

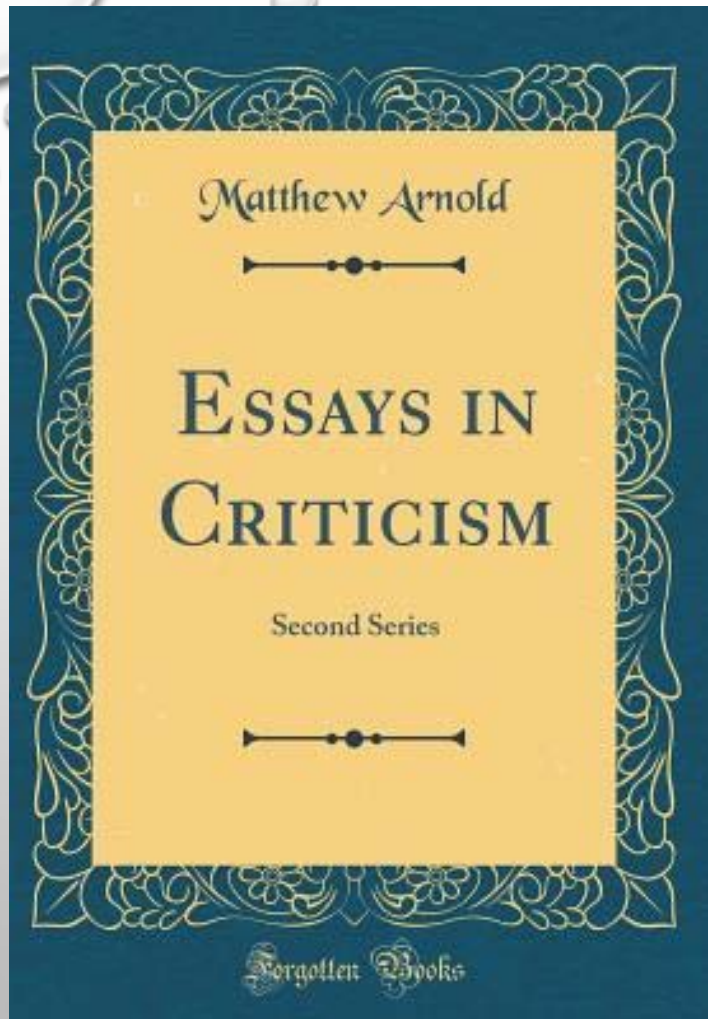
The background of the slide is a light gray gradient with several realistic water droplets of various sizes scattered across it. The droplets have highlights and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

**MATTHEW ARNOLD'S**  
**ESSAYS IN CRITICISM**  
**BOOK BY MATTHEW**  
**ARNOLD**

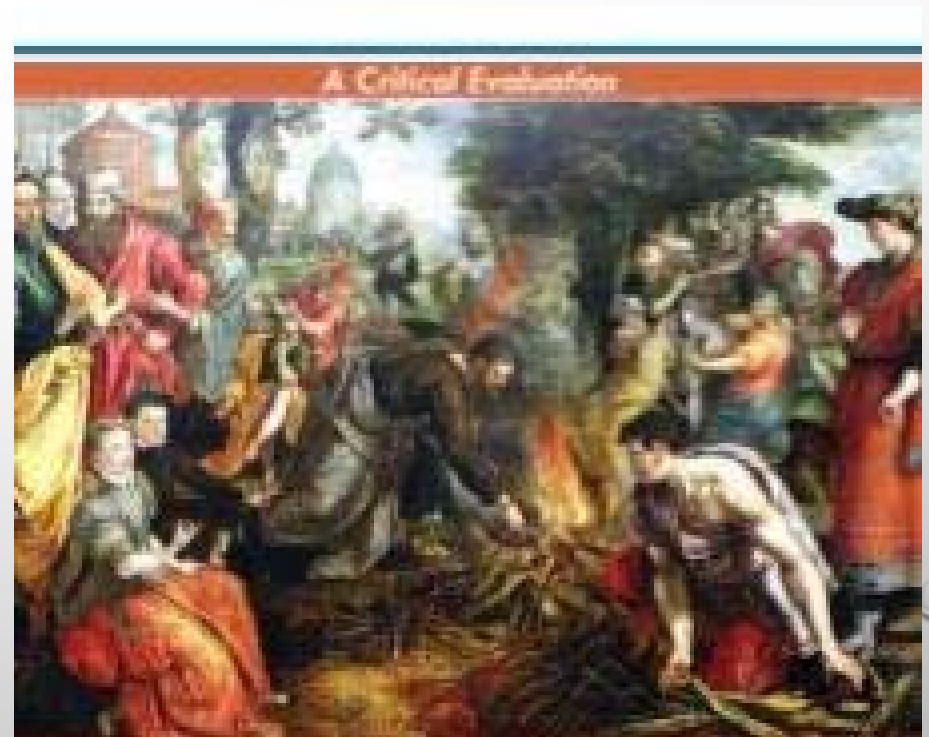
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**“The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,”** is an overture announcing briefly most of the themes he developed more fully in later work.







