

# 追求和谐完美

——评马修·阿诺德文学与文化批评理论

In Pursuit of an Ideal of Harmonious Perfection:  
A Critique of Matthew Arnold's Literary  
and Cultural Criticism

李振中 著



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## Foreword to *In Pursuit of an Ideal of Harmonious Perfection*

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Dr. Li Zhenzhong's new book on Matthew Arnold's literary and cultural criticism is a brilliant and much-needed contribution to nineteenth-century studies. *In Pursuit of an Ideal of Harmonious Perfection: A Critique of Matthew Arnold's Literary and Cultural Criticism* takes as its formidable task the defense of Arnold against modern-day scholars like T. S. Eliot who have accused Arnold of irresponsible inconsistencies in his critical theory and practice.

Of course, as Dr. Li admits, there are indeed a few minor inconsistencies and small contradictions in Arnold's statements. In defending Arnold against charges of inconsistency, Dr. Li might have reminded us of what Arnold's American contemporary and admirer Ralph Waldo Emerson said about consistency in his famous essay "Self-Reliance" (1841): "The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks" and "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines" — and, Dr. Li might have added, little scholars like T. S. Eliot. Or

## II

he might have reminded us of what another contemporary American, Walt Whitman, said in *Song of Myself* (1855): "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes." The important thing with Arnold, as with all great thinkers, is not the individual tacks they take as they sail onward, but the general goal they aim for and achieve. Minor contradictions are no problem for a man as large as Matthew Arnold. He contains multitudes.

Dr. Li could have stopped with such general statements, but he wants in his book to be more specific in defending Arnold against the charge of inconsistency. To do so he carefully analyzes all of Arnold's important essays and shows, beyond all doubt, that Arnold's idea of harmonious perfection was an important and pervasive concern almost from the beginning of his career until his tragic death in 1888 — as he rushed to greet his daughter, newly returned from America. For Arnold, the ideal of harmonious perfection applied both to individual human development and to man's social connections with others around him. Key to a defense of what Dr. Li calls Arnold's "gift for perfection" is an understanding of Arnold's concept of the State. Arnold envisioned — and called his countrymen to envision — an almost Platonically ideal State that would take good care of its citizens.

Ever practical, Arnold realized that there will never be perfect harmony either within a man or woman individually, or among Englishmen collectively, or in mankind considered as citizens of a wider world. Dr. Li shows that Arnold knew that even though the perfect ideal would never be achieved, men and women everywhere should keep the ideal before them and strive in their private and public doings to reach ever closer to it. No Platonic State would ever succeed in providing a good or fair life for every citizen, particularly in a society like that in England, where the aristocratic, the middle, and the laboring classes tended often to work at cross purposes. Still, a strong program of educational reform, Arnold argued, could help all three classes to work toward the common goal of a perfectly harmonious State. To forget the ideal of perfect harmony or to stop striving for it would lead to what Arnold called

anarchy.

The social implications of Dr. Li's study are wide. Not only does he do important work in reminding us all about the enduring importance of Matthew Arnold as a social philosopher, but he also reminds his Chinese compatriots that, as China grows more confident and achieves its rightful prominence on the international stage, they must not forget the ideal of a perfect harmony—a perfect harmony for individual Chinese men and women, for them as members of a self-contained Chinese State, and for them as collective citizens of the world. *In Pursuit of an Ideal of Harmonious Perfection*, then, is one of those books that will endure, that will carry important messages not just to scholars of British culture, but to all citizens of a world in rapid transition.

One final, and more personal, note: I was honored when Dr. Li Zhenzhong invited me to write a foreword to his important new book. I was honored not because I know Arnold's work well, but because Li Zhenzhong was my student more than two decades ago when I was a Fulbright professor of English at Sichuan University. I got to know him especially in his role as class monitor in my graduate course on thesis writing. Li Zhenzhong was at that time a young master's student who stood out as an unusually fine and serious man. I was not surprised, then, to learn that he went on for the doctorate and that his dissertation was selected for a special award and for publication by a distinguished press. I was pleased, but of course not surprised, to find that *In Pursuit of an Ideal of Harmonious Perfection* demonstrates solid research, clear exposition, and a timely message. I of course take no credit for any of this, but I am thrilled to be able to say of my former student that, like Whitman and Arnold, he is large, he contains multitudes.

Peter G. Beidler,  
the Lucy G. Moses Distinguished Professor, emeritus  
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.



## *Preface*

The book in your hand is based on my doctoral dissertation, which was approved in June of 2007 by Shanghai International Studies University. It is the fruit of my years' study in a doctoral programme that turned me to a research into the literary and cultural criticism of Matthew Arnold.

