

# *Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin as Educational Reformers in a European Context*

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**Brendan A. Rapple, *Matthew Arnold and English Education: The Poet's Pioneering Advocacy in Middle Class Instruction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017), 197 pp., softcover and e-book, \$65.00.**

***John Ruskin and Nineteenth-Century Education*, edited by Valerie Purton (London: Anthem, 2018), 192 pp., hardcover and e-book, £70.00, \$115.00.**

*A*lthough Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin shared a critical perspective on the commercial values of the Victorian middle classes, the two writers' schemes for educational reform might seem to have little in common. Due to his first-hand observations of the deficiencies in elementary education as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of elementary schools in England and Wales, as well as his extensive consultations for parliamentary commissions investigating educational reform, Arnold favored the creation of a national system that would guarantee the standardization and centralization of education under state control. Rather than recommending such systemic institutional reforms, Ruskin presented himself as a teacher, both in his public lectures at the Working Men's College and his writings directed at working-class readers. On the basis of his comparative educational researches, Arnold

also put forward a positive idea of modernity that defined social progress in terms of a generalized intellectual progress of society that a more centralized educational system could encourage, as had been done in other European countries. Ruskin promoted a more individualized approach to education, and was often skeptical of modernity generally, and of motives for schooling and self-improvement that he deemed to be driven by a competitive ethos. Nevertheless, both Brendan A. Rapple's *Matthew Arnold and English Education: The Poet's Pioneering Advocacy in Middle Class Instruction* and Valerie Purton's edited collection, *John Ruskin and Nineteenth-Century Education*, reveal an important, and rarely studied, European inspiration for both writers' educational philosophies as well as their projects for refurbished schools, more effective educational methods, and an individual self-culture inspired by literature and the arts.

Rapple's study fills a gap in scholarship on Matthew Arnold's cultural criticism by taking as its focus Arnold's comparative methods and more specifically his persevering advocacy of a centralized state system of public schooling for the middle classes in England and Wales, following the models of school systems in Prussia, France, Italy, Holland, and Switzerland. The book's chapters provide detailed analysis of Arnold's many educational reports based on his research trips to the Continent on behalf of parliamentary commissions and disseminated in his works focused on comparative education such as *The Popular Education of France* (1861), *A French Eton; or Middle Class Education and the State* (1864), and *Schools and Universities on the Continent* (1868). Rapple shows that Arnold's admiration for centralized, state-run European school systems, especially at the secondary level, expressed his belief that education should not be considered as "divorced from other societal forces but as being thoroughly blended with them" (35). In coordination with his "wider comparative criticism" in such works as *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Rapple explains, Arnold's advocacy of the British state as the proper administrator of educational provision was based in his view that, in other European countries with centralized school systems "the intellectual, cultural, social, and political virtues of these foreign societies

had a thoroughly interdependent relationship with their educational systems" (35). The inculcation of such public virtues was the product of concerted organizational planning at the state level (88). Arnold strongly criticized the fact that in England and Wales (Scotland's educational system was separate and independent), educational provisions had evolved haphazardly and in a fragmented way over time, and without any comprehensive governmental planning or oversight (88).

Rapple's analysis emphasizes the way Arnold's educational reform program links together positive conceptions of modernity and the benefits of intellectual culture with the idea of the State as a collective entity, superseding the partial interests of the social classes, and capable of acting for the benefit of the whole community and against divisive social unrest (76-77). For Arnold, Britain's deficits in modern social organization and the promulgation of collective values through education were glaringly evident in comparison to the highly organized school systems of France and Prussia. Unlike these countries, Britain lacked a modern educational system for the middle classes that could impose central supervision and regulation, and maintain public oversight of educational quality (116-17), including over the certification of teachers, particularly in the secondary schools (118). As Rapple outlines, for Arnold, the requirements of such a system would be a systematic and standardized national curriculum (119), as well as governmental supervision of the expenditure and maintenance of school and university endowments (136). Rapple points out that another salient aspect of the comparatively greater modernity of the French secondary educational system, for Arnold, was its secularism (62), and its embrace of the modern "democratic movement" (80), as part of the French state's rationalization of its own political history. This focus on democratization was evident in the combining of middle- and upper-class students in French secondary schools, or classical *lycées*, enabling young men to develop a shared political culture (120-21). In England and Wales, by contrast, class divisions were exacerbated by separate schooling for the middle and upper classes (71), encouraging what Arnold described in his 1878 essay "Equality" as the middle-class English "religion of inequality,"

as Rapple notes (107-8). In the Prussian secondary educational and university systems, Arnold admired the implementation of the educational ideal of culture as *Bildung*—as a principle of state formation based in systematic knowledge (68-69; 166), while he faulted English society for its equation of modernity merely with material, economic, and technological advances and not with the intellectual and social advancements that were the goal of French and German schools and universities (91).

