



## The Poetry of Twenty-First Century and its Deviation from Arnold's Traditional Poetic Ideals

Maroof Anwar<sup>1</sup>, Fatima Noor<sup>2</sup>, Zarish Fatima<sup>3</sup>, Fatima Bibi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.  
Email: maroofanwar216@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Research Scholar, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.  
Email: fatemah.noor.fn@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Lecturer, Department of English, Times Institute Multan, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: zarishfatima12@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup> Research Scholar, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.  
Email: fatimabibif6574@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore present-day poetry from Arnold's perspective. Poetry, a genre which held the most value in past and was given the prime importance, no more holds the same significance. The study is a qualitative investigation to study the modern-day poetry and its deviation from the classical norms of the poetry. For the purpose, excerpts from the works of four Instapoets were taken and within interpretive paradigm, the analyses were conducted. Arnold, Study of Poetry, was taken as a theoretical framework. The findings of the study shows that the deviation is evident and implausible. The researchers have found that this kind of poetry to be is very plain and simplistic.

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Corresponding Author's Email: maroofanwar216@gmail.com

## 1. Introduction

"Poetry is what in a poem makes you laugh, cry, prickle, be silent, makes your toenails twinkle, makes you want to do this or that or nothing, makes you know that you are alone and not alone in the unknown world, that your bliss and suffering is forever shared and forever all your own. All that matters about poetry is the enjoyment of it however tragic it may be all that matters is the eternal movement behind it – the great undercurrent of human grief, folly, pretension, exaltation and ignorance – however unlofty the intention of the poem..." – Dylan Thomas (Kirin, 2013, October 16).

Poetry is undoubtedly one of the most recognized genres in literature having its fame continuing from the times of Greek to the world of Postmodernism. The genre is equally popular in every language. Whether its Arabic, Persian, French, Japanese, Urdu or English, Poetry has significantly produced great number of Poets in each language and culture. This shows that Poetry has a significant meaning and role in societies. Poetry have long been seen as the true form of art. It was always considered meaningful. In different ages, critics and scholars have presented their defense on poetry. They have given their arguments on why should poets keep on writing poetry and why it is of paramount importance. From Sidney to Eliot, English poetry has seen the best defenders in history of literature. Among those, is Mathew Arnold. In the paper, researchers are going to examine Mathew Arnold concept regarding poetry to later see its application on modern contemporary poetry of today's time.

### 1.1. Significance of the Poetry

This study is significant as it pinpoints the necessity elements that must be present in the poetry. The current study has seen poetry from the Arnold's perspective who have defended this genre in best possible way and told its purpose. It has evaluated the classical norms of the poetry and then in comparison has studied the latest trends of the genre which has been exercised in the modern-day times. It would be a valuable comparative study for the

researchers of literary studies as it will help them gain a perspective on the evolving nature of the poetry.

### **1.2. Aim**

Language has undergone changes with the period of time and naturally poetry has changed as well. It has readjusted to the new and cultural linguistic variations and style. The aim of this study is to see how the poetic genre has changed over the period of time and how much it has deviated from the standard poetic form as proposed by Mathew Arnold in nineteenth century.

### **1.3. Research Question**

Keeping in context Arnold's view on Poetry, how has Present-Day Poetry evolved over the period of time

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Origin of Poetry**

Poetry is the essence of life. It is the branch of literature that has been existent for ages. It has its roots embedded in early Greek literature and evidences of it is found in every age. It has been said that poetry found its origin with the origin of humanity. It has been evolved with the passage of time; the way humanity has evolved over the centuries. According to Asika (2015) two reasons could be associated with the evolution of poetry. One being the instinct of Imitation, men like to recreate things that are already existing in the nature. Thus, using the fountain of creativity, men have imitated pleasure through the development of poetry. Second reason for the development of poetry must be accounted to men's love for music and rhythm. They are fundamentally prone to such things as they are emotional being and try satisfying their life with such gratifications. Asika (2015), in an attempt to write the origin of poetry have emphasized on the role of poets as well. Poetry is affected by the kind of men who are writing it. For instance, if a person has a serious mind with a grave spirit, he tends to write poetry differently than a person with less serious-minded personality. He has given an example by quoting Homer. A man known for his seriousness and supreme plot. It is only due to the fact that Homer has a natural aptitude towards such kind of poetry. In short it can be said that poetry is indeed being affected by the men who are devoting their time and energy in writing it.

