

Topic Page: [Arnold, Matthew, 1822-1888](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/arnold_matthew_1822_1888)



Summary Article: **Arnold, Matthew**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

1822–88, English poet and critic, son of the educator Dr. Thomas Arnold.

Image from: [England in Chambers Dictionary of World History](#)

Arnold was educated at Rugby; graduated from Balliol College, Oxford in 1844; and was a fellow of Oriel College, Oxford in 1845. In 1851, after a period as secretary to the 3d marquess of Lansdowne, Arnold was appointed inspector of schools, a position he held until 1886, two years before his death. During his

tenure he went on a number of missions to European schools. He was impressed with some educational systems on the Continent—most particularly the concept of state-regulated secondary education—and wrote several works about them.

His first volume of poems, *The Strayed Reveller*, appeared in 1849; it was followed by *Empedocles on Etna* (1852). Dissatisfied with both works, he withdrew them from circulation. *Poems* (1853) contained verse from the earlier volumes as well as new poems, including “The Scholar Gypsy” and “Sohrab and Rustum.” *Poems: Second Series* appeared in 1855 and was followed by *Merope: A Tragedy* (1858) and *New Poems* (1867); the latter volume included “Thyrsis,” his famous elegy on Arthur Hugh Clough.

Arnold's verse is characterized by restraint, directness, and symmetry. Though he believed that poetry should be objective, his verse exemplifies the romantic pessimism of the 19th cent., an age torn between science and religion. His feelings of spiritual isolation are reflected in such poems as “Dover Beach” and “Isolation: To Marguerite.”

Matthew Arnold was also one of the most important literary critics of his age. From 1857 to 1867 he was Professor of Poetry at Oxford; during this time he wrote his first books of criticism, including *On Translating Homer* (1861), *Essays in Criticism* (1865; Ser. 2, 1888), and *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) and *Friendship's Garland* (1871) he widened his field to include social criticism. Arnold's interest in religion resulted in *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), and *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877). In the 1880s he gave several lectures in the United States, which were published as *Discourses in America* (1885).

Arnold was the apostle of a new culture, one that would pursue perfection through a knowledge and understanding of the best that has been thought and said in the world. He attacked the taste and manners of 19th-century English society, particularly as displayed by the “Philistines,” the narrow and provincial middle class. Strongly believing that the welfare of a nation is contingent upon its intellectual life, he proclaimed that intellectual life is best served by an unrestricted, objective criticism that is free from personal, political, and practical considerations.

See various editions of his letters;

his poetical works (ed. by C. B. Tinker; H. F. Lowry, 1950);

his complete prose works (ed. by Super, R. H. , 1960-72, 8 vol.);

his notebooks (ed. by Lowry, H. F. et al., 1950);

biographies by E. K. Chambers (1947, repr. 1964), L. Trilling (rev. ed. 1949, repr. 1979), P. Honan (1983), M. Allot and R. H. Sugar (1987), N. Murray (1997); and

I. Hamilton (1998);

studies by D. G. James (1961), H. C. Duffin (1963), E. Alexander (1965), A. D. Culler (1966), G. Stange (1967), and D. Bush (1971).

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Chicago

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Harvard

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