

Introduction:
*“Not a Having and a Resting,
but a Growing and Becoming”:
Matthew Arnold at 200 Years*

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Dedication: For Paul, Tim, Stephen, and Barbara—my teachers: “Happy the man who in that susceptible season of youth hears such voices! they are a possession to him for ever.” (Matthew Arnold, “Emerson,” *CPW* X:165)¹

To appropriate a line from Matthew Arnold, it might be safe to say that in 2022 we “make far too little use of our prose classics [...] a loss for which no conversance with contemporary prose literature can make up” (*CPW* IX:286). In a world wherein an increasing percentage of the population reads conversant prose almost exclusively through social media platforms, one could do worse than take Arnold’s advice and look to the prose of the past for insight. But while much *creative* Victorian literature has maintained a steady and even flashy presence in pop culture around the world—from movies to Neo-Victorian *Netflix* series to the rise of Steampunk—the study and appreciation of Victorian nonfiction prose remains, well, prosaic.

Studying Victorian nonfiction prose, though, is important, and this journal’s legacy testifies to that. Moreover, it is fitting that the opportunity to revisit and reevaluate Matthew Arnold, one of the most prolific prose writers of the Victorian Era, on the occasion of his bicentennial comes through this journal. *Nineteenth-Century Prose* emerged in the late 1980s

from what was *The Arnoldian*, itself an expansion of the earlier *The Arnold Newsletter*. I hope that this special issue initiates fruitful conversations about Victorian nonfiction prose, and Matthew Arnold especially, that help us to understand and navigate our present global circumstances, “the confusion of the present times,” the bewildering “multitude of voices counselling different things” (*CPW* I:8).

Arnold famously wrote in “The Study of Poetry” that *poetry* is “a criticism of life” (*CPW* IX:163). However, Arnold’s sustained criticism of his life and times comes via his prose, collected in eleven hefty volumes, various notebooks and diaries, and another six volumes of letters. Simply put, his prose output is staggering, dwarfing the single volume of collected poetic works on my office bookcase. Arnold tackled topics that resonate in 2022: education, inequality, international affairs, literature, political and religious factions, nationalism, industrialization, and the meaning of democracy. The essays collected in this special issue address these and many other topics. Moreover, they bring Arnold’s ideas into contemporary conversation, into what Arnold himself saw as his “communications with the future” (*CPW* V:106).

This is not to say that some of Arnold’s ideas are not difficult, even misguided. Arnold’s critics frequently fling out for scorn his “*Force till right is ready*” (*CPW* III:265-66) or his praise (excised, importantly, from subsequent editions of *Culture and Anarchy*) of his father’s response to riots: “flog the rank and file, and fling the ringleaders from the Tarpeian Rock!” (*CPW* V:526 n 223:7). Dedicated Arnoldians outright gasp at his conclusion, “the sooner the Welsh language disappears as an instrument of the practical, political, social life of Wales, the better” (*CPW* III:297). Scholars may bristle at his frequent description of the British democracy as “featherbrained,” and who can forget Terry Eagleton’s witty summation of Arnold’s social ethos: “If the masses are not thrown a few novels, they may react by throwing up a few barricades” (Eagleton 2142)?

As apparent as these statements are in Arnold’s work, readers should bear in mind Arnold’s own words about what it means to comment on one’s age—a writer “may give us, in the very same work, current error and

also fruitful and profound new truth, the error's future corrective" (*CPW* VIII:129). Recognizing this tendency is difficult but essential for a critic, as Arnold notes early in his career:

[The critic] must at all times be ready [...] to burn what he used to worship, and to worship what he used to burn. Nay, but he need not be thus inconsistent in welcoming it; he may retain all his principles [...]. Relative success may take place under the most diverse conditions; and it is in appreciating the good even in relative success, it is taking into account the change of circumstances, that the critic's judgment is tested, and that his versatility must display itself. (*CPW* I:200)

We return to Arnold two hundred years after his birth, then, with pleasure, to see his work through the hindsight of history, for we learn both about him and ourselves. So, this issue does not propose to take an uncritical look at Arnold's output, but we do this with understanding. The volume of Arnold's writing and the pressures under which he often wrote mean that Arnold was not writing complete philosophical pieces. He was, rather, working out ideas in a public way. As Arnold noted, "What a remarkable philosopher"—here we might read *critic*—"really does for human thought, is to throw into circulation a number of new and striking ideas and expressions, and to stimulate with them the thought and imagination of his century or after-times" (*CPW* III:181). We are in those after-times, and we return to converse with his ideas.