Writing on the origin of Poetry, Aguasaco (2014) have stated that men have emerged on the face of Earth about half a million years ago. Men came up with a language around fifty thousand years ago and it won't be wrong to say that it is exactly the same time when poetry emerged. This shows that humans have long connection with poetry. Earlier in times, they would have communicated in it. The biblical text with religious manuals, treaties on Science and Politics, all had poetic mannerism. Poetry had long maintained a social communicative function. It was not an oddity back in the time. It was as natural as the existence of human kind (Aguasaco, 2014). Poetry was once considered to be the instrument of teaching and learning. Many Philosophers, thinkers, intellects and historians have defended this genre. Emerson (1844) while praising the art of poetry suggested that every word was once a poem and makers of the language were all poets. This was his way of establishing the scope of poetry. He emphasized on the role of it and exhibited the connection between language and poetry. Earlier, it was Sidney who established the scope of it. Back in the times of Renaissance, he left no stone unturned while stating the importance of poetry (Leitch et al., 2018). According to him, the great civilizations have always valued poetry and its creators. The Romans have designated them as *Vates*, the prophet or the diviner. The Greeks affiliated poetry with the wisdom and Luck. In fact, the word poetry itself has a Greek origin. It is derived from the word *Poiein*, that means to make or to create. Sidney continues to praise poetry when he says that every vocation is dependent on something. An astronomer, a geometrician, an arithmetician and even a musician rely on ideas. A Philosopher will base his philosophies on natural virtue. A lawyer will take expertise from historians. A grammarian is dependent upon speech. A physician requires human body to examine. Among all, it is only the poet who lives in his own vigor. He is a creator, an inventor, an architect on its own. He has the power whether to destroy or glorify a particular piece of object (Leitch et al., 2018).

## 2.1. Falling From Grace

Many critics and writers believe that Poetry has distinctly changed over the period of time. The grace and poise it once had is now begone. Covey (1993) stated that Poetry was once an elitist refuge. It was considered to be the genre of great popularity; a revered art form with poetic imagination and verses that could stir multiple emotions in humans. This genre, for ages, inspired, provoked and incited deep thoughts. But many critics think that it has now lost its charm. While debating on the decline of the poetry, Majewski (2023, June 28) thinks that people are perhaps intimidated by this genre. They believe that they require certain skills and level of sophistication to appreciate the genre fully. Another reason he pinpoints is related to its relevance in modern and contemporary times. Many people opine that the language of poetry is too archaic and therefore, inaccessible. It does not resonate with the changing times. Ingraham (2015) believes that all the concerns could be true. There is a possibility that poetry might have become irrelevant. Maybe it is too elitist or may be too pretentious, he is not certain about any cause. But one thing he is assured of is the declining readership.

According to the survey reported in Washington Post, there is a massive decline in the readership of the poetry in United States of America. The number which was 17% in the year 1992, now befalls to 6.7% two decades later. Ingraham (2015) asserts that majority of the people just do not like reading poetry even once a year. People would rather watch a movie than read a poetry. The survey also suggested contraction of poetry readership up to 45%, figures signaling towards stark situation related to poetry's popularity.

## 2.2. Research Gap

The researchers have applied Arnold's viewpoint on the ruling instapoetry. Although his viewpoints are significantly Victorian but could be used as a framework in order to observe the changing trends of poetry in Modern Times. The Study has analyzed Instapoetry, the modern Twenty-First Century Poetry, which has never been seen from the traditionalist angle before.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

In this Literary investigation, Mathew Arnold's, Study of Poetry will be considered as a standpoint in understanding the actual meaning of poetry. Moreover, it will be seen that whether the rules of Classicism still apply on the contemporary poetry of twenty first century. Arnold has done significant research in poetry and like many critics of that era tried establishing the scope of poetry. For Arnold, grand style of poetry is vital (Lakshami, n.d.). He, in fact, defines the true nature and function of poetry (Asika, 2015). He has not considered the role of poet to be pertinent nor he has focused on command a poet should have on poetic verses, he in actual emphasized on the writing style of the poetry. For Arnold, concerns were altogether different. Apart from having style, Arnold also believed in the quality of the verses. It is indeed language, beauty and style that makes poetry perfect. The presentation matters and it plays an important role too. A poem, according to Arnold (1956) should have such language and expression that it may insert a lasting impression in the minds of the reader. This is the reason he has always seen the classical poets as the ultimate master of the genre.

