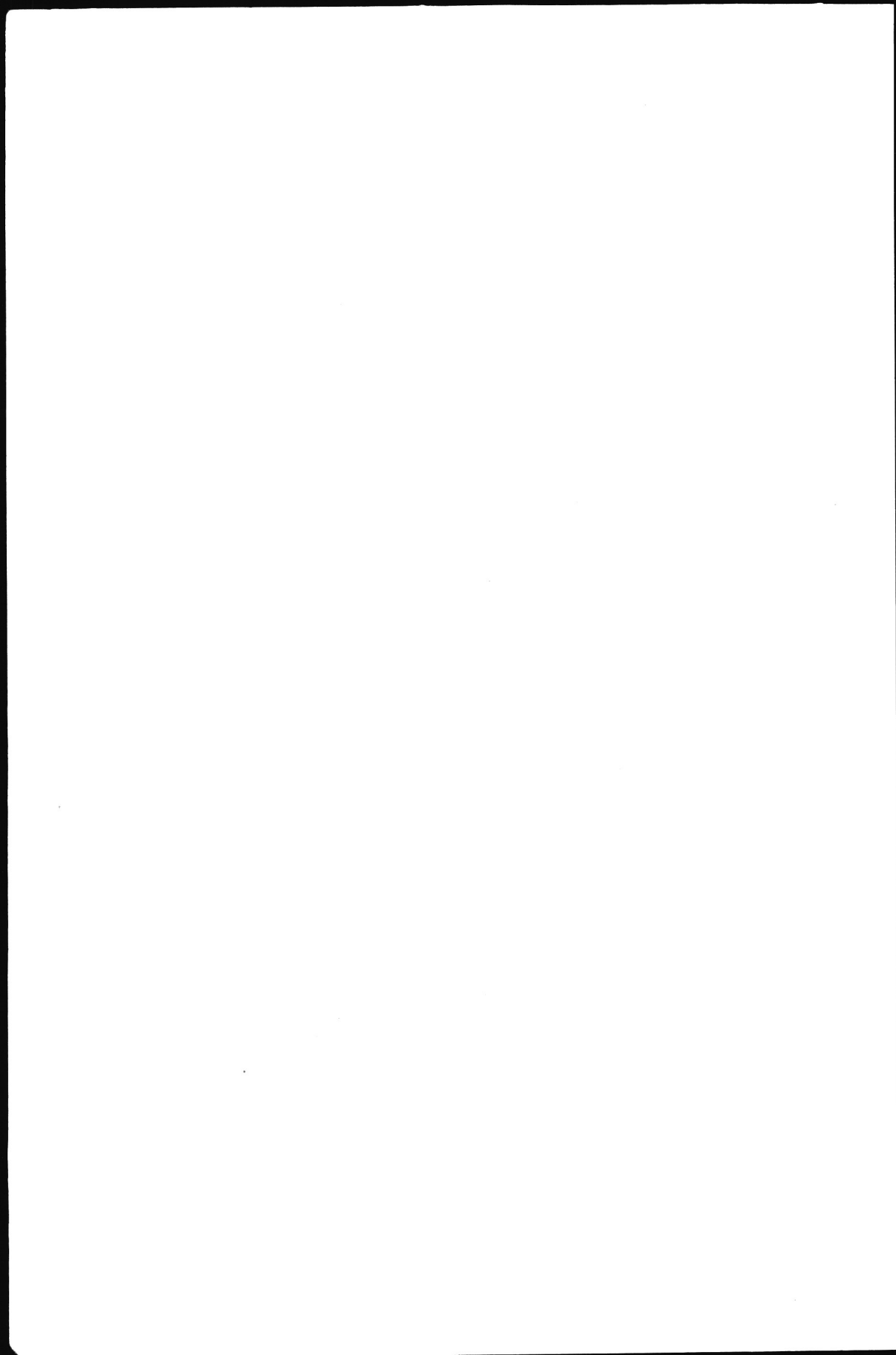


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THE VICTORIAN TASTE

**A Study of Some Critical And Aesthetic
Theories in the Victorian Period**



THE VICTORIAN TASTE

A Study of the Critical and Aesthetic Theories
in the Victorian Period

BY

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To the Memory of My Parents



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FOREWORD

In order to understand a period it is necessary not so much to be acquainted with its more defined opinions as with the doctrines which are thought of not as doctrines, but as *facts*. (The moderns for example, do not look for their beliefs in *progress* as an opinion, but merely as a recognition of fact). There are certain doctrines, which for a particular period seem not doctrines, but inevitable categories of the human mind. Men do not look on them merely as correct opinion, for they have become so much a part of the mind, and lie so far back, that they are never really conscious of them at all. They do not see them, but other things *through* them. It is these abstract ideas at the centre, the things which they take for granted, that characterize a period. There are in each period certain doctrines, a denial of which is looked on by the men of the period just as we might look on the assertion that two and two make five. It is these abstract things at the centre, these doctrines felt as facts, which are the source of all the other more material characteristics of a period.

T.E. Hulme, *Speculations*.

The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards.

T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*.

Placing writers in the context of ideas current in their time has two dangers; one may catalogue the components of the environment and neglect the central concern — the writers' achievements, or, on the other hand, one may impose upon the achievements a rigid clarity which reveals only a desire for "neatness" in intellectual history. No study worthy of the name can avoid these dangers entirely — indeed, used warily, they are tools for unravelling the complexities of the critical theories in England in the Victorian period. But one should always be aware of the risks of such historicism.

A great deal of Arnold's poetry is either a criticism of his age, or a poetic statement of his own philosophy, and many of his own poems are as essentially critical as his essays and lectures. Behind his poetry, lies an immense critical effort. By welding together ideas and poetic symbols, he