Biography

Yet before introducing the essays and authors collected here, I would like to provide brief biographical context for anyone approaching Arnold for the first time or returning after some time.² In broad strokes, Arnold's biography paints a typical upper-middle-class Victorian portrait. He was born 24 December 1822, in Laleham, Middlesex, England, to Dr. Thomas Arnold and Mary Arnold (née Penrose), the second of ten children and the oldest boy. His father, an historian by education, gained fame as the

headmaster and reformer of Rugby School, eventual Regius Professor of History at Oxford, and vociferous critic of the Oxford Movement and its *de facto* leader, John Henry Newman. Having gained the Rugby headmastership, Dr. Arnold moved his family there and later built a home, Fox How, in the Lake District. Matthew lived out a youth and adolescence between the two residences as a neighbor to William Wordsworth, who was a frequent visitor to their house and accompanied the family on walks—not bad company for an emerging poet.

After stints at Winchester School and Rugby, Arnold entered Balliol College, Oxford, where he completed his degree. He was briefly employed at Rugby before being elected a fellow at Oriel College, Oxford. After his fellowship, Arnold entered government service, becoming the private secretary to Lord Lansdowne. In these early years he published poetry which was critically and somewhat commercially successful. He would continue to re-publish his early poems throughout his life and occasionally wrote new ones, although these were less critically or commercially successful.

During his time with the Cabinet Minister, Arnold met and fell in love with Fanny Lucy Wightman, daughter of a distinguished London judge. Recognizing that he could not hope to begin a family on a secretary's pay, Arnold applied for and became, with the marquis' recommendation, a member of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools (HMIS), a full-time government position he would hold until his retirement in 1886. He and Fanny Lucy, whom he affectionately called "Flu," married in 1851 and together had six children. The year 1853 saw him turn his hand to prose, beginning with his famous piece on poetics, the "Preface" to his 1853 volume, *Poems*. This was followed by a pamphlet, *England and the Italian Question*, and thus his prose career took off. For a time, he held the Oxford Professor of Poetry position and in that capacity delivered a series of lectures, later collected and published. It was a platform from which he developed many ideas that would shape his later work and that contributed to his sometimes provocative writing style.

As HMIS, Arnold occasionally travelled to the Continent on government research into the state of schools, and he crisscrossed the

breadth of England giving and marking exams. I would argue that no major Victorian writer knew working life, with all its travails and travels, as well as Matthew Arnold. An attempt to log the sheer amount of time and miles he rode on England's expanding railways would prove an interesting study. Arnold was also a prolific letter writer and diarist. He travelled to America twice on that Victorian cash cow, the lecture tour, in 1883-1884 and 1886. He passed away from heart failure on April 15, 1888, hurrying to catch a tram to meet his daughter, who was returning from America along with his first grandchild. Arnold was buried in Laleham, his funeral attended by such notables as Benjamin Jowett, Robert Browning, George Smith, and Henry James. Arnold was survived by his wife, two daughters, and a son.

More than simply a run-of-the-mill middle-class Victorian man of letters, Matthew Arnold led a life that even two hundred years later is relevant, in its details, to almost anyone. In other words, Matthew Arnold *as a person* is not beyond our ken in the twenty-first century any more than his ideas are; most people can see a part of themselves reflected in him. The adolescent and young adult Arnold was a cut-up and clown. He had a wicked sense of humor combined with a nonchalance that drove school friends and tutors into a fury, and which would emerge later, controlled, in his prose works as withering satire and self-deprecation. "I laugh too much," he confides in a letter to John Duke Coleridge, "and [friends] make one's laughter mean too much" (*Letters* I:61).³ He certainly was not academically committed—he earned a second class from Balliol in spite of dedicated tutors. Despite this, reading his letters and notes, such as those in the *Yale Manuscript*, one cannot help but hear the strains of a self-conscious and conflicted college student, perpetually challenging his beliefs and those of his friends and father. His veneer of humor masked depths of feeling, especially after the early death of Dr. Arnold while Arnold was still at Oxford.