*Any poem that does not take its root, language and elegant style from the poetry of classical time is not poetry to Mathew Arnold (Asika, 2015).*

For Arnold, looking at exemplary intellects was necessary because they are the ultimate masters and can provide guidance on the literary style of the poetry. If a poetry lack style, it is no poetry at all. Such poetry is not worth it and readers must not pay any heed to such piece of work. The reason, Arnold prefers the traditional form of poetry with grand style is because it possesses greatness; the greatness of language, the beauty, the quality and the character. It has everything that balances the piece of poetry. And this makes the poetic verses everlasting. It is not only the style he puts his focus on. He also gives weightage to the idea. The idea is eternal, rest is illusion. So, if poetic idea is grand and workable, then the poetry has potential to survive. According to Arnold, it is the idea which gives poetry a purpose. With quality poetry, life can be human lives can be interpreted. It consoles. It is like a therapy. Poetry provides sustenance and also establishes deep connection with other fields of life like sciences and philosophy. Without poetry, such fields of life will appear incomplete. Arnold (1956) quoted Wordsworth when he says that, '*Poetry is the countenance of all sciences*' (p.2). He goes on to praise poetry which according to him is the breath and spirit of all knowledge. Arnold also

suggested that one should always keep their standards high when it comes to reading poetry. For him, if poetry is not fulfilling humans' expectation, it is not good at all. It must have high order of excellence. *The best poetry will find to have a power of forming, sustaining and delighting us, as nothing else can (p.2)*. Arnold's viewpoint has been taken as a theoretical framework for the study because he knew the true nature of it and ought to know what poet should and should not be doing when it comes to writing. So, his critical remarks on poetry will be considered as the standard rule to judge the contemporary poetry and it will be seen that whether the poets of modern times have been able to meet the requirements Arnold has set back in the times.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study is qualitative in nature. The researchers have adopted a qualitative viewpoint because it is naturalistic in approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and suits the nature of this study. Arnold's *Study of Poetry*, has been used as a theoretical framework to analyze the poetry of four present day poets. All the four poets also use social media platform to upload their poetry. The selected poets are, Nikita Gill, Amanda Lovelace, Rupri Kaur and Atticus. Ten excerpts has been taken from each poet's work to analyze whether their poetry still beholds the ideas that were significant in earlier times.

##### **4.1. Analysis**

For this study, researchers have picked four contemporary poets and have analyzed their poetry from Arnold's point of view. All four poets, Nikita Gill, Atticus, Rupri Kaur and Amanda Lovelace, are instapoets, write their poetry mostly in excerpt form. The researchers of this study have evaluated the works keeping in mind the arguments made by Arnold in his famous book of criticism, *Study of Poetry*.

##### **4.2. Nikita Gill's Poetry, A Modern Obsession**

Nikita Gill is undoubtedly one of the most famous names in the world when it comes to literary writings. She first used Tumblr for her poetry, later on using Instagram as a platform to upload her poetry. She has more than half a million followers on Instagram reflecting her popularity on social media (Angel, (n.d.)). Her poetry, although being famous, is still different to the standards Arnold set in nineteenth century. For Arnold, Diction was important which is lacked in her poetry. Consider the following excerpt of her poetry.

*There are days  
I have been the thirst  
And days  
When I have been the water  
But the days  
I love myself the most  
Are the days I am both.  
Nikita Gill, Wild Embers*

A poetic diction, according to Hirsch (2014) is said to be the operating language of a poetry which is employed in a manner that sets poetry apart from the other kinds of speech or writing. Diction includes strong vocabulary, appropriate grammar and well-crafted order. Arnold puts a lot of emphasis on the strong use of diction. He was well aware of the fact that how influential a piece of poetry could be if it has strong diction. Unfortunately, Gill's poetry lack the element. Consider another example from her poetry.

*I think people are so beautiful  
When their eyes light up  
And they say sincerely,  
I'm so glad you're here.*

The case is similar in this context as well. One can see how plain the manner of writing is. There is no consideration of following a meter, nor the focus is on the language. The excerpt appears to be a piece of plain writing rather than a piece of poetic excellence. This plainness of writing can be attributed to the times in which we are living. People do not bother reading complex poetry, they would rather prefer to scroll on social media platform. They like common language and likes to interact in one. This is the reason, when a poet writes and uploads his

poetry on social media platform, she needs to be accessible for everyone. They would rather pick and choose poetry that is of simplistic tone, easily understood by majority of online users.

