

What is Arnold's view of Chaucer as a poet?

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Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) wrote "The Study of Poetry" in 1880. In this essay, he judged many poets by strong standards. He praised Geoffrey Chaucer's (c. 1343-25 October 1400) talent and charm. But he did not call Chaucer a classical poet. Arnold gave clear reasons for this view.

Great Charm: Arnold said Chaucer has a liquid, ease, and charm. His style is smooth and full of life. Chaucer shows deep human feeling. His poetry gives joy and freshness. Readers enjoy his characters and their lively talks. About this quality, Arnold says the following:

"Chaucer is the father of our splendid English poetry, because by the lovely charm of his diction, he makes an epoch and founds a tradition."

Not First Rank:

Arnold placed Chaucer below classical poets. He said poets like Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton are greater. They teach us the truth with great power. Chaucer gives pleasure but not deep moral truth. So, he is not in the first rank.

Lack of High Seriousness: Arnold said Chaucer lacks high seriousness. "High Seriousness" is a poetic quality that states,

"The superior character of truth and seriousness,, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner."

Chaucer writes with fun and humour. But he does not go deep into life. His poetry does not deal with fate, duty, or truth.

In short, Arnold respected Chaucer's talent and lively poetry. But he believed Chaucer lacked deep moral power. So, he placed Chaucer below the great classical poets. Chaucer is loved, but not fully great, in Arnold's view.