Arnold also went through the crucible of adolescent love and offered literary posterity one of the most enduring mysteries of Victorian love poetry. During two trips to Switzerland, in 1848 and 1849, Arnold

experienced love and loss and created a nearly unsolvable mystery. While in the tourist town of Thun, Arnold met and fell in love with a figure known only from a single cryptic line in a letter Arnold posted to his best friend, Arthur Hugh Clough, from a hotel in Leuk: “Tomorrow I repossess the Gemmi and get to Thun: linger one day at the Hotel Bellevue for the sake of the blue eyes of one of its inmates: and then proceed” (*Letters* I:119). The owner of that pair of blue eyes is still the subject of years of scholarly speculation, for that mysterious inhabitant appears in a flurry of intense poems written over the span of a decade beginning in 1848, collectively titled “Switzerland,” containing the enigmatic character, Marguerite. Many scholars remain fairly certain that Marguerite is a friend of the Arnold family with whom Arnold flirted, the French Protestant Mary Claude, who had family in Switzerland. No primary texts, though, can place her at Thun in either 1848 or 1849. Thus, the evidence for Mary Claude remains speculative, and other scholars have posited that Marguerite was everything from a hotel chambermaid (she wears her hair in a kerchief, characteristic of chambermaids at the time) to a fabrication of Arnold’s hormones. Whoever or whatever she was, she occupies a series of poems written over a span of years, the last one written after he had married. The mystery of Marguerite lingers in Arnold studies, her definitive identity a career-making holy grail.

In addition to love, Arnold felt the heartache of death. In his first year at Balliol, his father died suddenly of the *angina pectoris*, which haunted Arnold males, and would ultimately claim Matthew’s own life. Although the loss of Dr. Arnold’s powerful presence released the son from his father’s shadow, one cannot help but imagine that such a loss at such a time shook the young man. He also lost his best friend, Arthur H. Clough, to an untimely death. Although their relationship was sometimes fraught, their letters to one another show an unmistakable depth of feeling and intellectual commitment. Some scholars see Arnold’s poetic memorial to Clough, *Thyrsis*, as a lackluster elegy, and time and distance certainly did erode some of their early closeness. However, that Arnold considered Clough a brother cannot be denied: “as with all our differences we agree

more with one another than the rest of the world" (qtd Murray 127). Finally, in the intimate family he and Flu nurtured, death seemed never far from the door. Arnold and Fanny Lucy lost three children in infancy and adolescence, and Arnold's pain is palpable in the letters surrounding his children's deaths.

And all this time, right up until his sudden death, he wrote some of the clearest and most readable prose in English.

The details above are not meant to be a paean to Arnold, nor to imply that other Victorians were not visited by similar or more difficult circumstances. Rather, I present them to counterbalance the common misconception—common both in Arnold's time and ours—that he lived, worked, and thought above the din and fray of what we might call a relatable experience. As mentioned, not everything that Arnold wrote has aged well, or was even considered appropriate in his own time. However, looking at Arnold's oeuvre, as the articles in this special issue do, demonstrates some consistent lines of thought that are not only indicative of Arnold's definition of himself as a "liberal tempered by experience," but also of Arnold's relevant place in current thought (*CPW* V:88). I would like to single out a few consistent lines of thought in Arnold's prose that make his work relevant and worthy of a seat at the table in both academic and lay conversations today. Matthew Arnold is never *without complication* defined by any of the following characteristics; by the same token, though, he is never *simply* their opposite.

Persistent Trends in Arnold's Thought

First is Arnold's awareness of his historical context and the constraints on those he praises and censures. Beyond knowing his own place in time, Arnold understood well how times affected people and culture. Even to his definition of culture, often placed under fire, as "the best that has been thought and said in the world," Arnold supplies qualifiers: "the best knowledge *of their time*," "the best knowledge and thought *of the time*," Arnold writes (*CPW* V:113). Arnold constantly criticized his countrymen for what he called their provincial thinking. By

that he meant their unwillingness to place their views at a particular time into perspective, the tendency to utter “any given opinion as something isolated, without perceiving its relation to other ideas, or its due place in the general world of thought” (*CPW* III:40). As he would explain later, knowledge is “Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming,” so when Arnold uses terms like “perfection” and “the best,” readers must understand that these words are malleable and rarely static in his vision (*CPW* V:94).