#### **4.3. Amanda Lovelace, with the pseudonym Lady Book Mad**

Another poet who got her fame on Instagram is Amanda Lovelace. Have hundred thousand followers on Instagram. Consider her stanza,

*january 1<sup>st</sup> isn't the only  
new beginning  
new beginning can happen  
at any given moment,  
at any second-  
you need only saw when*

Again, the simplicity of nature of the poem is visibly explicit. There is no focus on the weightage of meter and no significant attention can be seen on the structure of the poetry. The manner of the poetry is close to the structure of prose and deviation from the classical standards is obvious. The grandeur, a basic requirement of the poetry, is nowhere to be seen. The grandeur is related to subject matter, the idea and also the diction. It should be masterly in every way possible. The words that are of higher order and are subject of excellence. Unfortunately, non of the classical orders are followed by instapoets like Amanda Lovelace. Arnold has also talked about timelessness of poetry, a poetry according to him must be of paramount subject. It shouldn't be written for a particular age, rather it should possess the qualities of being timeless. Arnold was an admirer of Greeks, and he believed that they have set the benchmark for the others to follow (Mishra, 2017, July 8). The Poetry of Lovelace lack the compassion for Greeks and the content matter didn't appear to follow the exemplary literary standards of great Greeks.

#### **4.4. Rupi Kaur; The Masquerading Poet**

Kaur called herself a poet who reached at the epitome of fame by writing and uploading the poetry on the famous social media platform. She has four and a half million followers on Instagram and have the popularity of highest order. But one often wonders what exceptional qualities she might posses to attain such fame. The answer lies not in his extraordinary style of writing or poetic phrases but rather on how understandable she is to the majority of the social media users. People nowadays no longer strive to understand hard written words but they rely on straightforwardness. This is what Kaur has given to the public, verse in a plain mannerism. Commenting on the fame of Rupi Kaur, one analyst writes, "*Not because they were written by female writer but they were simple to understand*" (Eunice, 2023, June 22). The criteria to read poetry is restricted to how simple the lines are.

*Your voice  
Is your sovereignty.*  
On criticizing Kaur, Kumar (2018) writes,

*"Please take your time to read people who have actually invested a great deal of thought in whatever they write. Balzac said, "love is the poetry of the senses." I suppose poetry is life, and everything else. Read Sylvia Plath if you want to read good poetry. Read E.E Cummings. Read Eliot, read Shelley. Read Frost. Read the sonnets of Shakespeare. Read the romantics Coleridge, Keats, Byron. You have too little time to waste reading bad poetry. Stop being that Instagram generation".* This criticism shows that Kaur's poetry lacks the actual essence of poetry. The one Arnold talked about. While discussing the three estimates of Poetry, he writes that the actual poetry follows the real estimate; having an unbiased viewpoint, it not only historically accurate but also have creative faculty in it. While looking at Kaur's poetry, nothing exceptional is found to be present.

#### **4.5. Atticus, The Instapoet**

Atticus writes,  
*His Love was easy  
Like a sweater that always fit*

The above lines are written to define love, the subject he often used in his poetry. He also writes.

*A thousand times  
A day  
I love you  
A little more  
Than I did  
The day before.*

Same emotions are captured by Arnold, in his times, when he writes.

*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*

If one looks for the explanation of the above lines, one would be able to find the importance a poet has given on the expression of love. Love is a feeling that completes a person. It gives a purpose to life and meaning to desires. With love, one can attain a novel life. This extract is a practical example of Arnold's view of poetry. He sees Poetry as a sustainer of life. The form which upholds the humanity, giving it a meaning. So when Arnold writes about love, he writes it like it is of the prime importance. Without it, a human being will have no real purpose. On the other hand, Atticus fail to capture the depth of the idea. He presented the felling in a very generalized way, in a manner of conversation rather than in poetic fashion. This shows the deviation poetry has faced over the period of time. The content of the form has entirely been changed with the progress of time.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

The Study has discussed the contemporary poetry by keeping in mind Arnold's characteristics Features of Poetry. Researchers have summarized the content in a bullet form and have presented in a table form to see the qualities these poets possess. The poets that were included for the study was Nikita Gill, Amanda Lovelace, Rupi Kaur and Atticus. The above-mentioned table suggest that majority of the poets lack Arnold's suggested Poetic features. For instance, When talking about the point of diction, it was found out that not even a single Instapoet cares to use strong diction.