Strictly a study of Arnold's views on education for middle- and upper-class males, *Matthew Arnold and English Education* does not attempt a broader investigation of Arnold's views on girls' and women's education, and does not scrutinize the coherence of Arnold's comparative approach toward secondary and higher education with his reports and recommendations on elementary schooling for the working classes. The book's investigations of Arnold's methodological innovations in the areas of comparative education and system-wide institutional analysis, and its discussion of definitions and methods in the field of comparative education since the nineteenth century, are particularly useful. At our contemporary moment of heated debates, often based in comparative analysis, over declining levels of government funding of public school systems in several advanced democracies around the world, the book's focus on the history of educational reform also takes on a new relevance.

While Rapple observes that "it is impossible to construct a detailed design for an Arnoldian system of post-secondary schools" (147), many of the intriguing essays in *John Ruskin and Nineteenth-Century Education* focus on Ruskin's abiding interest in designing Victorian educational materials and curricula and revising pedagogical practices. Purton characterizes Ruskin's educational ideals, as expressed in his Inaugural Address on 29 October 1858 at the opening of the new Cambridge School of Art, as expressing "his passion to [...] extend education as widely as possible, while respecting both the practical and the aesthetic" (2). The book's chapters are divided into three sections: "A. Changing the World," "B. Libraries and the Arts," and "C. Christianity and Apocalypse." Section

A. includes Sara Atwood's astute analysis of Ruskin's key educational ideas and, based on these, her recommendations on how they can be applied to today's educational challenges; an extensively researched and original chapter by Stuart Eagles on Tolstoy's educational ideals and projects, as based in the Russian writer's admiration for Ruskin's teachings; Rachel Dickinson's intriguing account of Ruskin's multifaceted discussions of textiles, dressmaking, and clothing in educational contexts; and Jan Marsh's investigation of Ruskin's informal teaching at Winnington Hall School for girls, and the social contexts and reception of Ruskin's commentaries on female education in *Sesame and Lilies*. In Section B. can be found Emma Sdegno's detailed study of Ruskin's views on the educational value of the practice of translation, as exemplified in *Rock Honeycomb* and *Fors Clavigera*, and in his focus on translations of the Psalms; an analysis by Stephen Wildman of Ruskin's surprising selections and teaching methods accompanying a set of four art photographs for home instruction that Ruskin arranged to be distributed to working-class readers of *Fors Clavigera* in 1875-76; Paul Jackson's survey of Ruskin's views on the educational role of music and his influence on the development of civic arts institutions; and a careful history and interpretation of the sources, contexts in Ruskin's art and architecture criticism, and educational messages of Ruskin's fairy tale for children, *The King of the Golden River*, by Edward James. While the chapters in section C. have a less direct relationship to Ruskin's educational ideas, they are both insightful contributions to the volume. Keith Hanley's essay focuses on the many strands of Ruskin's religious ideas, arguing that his influence on the arts, culture, and education cannot accurately be viewed as secular. Andrew Tate's compelling essay illuminates how Ruskin's cultural pessimism and his environmentalism, often framed in Christian eschatological terms, were prescient in characterizing an unfolding epoch that we now refer to as the Anthropocene, as well as imagining a future that could still be shaped by human actions tending toward a more hopeful outcome. Several chapters include significant discussion of Ruskin's writings and activities related to

girls' and women's education and his efforts to foster the access of members of the working classes to education and the arts. Given that some of the contributors are affiliated with the Guild of St George, founded by Ruskin in the 1870s, a chapter studying the educational mission and history of that organization up to the present would have been a useful addition to the volume.

Taken together, both Rapple's *Matthew Arnold and English Education* and *John Ruskin and Nineteenth-Century Education* provide a valuable new vantage on Arnold's and Ruskin's contributions to a trans-European conversation among writers, intellectuals, and educational professionals concerning educational philosophy, instruction, school organization, and the social benefits of educational improvements during the nineteenth century. These international dimensions emerge in Ruskin's educational writings and lectures on European art and architecture, and Arnold's practice of comparative methods across his writings on literature, cultural criticism, and education. In a time of resurgent nationalisms, these international dimensions of Arnold's and Ruskin's work suggest a further impetus, in addition to studying recurring questions about the social goals of modern education, for revisiting their work today.

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