

PPT on
The Scholar Gypsy

CC-6 (SEM.2)

The Poet

- Matthew Arnold(1822 – 1888) was an English poet, literary critic and philosopher.
- He was a thoughtful and intellectual poet who often dealt with the problem of isolation which was common in nineteenth century England.
- The loss of faith and belief led to a lot of frustration and pessimism.

The Poet

- Arnold was indeed a remarkable figure of the nineteenth century and like Tennyson and Browning holds an important place in the literature of the times.
- His poetry vividly reflects the changing social, literary, economic and religious conditions of his age.

The Poet

- His *Essays in Criticism* are appreciated even today.
- His criticism influenced every major English critic- T.S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling included.
- His poetry too influenced the modern poets.
- Poets like W.B. Yeats, Sylvia Plath, Sharon Olds and James Wright paid tribute to his influence and they too reflected the atmosphere of their age.

The Scholar Gypsy

- “The Scholar Gypsy” was published in 1853 and was based on a seventeenth century Oxford story found in Joseph Glanvill’s “The Vanity of Dogmatizing” (1661).
- It is Matthew Arnold’s best and perhaps the most popular work. It tells the story of a poor Oxford scholar who left Oxford to join the gypsies.
- He became so friendly with them that they told him all their secrets. Later on he was recognized amidst the gypsies by two of his former fellow students.

The Poem (stanza I &II)

- Arnold begins "The Scholar Gypsy" in a pastoral mode, invoking a shepherd and describing the beauties of a rural scene, with Oxford in the distance.
- The speaker(the poet) asks his fellow shepherds to take the flock and not leave them unattended. While the others take the sheep for grazing, the poet will sit in one corner where the reapers have begun their work.

Stanzas III & IV

- The poet will be sheltered from the summer sun in this corner and will remain there till sunset.
- This is followed by a description of the pastoral scene.
- He can see the fields of corn and the poppies and can see the green roots and the yellow stalks.

Stanzas V & VI

- Many years later, two of his former college friends met him and asked him what he was doing.
- He told them of his gypsy life and their art and secrets which he wanted to learn.
- Once he knew their secrets, he would return to normal life and let the world know of their secrets.

Stanzas VII & VIII

- The poet here says that he, himself has seen him often enough in the countryside; boys scaring the birds in the fields had seen him and also in the grassy meadows filled with sunshine in the Cumner Hills.
- People returning from Oxford had seen him crossing river Thames in a ferry (a small boat).
- He was found trailing his fingers in the river water or leaning back in a thoughtful way, with a bunch of flowers in his lap which he had plucked in the bowers of Wychwood.

Stanzas IX & X

- Again he was not seen for some time. Girls from far off villages, who danced around the elm tree in May, had seen him in the darkened fields at night.
- Very often he had given them flowers he had collected from the fields-the anemones and bluebells, drenched with the dew of summer evenings.
- But he spoke to none of them .He was always pensive and thoughtful. He was also seen above Godstow Bridge in hay time in June.

Stanzas XI & XII

- The housewife darning something outside her house in the Cumner Hills too had seen him. He was hanging over the gate, watching the threshers working the corn.
- Even children who looked for cresses (water plants) in the stream, morning and evening, had seen him wander around in the April mornings and also at night when the stars are out in the skies. They had seen him walk through the dewy grass.

Stanzas XIII & XIV

- In winter on the highway, when it was very cold and foot travellers were going through the flooded fields, the poet says he had seen the scholar gypsy on the wooden bridge, wrapt in his cloak and fighting against the cold and snow.
- He had climbed the Cumner Hill and turned to watch the lights of the Church while the snowflakes were falling.

Stanzas XV & XVI

- The scholar gypsy is beyond the wear and tear of modern life.
- In the hustle and bustle of modern life, man is far too busy trying to survive. He passes from shock to shock trying to make the best of life.
- Man is tired of life and yearns for the peace the scholar gypsy had known.
- The scholar gypsy knows nothing of the problems of modern life as he has renounced such a life by giving up Oxford and retiring to a quiet life with the gypsies.

Stanzas XVII & XVIII

- Arnold in these stanzas points out the contrast between the life of the scholar gypsy and that of modern man.
- England had become more city based and industrialized and people had lost faith in religion as a result of Darwin's theory of evolution which said that man is descended from the ape. The scholar gypsy knew nothing of this. Hence he had no doubts.

Stanzas XIX & XX

- All men are waiting and all suffer and it is only one among the many who manages to somehow get a little of what he wants.
- The Scholar Gypsy lays bare his soul--of how he suffered and strived; his sad experiences, his misery and his growth and how the little he gained has eased his hurt and pain a bit.

Stanzas XXI & XXII

- The Scholar Gypsy lived in an age when life was pure and uncomplicated and free and clear like the waters of sparkling Thames.
- He gives an apt description of modern life— with its hustle and bustle and its goals which keep changing; where hearts and heads are overburdened by tension, worry and ambition which weakens him.

Stanzas XXIII & XXIV

- These stanzas describe if the protagonist were to come into the modern age, he would no longer be the scholar gypsy.
- His happiness would long be gone and so also the peace and quiet of his life. He would be distracted and confused like all men in the modern world.

Stanza XV

- In this last stanza the poet speaks of the scholar gypsy renouncing the outside world just as the Tyrian merchant did.
- The seaman did not like the corrupt way of life in Greece so he left for Iberia.
- He was seen slowly and quietly slipping away from Greece to Iberia because he wanted to escape the corruption in Greece and start a new life in Iberia.

Main Idea

- The poem has many descriptions of the beautiful countryside and romantic dream visions, elegiac arguments and finally an epic simile.
- It is about a spiritual crisis faced by his age as a result of loss of faith.
- The changes that took place in the nineteenth century resulted in an atmosphere of uncertainty and questions were raised about the meaning and significance of life.

Elements in the Poem

- Arnold, himself called his poem an elegy, a poem of mourning. But it is more than that.
- It has landscape descriptions, narrations, dream visions in pastoral surroundings and other elegiac features.
- He was mourning the passing away of a way of life, presented in pastoral form. In form, it is a whole.

Continued.....

- Arnold brings together two opposed worlds-the idyllic world of the scholar gypsy and the sick world of the poet speaker.
- He is a poet who appeals to the head rather than the heart.
- His poetry does not have spontaneity, passion or music but it is reflective, stoic and full of wistful melancholy.

Style & Diction

- He is an intellectual poet rather than a poet who appeals to the masses and he is worthy of our praise.
- Arnold's style is unique in English Literature. It is simple, lucid, precise, elegant and restrained.
- He was considered more of a critic than a poet and as such his poetry cannot be expected to be from the heart.

Points to be considered

- Give the salient features of Matthew Arnold as a poet.
- Discuss Arnold as an elegiac poet.
- Discuss Arnold as a poet of Nature.
- Write a short note on Arnold's classicism and Hellenism.
- Write a note on Arnold's style.
- Discuss the note of melancholy in Arnold's poetry.
- Discuss Arnold's poetry as a criticism of life.

Courtesy

Dr. Md. Ejaz Alam