Arnold applied this recognition of historicity to many subjects, including politics. He recognized that too quickly adhering to party-line thinking could be dangerous because ideas for good “do not seem to us so practical for real good.” He continues, “Sometimes the result of floating them may be agreeable to this party, sometimes to that; now it may be unwelcome to our so-called Liberals, now to our so-called Conservatives” (*CPW* V:220). Early in life, when writing about State authority, Arnold recognized that an unflinching critical eye had to be turned upon ourselves always. “Hesitating, blundering, unintelligent, inefficacious, the action of the State may be,” he writes, “but such as it is, it is the collective action of the nation itself, and the nation is responsible for it. It is our own action which we suffer to be thus unsatisfactory” (*CPW* II:28). This is Arnold’s two-way street—acknowledging that the way things are is a complicated result of a nation’s actions and failures, and agitating against a system sometimes involves conceding one’s complicity in that system.

Arnold’s awareness of history comes throughout his prose but seems most sensitively presented in his religious criticism. His belief in the power of the church, particularly the Christian church, in the creation of culture is something that, in contemporary thought, may be considered conservative, even reactionary. However, Arnold held to a broad and literate vision of the power of religion, or at least proximity to it, and to a familiarization with the Hebrew and Christian scriptures as works of literature, for the expansion of culture. And he remained aware of a religious work’s historical limitations, even of Christianity’s limitations. Arnold was no fundamentalist, writing, “christianity will assuredly ever

be able to adapt itself to new conditions, and, in connexion with intellectual ideas changed or developed, to enter upon successive stages of progress" (*CPW* III:78). The strict Pauline theology taking hold with the rising Dissenting churches gets blunted through Arnold's criticism of scripture. Arnold tried to temper Dissenting theology by focusing on, for instance, the dissonance between St. Paul's time and his own: "there are degrees," he writes, "of nearness in getting at a man's meaning; and though we cannot arrive quite at what St. Paul had in his mind, yet we may come near it" (*CPW* V:182). In fact, "There can be no surer proof of a narrow and ill-structured mind, than to think and uphold that what a man takes to be the truth on religious matters is always to be proclaimed" (*CPW* VI:147).

Arnold often argued against the "Dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion" that earned his ire in both his religious works and his social and cultural critiques (*CPW* V:102-3). Understanding that the Bible needed to be placed into a wider circulation of thought, he famously said, "'*he knows*,' says Hebraism, '*his Bible!*'—whenever we hear this said, we may, without any elaborate defence of culture, content ourselves with answering simply: 'No man, who knows nothing else, knows even his Bible'" (*CPW* V:184). Arnold's religious works are inspired pieces of liberal biblical criticism—a perfect blend of scholarship and aesthetic study, as well as blistering attacks on religious fanaticism and fundamentalism that are still relevant two centuries later. He recognized that any sort of fundamentalism or dogmatism is dangerous and retarding culturally. He understood that the "language of the Bible [...] is literary, not scientific language; language *thrown out* at an object of consciousness not fully grasped, which inspired emotion" (*CPW* VI:189, emphasis in original). The ossification of St. Paul's words by Puritans took away the power of even Paul's attempts to grasp what he could only approximate in his own time:

Paul's figures our Puritans have taken literally while for his central idea they have substituted another which is not his. And his central idea they have turned into a figure,

and have let it almost disappear from out of their mind. His essential idea lost, his figures misused, an idea essentially not his substituted for his—the unedifying patchwork thus made, Puritanism has stamped with Paul’s name, and called it *the gospel*. It thunders at Romanism for not preaching it, it casts off Anglicanism for not setting it forth alone and unreservedly, it founds organizations of its own to give full effect to it; these organizations guide politics, govern statesmen, destroy institutions;—and they are based upon a blunder! (*CPW* VI:69)

What a strong statement that is, as applicable to contemporary identity politics and even politically shattered literary studies departments as it is to religion.