**Matthew Arnold**

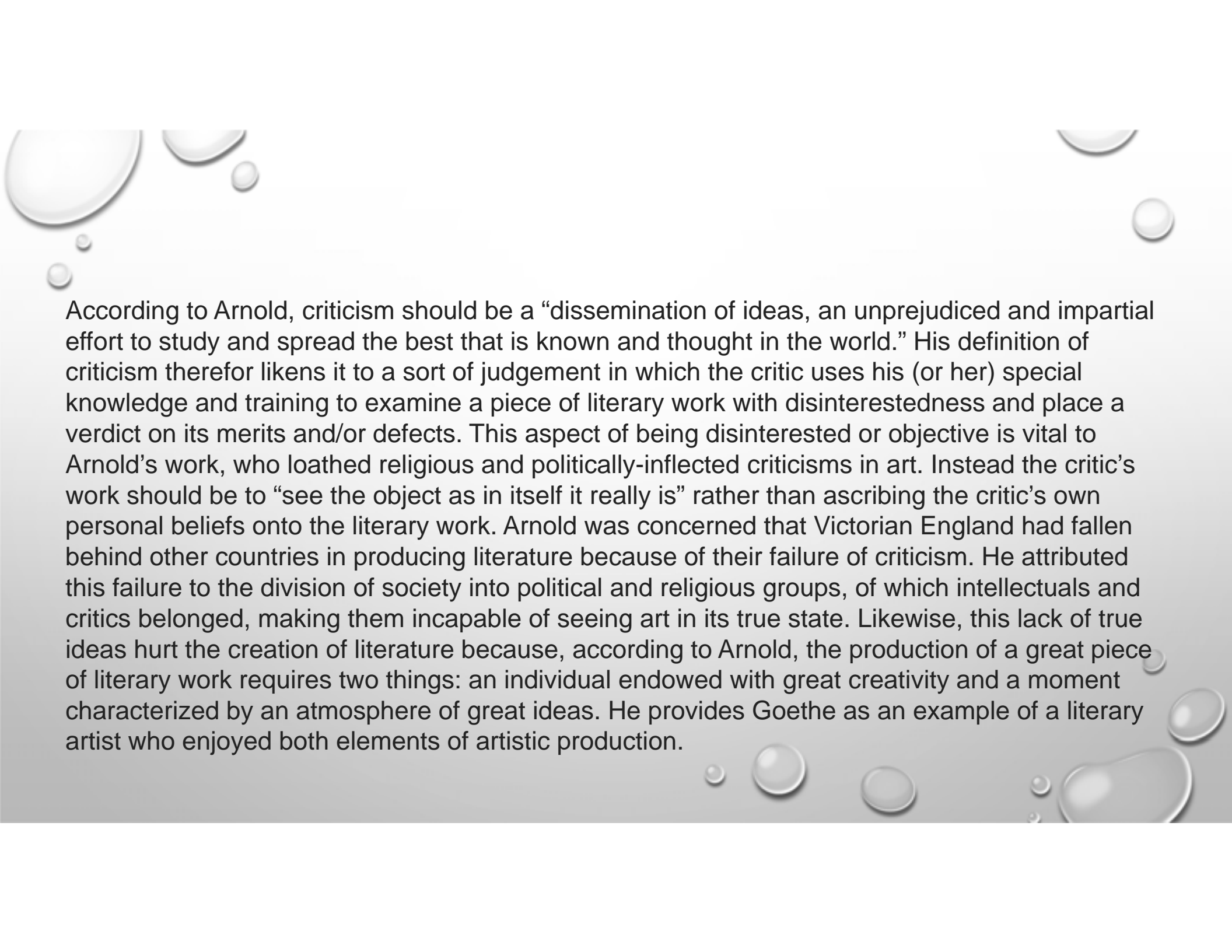
**Arnold As Critic**

It is said that when the poet in Arnold died, the critic was born




Matthew Arnold's essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," was the prefatory essay to his collection *Essays in Criticism* and presents an argument that criticism is more important and powerful than was previously believed. Although he states that "the critical power is of lower rank than the creative," his essay also makes clear that criticism is a vital component of allowing creativity to flourish within a society.





According to Arnold, criticism should be a “dissemination of ideas, an unprejudiced and impartial effort to study and spread the best that is known and thought in the world.” His definition of criticism therefor likens it to a sort of judgement in which the critic uses his (or her) special knowledge and training to examine a piece of literary work with disinterestedness and place a verdict on its merits and/or defects. This aspect of being disinterested or objective is vital to Arnold’s work, who loathed religious and politically-inflected criticisms in art. Instead the critic’s work should be to “see the object as in itself it really is” rather than ascribing the critic’s own personal beliefs onto the literary work. Arnold was concerned that Victorian England had fallen behind other countries in producing literature because of their failure of criticism. He attributed this failure to the division of society into political and religious groups, of which intellectuals and critics belonged, making them incapable of seeing art in its true state. Likewise, this lack of true ideas hurt the creation of literature because, according to Arnold, the production of a great piece of literary work requires two things: an individual endowed with great creativity and a moment characterized by an atmosphere of great ideas. He provides Goethe as an example of a literary artist who enjoyed both elements of artistic production.



Finally, Arnold believes that the work of criticism can have some similarities to creative work. First, the critic may feel creative joy or excitement while writing a piece of criticism. Additionally, it provides a public good in that the successful critic will help to elevate worthwhile literary art.