Matthew Arnold is a well-known English poet and critic in the nineteenth century as well as a leading figure of criticism in the English speaking world. For more than a century, he has been a major subject of academic studies in both Britain and America, witnessed by the popularity of "Arnoldian studies" among British and American scholars. While scholars acknowledge his status as an influential critic, they differ in their opinion about him on various issues, one of which is his critical consistency. This issue originates from T. S. Eliot's criticism on Arnold. As Eliot is both the literary dictator after Arnold and an acknowledged inheritor of the latter's critical legacy, Eliot's observation on Arnold's lack of a "gift for consistency" has aroused much critical attention. It is approved by a number of critics while not endorsed by some others. Owing to the inadequacy of Arnoldian studies in China, this issue of Arnold's gift for consistency has not yet been addressed by Chinese scholars. Yet this issue is of great importance to a proper understanding and appreciation of Arnold and his criticism. Attracted

VI

by the issue, I made an intensive study of Arnold's writings on literary, cultural, and social topics, which led me to conclude that despite the apparent impression of discrepancy he may give to some students of his criticism, Matthew Arnold is in effect a critic with positive gift for consistency, as is testified by the persistence he displays in pursuit of an ideal of harmonious perfection.

Upon the publication of my book, I feel obliged to show gratitude to Prof. Li Weiping of Shanghai International Studies University and Prof. Lan Renzhe of Sichuan International Studies University. Prof. Li is one of the authorities in the studies of British literature in contemporary China, and a scholar rich in literary scholarship, academic expertise, and critical insight. His supervision, trust, and support are an indispensable contributor to the completion of my dissertation and publication of this book. Prof. Lan is also a distinguished scholar of English studies I have long held in esteem. I was indebted to him for his generous help twenty years ago when I worked on my M.A. thesis, and then had the luck to be further guided and helped by him when I worked for my Ph. D. Thanks to his good counsel and generous support, I could have overcome the difficulty I met both in writing my dissertation and in preparing my book for print.

I must thank with all my heart Prof. Peter G. Beidler at Lehigh University. Honoured as 1983's American "Professor of the Year" and distinguished with personal merits and professional achievements, Dr. Beidler has enjoyed a name not only in his own country but also in others. His "Why I Teach" in *College English* has been read and enjoyed by millions and millions of Chinese students all over the country. His *Writing Matters*, ever since its publication in China by Sichuan University Press, has been treasured as a rare reference book on writing by teachers and students in many a Chinese university. Twenty years ago while he taught as a Fulbright Professor at Sichuan University, his classes of American literature and English writing provided me a rare chance to learn the skill of academic writing. In the past two decades, *Writing Matters*, which he sent me as a gift from America, has been an indispensable aid to me

not only in my teaching but also in my own writing. Twenty years later when I asked him to read through my draft book to ensure its quality of language and write a few words as comment, he did it willingly despite the illness he was suffering from and generously wrote a preface to the book.

I also want to thank my American friends Ms. Alice Galmore and Ms. Julia Melvedt. Upon learning my wish to have some native speaker to help screen out possible language errors, unable to do so for her age and eye condition, Alice promptly contacted her cousin Julia, who willingly agreed to do it for me despite her life of total retirement since she last taught in college more than a decade ago. Although the unexpected blur in the print prevented Julia from reading the text properly, she did it where possible and sent her opinion back to me in due time.

I am thankful to my friends Prof. Feng Qinghua at Shanghai International Studies University, Prof. Shi Jian at Sichuan University, and Prof. Fu Yonglin at Southwest Jiaotong University. Largely because of their encouragement and support I was able to enter the doctoral programme, complete my research project, and get my book published.

Last but not least, I want to thank Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. It is its elevated goal “to trace the current development of China’s scholarly research, demonstrate the latest academic tendency and achievements, and encourage and support distinguished English scholars” that gave me a chance to have my book published in this way.

Li Zhenzhong  
Chongqing, 2009.

**VIII**

## **Abbreviations**

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As Matthew Arnold's works are frequently cited in the text, the following abbreviations are used for convenience's sake. For full bibliographic information, please refer to the Works Cited and Consulted section.

<b>CA</b>	<i>Culture and Anarchy</i>
<b>DA</b>	<i>Discourses in America</i>
<b>E1</b>	<i>Essays in Criticism, First Series</i>
<b>E2</b>	<i>Essays in Criticism, Second Series</i>
<b>FE</b>	<i>A French Eton or Middle-Class Education and the State</i>
<b>FG</b>	<i>Friendship's Garland</i>
<b>HLW</b>	<i>On Translating Homer; Last Words</i>
<b>HTL</b>	<i>On Translating Homer; Three Lectures</i>
<b>L1</b>	<i>Letters of Matthew Arnold, Vol. I</i>
<b>L2</b>	<i>Letters of Matthew Arnold, Vol. II</i>
<b>ME</b>	<i>Mixed Essays</i>
<b>MI</b>	<i>Mixed Essays, Irish Essays and Others</i>
<b>OM</b>	"On the Modern Element in Literature"
<b>PP</b>	"Preface" to <i>Poems</i> ( 1853 )