Another recurring theme in Arnold’s work is his antipathy to factious thinking, fragmentation, and party politics. Again, this theme’s consistency is remarkable throughout his prose. He introduces the idea in his first lecture as Oxford Professor of Poetry, “On the Modern Element in Literature,” noting that one of the most sought-after qualities of the critic is “the growth of a tolerant spirit,” one that is “patient of the diversities of habits and opinions” (*CPW* I:23). Arnold also railed against increasing factionalism in politics, social structure, and religion. Such a focus on the evils of party politics is something that contemporary America, especially, but also other nations, can certainly feel. When one thinks of how quickly responses to something as neutral as a pandemic can become partisan, we feel the power of Arnold’s observations: “so much has our national life been carried on by the means of parties, and so inevitably does party-spirit, in regarding all things, put the consideration of their intrinsic reason and truth second, and not first” (*CPW* III:79). Our ability as thinkers to consider an issue is limited when we listen only to the voices that counsel us in the direction our minds are already going. The extreme politicization of news outlets comes to mind, particularly in the United States, but this was true of Arnold’s Victorian England also, when newspapers repeatedly

roared party "clap-trap" in what amounts to an echo-chamber. The arid solipsism that characterized party thinking also limited what Arnold saw as the dominant religious tendencies of middle-class Englanders. Listening solely to flatterers produces such an attitude toward genuine criticism and self-assessment that ideas "do not sink into the minds of those at whom they are addressed, or awaken any thought of self-examination in them" (*CPW* V:151).

Arnold's prose was, to appropriate his words about Heinrich Heine, a taking up of "that terrible modern weapon, the pen [...] in one fierce battle [...] a life and death battle with Philistinism," and, for Arnold, particularly British Philistinism (*CPW* III:111). England was increasingly being divided into conservative and liberal camps that did not converse with one another. What's more, these camps, in Arnold's estimation, were only talking to themselves. Arnold's cultural project was always one at which everyone had a right and a duty to work. Culture, he says, "will not allow one member to be indifferent to the rest or to have perfect welfare independent of the rest [...]. Perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated" (*CPW* V:94). Arnold saw this on his trips to and comments on America. He would see too clearly the same public in the United States, who, in their zest for news, "seek for praise and blame to suit their already established likes and dislikes" (*CPW* VIII:166). American exceptionalism was as strong in Arnold's day as it is in our own, and he speaks at the end of his life of the "American rhapsody of self-praise" (*CPW* XI:366).

Finally, for someone whose critical injunction to know the best that has been thought and said in the world has been held up as elitist, readers would do well to balance that judgment with Arnold's consistent appeals for diversity of thought and reading. Again, although his appeals for diversity and tolerance are sometimes difficult to balance against his belief in the power of state action and his occasional slips into the language of established conventions and authors, if one looks at his work over time it becomes clear that he believed in taking a wide view of literature, culture, diversity, and tolerance. Even writing to Thomas Henry Huxley, with

whom he engaged in a lively debate, he tells him personally that science is included in his definition of literature. Such an injunction to think widely continues especially in Arnold's injunctions to critics: "when one side of a question has long had your earnest support, when all your feelings are engaged, when you hear all round you no language but one, when your party talks this language like a steam-engine and can imagine no other,—still to be able to think, still to be irresistibly carried [...] by the current of thought to the opposite side of the question" is necessary (*CPW* III:267). I recall, upon one of my first graduate encounters with Arnold, being struck by my classmates' unwillingness to see the large scope Arnold always gave to literature, quick to house him in an ivory tower and forget such clear requests as:

By the very nature of things, as England is not all the world, much of the best that is known and thought in the world cannot be of English growth, must be foreign; [...] [take] excellent care that we shall not be ignorant of its existence. The English critic of literature, therefore, must dwell much on foreign thought, and with particular heed on any part of it, which, while fruitful in itself, is for any reason especially likely to escape him. (*CPW* III:282-83)

Arnold was not a narrow reader. Even a cursory glance at his *Note Books* or skimming through the titles of some lesser known essays is proof of this. One realizes when reading Arnold that we learn best by comparison and contrast with other literatures. Arnold recognized and publicized this, especially during his journeys to the Continent to report on foreign education systems. This look at the way education was administered in England versus the Continent was the ground note of his arguments in these education pieces: "Having long held that nothing was to be learned by us from the foreigners, we are at last beginning to see, that on a matter like the institution of schools, for instance, much light is thrown by a comparative study of their institution among other civilized states and nations" (*CPW* IV:20).