**Table 1**

SR	Arnold Poetic Features	Gill	Lovelace	Kaur	Atticus
1	Strong Diction	No	No	No	No
2	Exemplary Language	No	No	No	No
3	Grand Subject	No	No	No	To Some Extent
4	Possess Real Estimate	No	No	No	No
5	Purposeful	Yes	Yes	No	To Some Extent

But for Arnold, it was of great significance. He sees diction to be the key element in poetry. Similarly, he talks about exemplary language and grand subject of Poetry which again seems to be lacking in the latest era of poets. When it comes to Real Estimation, It was Arnold who suggested that a perfect piece of poetry was not only inspired from historic masterpieces but contained creative power within itself. In his words, it was the perfect blend of post inspirations and current aspirations that makes poetry beautiful. But in the contemporary times, it has been observed that none of the poet possesses the real estimate, Arnold's once suggested. The last point is related to the purpose of the poetry. According to Arnold, the purpose of poetry is of prime importance as it gives sustenance to life. While writing poetry, a bit of purpose was reflected in Gill's and Lovelace's poetry.

Keeping in mind the above argument, following results have been deduced from the study.

### 5.1. Deviation Is Evident and Implausible

It has been evident from the above study that Poetry of Twenty-First Century has so much differences with the classical notions of the poetry. It is deviated from the standards norm of poetry. The poetic traditions that were followed by the great intellect of the past time is no more evident in the poetry of present times. Nowadays poetry is written not as a piece of literature or art form but rather it is written to appeal masses on social media. Poets care for publicity and likes on their posts. They do not care for quality content and does not give weightage to their crafting talents. They just write poetry for the sake of social media fame. It is implausible and improper. Also, it appears to be unconvincing because it does not meet the classical standards set by Mathew Arnold or poets before him. This deviation from the standard norms of poetry could be potentially dangerous. People will stop understanding the actual poetry. Earlier in times, it was poetry, that was interdisciplinary field. People would have a creative perspective after reading a poetry. They performed better in science and other fields of life. Restricting poetry to the simplistic mannerism is going to affect the creative genius of the youth. It could block the creative process which could take societies at the highest level of advancements.

### 5.2. The Higher Destiny Still Remains

All hope is yet not lost. The Present-Day poetry might have shown deviation from the standard poetry of the past but one thing that has been observed in this study is that the poetry is indeed purposeful. No matter, in what age it is written, the sole purpose is to inspire and motivate the reader. It should console the life. If it is serving this purpose, that means poetry is beneficial and have a meaningful purpose.

*May the Silence inside you  
Learn to speak one day  
may you win every war inside you  
that you refuse to speak of  
may you heal from all the pain  
you tell no one about  
Gill*

Despite of losing its essence over the period of time, I can not argue that poetry has still remains. The form and substance has definitely changed but the purpose has remained intact. Poets still write to motivate, encourage and inspire the reader so they could see a purpose in life.

### 5.3. The Subgenre of Poetry

People have long criticized Instapoetry, the poetry of modern-day times. Articles have been written and debates have been initiated whether it was a right sort of poetry or not (Hein, 2020, August 21). But one thing that was hard to deny was its existence as the new form of art. The poetry has gained fame and it has reached to an extent that poets are now publishing books after they receive successful feedback on social media platforms.

*"As a subgenre of poetry, it combines self-help, reflections on romantic relationships, identity and plain language to create poems that users can quickly grasp and share through hashtags like #instapoetry. Visually, Instapoetry is often accompanied by drawings, uses typewritten fonts and has an overall lack of capitalization and punctuation."(Silva, 2024, January 31).*

It has indeed emerged as a subgenre of poetry and no matter how different it is from the classical standpoint of poetry, its existence is hard to deny.

## 6. Conclusion

The study reveals that the poetry written and read nowadays totally fluctuates from the poetry that was written in earlier times. Obviously, the time changes and with it the writing styles and pieces of literatures also change. It is a common saying that if a person wants to learn about an age or period of history, then he must read the literature of that time in order to get familiar with the culture of it. The present-day times have shown that how literature have changed and in particularly, the genre of poetry has been evolved. Now poets are using social

media platforms to upload their poetry and to appeal the masses on such platforms, poets are keeping the structure very simple and plain. They are writing in a very basic and simplistic manner. Unlike the history of the poetry, where strong diction and grand style was preferred, poetry nowadays lack such conviction and compassion.

### 6.1. Future Recommendations

This study was done to analyze the emerging subgenre in poetry and to evaluate whether it fulfils the definition of standard form of poetry or not. In future, the researchers can dig deep to evaluate the genre more because it is one of the most unexplored areas in literary studies. Future researchers can see this sort of poetry from critical and stylistics point of view.

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