

Letters from the darkling plain : language and the grounds of knowledge in the poetry of Arnold and Hopkins

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Abstract

The works of these two writers are especially appropriate for linguistic and epistemological study because we find in them an unusually large amount of theorizing about the function of poetry and language-implicit in their poetry and explicit in Arnold's formal criticism and in Hopkins' letters and journals. It is a striking fact that their theorizing is itself as internally divided as the obvious polarities within each man's career. The general thesis of this book is that the racking conflicts and painful doubts of Arnold and Hopkins about the role of poetry in the modern world-and in their own lives-were brought about in large part by the philosophical dilemma we have been discussing and, further, that their careers illuminate the problem with enormous and sometimes horrifying clarity.

Table of Contents

Poetry and the problem of language -- Matthew Arnold: the city of god without Beatrice -- Gerard Manley Hopkins: the struggle with Deism -- Language as creation and cognition

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