Even Arnold's oft-decried definition of culture is, upon close and expanded examination, one that is tolerant and diverse. He writes, "culture seek[s] the determination of this question through *all* the voices of human experience which have been heard upon it, of art, science, poetry, philosophy, history, as well as of religion, in order to give a greater fullness and certainty to its solution" (*CPW* V:43). Culture, therefore, is critical, but also tolerant, polyvocal, diverse. Also, for as much as Arnold is presented in literary theory as pronouncing some Olympian standards, he never believed that he was in possession of such, or even defined them, saying just the opposite: "There is no *unum necessarium*, or one thing needful, which can free human nature from the obligation of trying to come to its best at all these points" (*CPW* V:180). Arnold believed both in many sides to the human, and in many sides to understanding culture, to the recognition of diversity and a tolerance in the global human spirit: "man has to make progress along diverse lines, in obedience to a diversity of aspirations and powers, the sum of which is truly his nature; and that he fails and falls short until he learns to advance upon them all, and to advance upon them harmoniously" (*CPW* IX:34-35).

Arnold knew that any cultural shift had to parallel a social shift, and amid his calls for tolerance came also his deep belief in a need to change the English education system, his faith in children, and his faith in reading as the means to bring about change. His interest in educational reform came slowly, even to this son of Dr. Arnold of Rugby. However, once it was sparked, it became personal. He recognized that his work as a schools inspector made him particularly apt for commenting on reading and education. At around the time that *Culture and Anarchy* appeared, Arnold shows his faith in young people to make the next big changes in society and culture. He writes that those who have the greatest potential to bring about change are "principally the young," and that "those chiefly attracted by sweetness and light will probably always be the young and enthusiastic" (*CPW* V:225). And education was part and parcel of his strong desire to inculcate the habit of reading in the public. That is, not to make the public merely literate, but to genuinely connect people with

literature from a young age. And this was not necessarily high classical literature, but popular literature also (though, admittedly, not as much). For all that his critics like to say that Arnold had only an eye to the past, and to high and classical styles of literature, they need only read “At the Princess’s” as an example of his treating popular culture works as literature (*CPW* X:96). Finally, the value of early popular elementary education teacher training is clear in Arnold’s thought: “it provided a class of efficient schoolmasters and schoolmistresses more quickly than they could have been provided in any other way; it interested the population in the schools, it caused the teacher’s profession to be generally regarded as a promising one” (*CPW* XI:225). Guiding the public toward a habit of reading was a project that Arnold took to heart, editing himself several books meant to make works of literature accessible to children and lay people alike.

In This Issue

As we turn to the works contained within this special issue, I must mention that it was created under some of the most unique and, at times, frightening conditions in recent memory. The COVID-19 pandemic sent many contributors into lockdown in their homes, separated from colleagues and, sometimes, family. Most of us wrote under restrictions, academic and personal, without access to archives or university research libraries, teaching our classes remotely while also, perhaps, overseeing a child’s sudden shift to home-schooling. Despite these extraordinary conditions, this global group of scholars has successfully produced an important collection, and I thank them.

Long-time students of Arnold will not be surprised—and new students of Arnold should be pleased—that this bicentennial celebration opens with Clint Machann’s sweeping review of the past twenty years of Arnold scholarship. The number of pieces Machann presents counters the frequent comment that Arnold scholarship is on the decline. Machann acknowledges that Arnold helped “prepare the way for pluralism and globalization,” but asserts that he is still “the most elusive of the major

Victorian writers." Even so, by summarizing significant contributions to Arnold scholarship, Machann traces trends in Arnold studies and, in looking to the future, asserts that Arnold is a model of critical thinking whose work will continue providing insights into human nature.

Giles Whiteley presents a lively reevaluation of *Friendship's Garland*. Whitely recognizes that "Arnold's reputation as something of a 'humorist' negatively impacted his early reception at the expense of his seriousness," yet "in the years that followed [...] Arnold became first and foremost associated with this seriousness." To recapture Arnold's sense of humor, Whitely categorizes *Friendship's Garland* as a work of "romantic irony," and in the process brings it into conversation with one of the few recognized works of English romantic irony: Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. In *Friendship's Garland*, Whitely writes, Arnold enacts the romantic ironist's goal of "active implication of the very same subject who is ironizing the world." Read as Whitely astutely does, *Friendship's Garland* emerges as one of Arnold's most engaging acts of the critical "disinterestedness" that he held in such high regard but that many detractors, in his time and ours, believe he rarely practiced.