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>0.1 Arnoldian studies in Britain and America</b>	6
0.1.1 Controversies over Arnold's poetic and critical identity	8
0.1.2 Controversies over Arnold's gift for consistency	18
<b>0.2 Arnoldian studies in the Chinese context</b>	24
<b>0.3 Argument for Arnold's consistency in pursuit of an ideal of harmonious perfection</b>	29
<b>Chapter 1 Harmonious Perfection in Literary Criticism</b>	36
<b>1.1 An Arnoldian definition of literature and literary criticism</b>	37
<b>1.2 Choice of subject matter for writing poetry and criticism</b>	41
1.2.1 Considerations behind the choice of poetic models	41
1.2.2 Considerations behind the choice of critical objects	46
<b>1.3 Notion of intellectual deliverance through literature</b>	51
<b>1.4 Criticism on the false practice in translating Homer</b>	62
<b>1.5 View of relationship between poetry and criticism</b>	70
1.5.1 Poetry as a criticism of life	71
1.5.2 Poet's contribution to criticism	74
1.5.3 Critic's commitment to disinterestedness	80

ii

<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Harmonious Perfection in the Theorization of Culture</b>	89
2.1	The conception of culture	90
2.1.1	Evolution of the concept of culture	91
2.1.2	Culture as a key word	93
2.2	Culture defined as an embodiment of the ideal of harmonious perfection	94
2.2.1	Culture's union of scientific and ethical passions	96
2.2.2	Culture's combination of knowing and doing	100
2.3	Culture in criticism of the falseness of the middle-class values	103
2.3.1	Domination of the middle-class values in Victorian England	103
2.3.2	Culture's analysis on the falseness of the middle-class faith in machinery	107
2.3.3	Culture's rational attitude towards machinery as distinguished from the blind faith of the fanaticism	117
2.4	Culture in evaluation of historical movements and forces	120
2.4.1	Appreciation of the Oxford movement	120
2.4.2	Criticism on Philistinism and Jacobinism	124
2.5	Insistence upon the best that has been thought and known for all humanity	129
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Harmonious Perfection in the Conception of State</b>	140
3.1	Disputes over Arnold's idea of the State	141
3.2	Desire to save the nation from the danger of anarchy	147
3.3	Sympathy for democracy and concern with popular benefit	155
3.4	Principle of authority as an institutional norm for the State	163
3.5	Faith in an idealized State based on the collective best self	176

<b>Conclusion</b> .....	190
<b>Appendix 1 Matthew Arnold: A Chronology</b> .....	195
<b>Appendix 2 Transcriptions for Chinese Names and Titles</b> .....	198
1. Transcriptions for Chinese Names .....	198
2. Selected Transcriptions for Chinese Titles .....	200
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	202



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# Introduction

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In the academic world it seemed — to some, anyway — that Arnold had become the permanent English critic and that to be a professor of English meant being, by definition, an Arnoldian.

J. H. Raleigh, *Matthew Arnold and American Culture*



Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) might have frustrated many of his contemporary observers when he contradicted their expectation with an unexpected reality. When he first entered Balliol College<sup>1</sup>, the oldest of all the colleges of Oxford University, as the eldest son of Doctor Thomas Arnold<sup>2</sup>, he let all those who knew the Arnolds anticipate an exemplary young scholar on the campus. Yet the figure he cut there did not meet their expectation. During his three-year stay in Balliol, he seemed to be a real dandy with a mind to “enjoy himself to the hilt”, as Park Honan<sup>3</sup> told us in his detailed account of Arnold’s early days in Oxford, “under beautiful old towers and near luxurious grassy hills with tantalizing, long views of the countryside” (48). Away from the supervision of parents, free from the burden of assignment, Arnold was observed to rise late, drink much, and read little. In his final year at Oxford, he even made himself the subject of some coaching efforts from his friends, who tried to help him get ready for the exams out of genuine concern for his inadequate preparations but were frustrated by his apparent indifference to such efforts (Collini 1993a: 221). Reading books to his taste, writing poems appealing to his mood, and studying textbooks according to his own rhythm, upon his graduation he was only granted a second-class honours degree, much to the disappointment of the friends and tutors who had expected a better display of his talent. But while he betrayed his well-wishers by failing to show his brilliant side, he quickly revenged himself by winning, much to the surprise of those who had almost given him up, at first, a Fellowship of Oriel College in 1845, and, then, after the elapse of a mere decade, the distinguished position of Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, which he secured for two consecutive terms until he lost the desire to remain in that position. When he first became the holder of the chair of Oxford’s Professor of Poetry, he contradicted the expectation of many people once again. He “began badly, and became even worse” (Honan 292), so much so that many tutors, who were “very unimpressed” by his lecture, decided to advise their students never to go to hear him again. (Honan 293) Yet to the humiliation of those depreciative tutors, he soon secured, with a language peculiarly his