Matthew Sussman gives an astounding review of the critical reception of Arnold's style up to the present. Sussman conceives three movements in the critical reception of Arnold's style. From an early formalism that divided Arnold's style from his subject, viewing his "expository prose as something that could be appreciated as an independent aesthetic merit," Sussman shows how in the early twentieth century "stylistic monism (which denotes the conflation of content and form)" emerged. This worked for and against Arnold, "in Arnold's favor so long as the reader approves" of both content and form, but against him if "recognizable features of his style [...] exemplify less savoury aspects of his underlying character." In roughly the last quarter of the twentieth century, though, Sussman notes the emergence of an "ethical formalist" approach to Arnold's style, treating "ethos as argument" and countering the Arnoldian temper's aesthetics "against the growing ranks who subjected it to ideological critique." In the twenty-first century, this has

given rise to a vision of Arnold's style almost as performative, creating a space for liberal ideas to emerge.

Joe Phelan's essay examines the significant but conflicted roles that Sainte-Beuve and Renan played in Arnold's construction of France as a counterpoint to the Philistinism of English cultural and intellectual life. While Sainte-Beuve epitomized the value of persuasion in criticism, Renan represented the advanced critical spirit that enabled the French to face the challenges of the future with a clarity and candor England lacked. Examining Arnold's religious criticism and Arnold's use of Renan's racial theories, Phelan explores Arnold's "true life's work: the attenuation of the 'Hebraic' element in English cultural and political life, and in the Protestant Christianity that underpinned it." Phelan's essay offers a nuanced study of Renan and Arnold's racial theories, and concludes by examining the reasons why Arnold's "enchantment with French culture [came] to an end, or rather fracture[ed] into a combination of censoriousness about the present condition of France and nostalgia for a lost and still idealized past" in the wake of France's catastrophic defeat in the war of 1870.

Federica Coluzzi's essay takes us on a unique voyage through Matthew Arnold's notebooks and journals in order to examine how Arnold engaged with, received, and incorporated Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. Coluzzi argues that Arnold's notebooks and diaries are, despite some scholarly opinion to the contrary, important sites for understanding Arnold's construction of his "self-in-time," especially as that authorial self relates to his reception and reading of Dante. Coluzzi maps the movement from Arnold's personal reading of Dante into the Italian poet's eventual appearance in many of Arnold's public pieces, a poignant example of Arnold applying and enacting his own "touchstone" method of reading.

We end this celebration of Arnold with a short but poignant memoir from Larry Mazzeno, Associate Editor for *Nineteenth-Century Prose* and an established name in Arnold studies. In this piece, Mazzeno recounts his history with Arnold, especially his foundational work with *The Arnoldian*, but more importantly how Arnold's work helped to shape his journey through academia, from student to scholar to administrator—a

professional life that, like Arnold's own, "shuttle[ed] 'between two worlds'—squeezing in opportunities to write while working full-time, I as a college president, he as a schools inspector." Mazzeno's words are a fitting "coda" for this issue, cementing Arnold as a "role model" for how to live as an academic in the "real world."

Conclusion

Threaded through each article comprising this special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose* is the affirmation that Arnold's ideas are still relevant, whether we want to continue his lines of thought, re-contextualize them, or disagree with them. Whatever the approach, these articles make clear that Arnold has succeeded in keeping up his "communications with the future." In this third decade of the millennium, we may never completely grasp all Arnold had in mind when he wrote. We are removed from his Victorian England, its concerns and contexts. However, we can continue to *get near* him, as Arnold did with those authors and ideas that were removed from him. We do have some advantage over Arnold's contemporary critics; we have it from his own pen: "no man can be perfectly judged till he has finished [his career]" (*CPW* I:79). Let us, then, as critics and able listeners, *draw near* to Matthew Arnold now that he has finished.

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Notes

¹ All references to Arnold's prose works, unless otherwise noted, are from Super's *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*.

² The details of Matthew Arnold's life provided here are gleaned from the following major biographies, all considered standards in Arnold studies: Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (Meridian Books, 1949); Park Honan, *Matthew Arnold: A Life* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981); Nicholas Murray, *A Life of Matthew Arnold* (St. Martin's Press, 1996).

³ All references to Arnold's letters, unless otherwise noted, are taken from Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*.

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