

Matthew arnold's "culture and anarchy"

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A lot of introductions to literary studies, including the one provided by Nünning, concentrate on what Collini (2000)² calls the "Holy Trinity" of literary studies: poem, drama and novel. According to Collini, this view dominated the Anglo-American literary study from the 1930's to at least the early 1970's. He states "Under this regime, the recalcitrant mixed-mode texts of the Victorian essayist and moralists did not fare well."

Nevertheless, non-fictional types of texts are the most common in everyday life. We would humanity be without newspapers, manuals, hypertexts, and all the other pieces of "non-fictional prose" which are, according to Collini "a nearly limitless category"?

It is the the most red category, and the category most written in. Writers are mostly engaged in non-fictional prose. There are millions of journalists and scientists today; not to speak of all the bureaucrats in the administrations of nearly every enterprise or government, who write trillions of letters, reports and presentations every day. Non-fictional prose is worth more attention.

This paper is concerned with a piece of non-fictional prose. Culture and Anarchy by Matthew Arnold. In order to deliver a sufficient analysis, there will be a chapter on the author first, to get an impression of how to understand the utterances. This includes a brief summary of the most important texts that were published by Matthew Arnold before Culture and Anarchy. Afterwards, there will be a chapter on text types, to clarify which category of text the work belongs to. At last, there will be the analysis of, as an application of the theory from the chapter before, with respect to the current scientific state of interpretation of Culture and Anarchy.

1. Matthew Arnold: Benchmarks

Matthew Arnold lived from 1822 to 1888. He was an elementary-school-inspector from 1851-86. He wrote poems until he was thirty³. The most popular one is *Dover Nünning, Vera*. An introduction to the study of English and American literature. Barcelona [et al.]: Klett, 2007 Collini, Stefan. "From 'Non-Fiction Prose' to 'Cultural Criticism': Genre and Disciplinarity in Victorian Studies". pp. 13-28. John, Juliet (ed. and introd.); Jenkins, Alice (ed. and introd.) and Sutherland, John (foreword) *Rethinking Victorian Culture*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 2000. xvi, 244 pp Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, p 488

Beach, where he pictured the struggling of his generation with religion and progress and finds a relief in love as a reliable fix-point in life. His poems became so popular, that he was elected the (foremost honorary) post of Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, where he was obliged to hold public lectures three times a year. He was the first unordained holder of the post and spoke English instead of Latin.

In 1861 he held a lecture on translating Homer, that was published as a book later. E. K. Brown (258) detects a dogmatic element in that essay, when Arnold asserts, that Homer is "the most important poetical monument existing" and prophesies that he will be read more and more in the future. In the same year, 1861, Arnold published *The Popular Education in France*, on his own expense. In the Introduction he makes an ominous statement about society as a whole, that was later republished under the title *Democracy*.

The next publication in book-form was *Essays on Criticism*⁵, where he developed a method called "disinterestedness" (dis- = not, inter- = <https://assignbuster.com/matthew-arnolds-culture-and-anarchy/>

between, esse= to be). It was not considered to be very helpful by scientists. Chhibbar⁶ states that it was "... fragmented, chaotic, and uncentered." (164), but Caufield⁷ suggests, that the lack of consistency was compensated by " a habit of keeping in touch with the concrete" and a " gift for implicit definition".

Arnold described himself as a "... mere solitary wanderer in search of the light", who speaks an " artless, unstudied, every-day, familiar language." (ibid., footnote 2). Having said this, his method can as well be called empirical and inductive. Arnold also pleaded that the mere " application of principles" was tautological, could not provide a " sense of creative activity." (38) and that it would sincerely take a lot of logic to build a machine but the idea to build a machine came from intuition (ix).

The subsequent book, *Culture and Anarchy*, was continuing in the tradition of *Essays in Criticism*, insofar as it was primarily a collection of essays published in a magazine before. According to Collini (1993, 276), Arnold was involved in an almost continuous series of overlapping Brown, A. K. " The Strategy of " Disinterestedness"". pp 251-262. Weber, Horst (ed.) *Der Englische Essay*. Darmstadt, 1975. Arnold, Matthew *Essays on Criticism*.

Chhibbar, Sudershan. *Victorian perspectives on democracy : a study of selected literary documents 1832 - 1867*, Dissertation, 1980
Caufield, James W. " Most Free from Personality: Arnold's Touchstones of Ethics", *Cambridge Quarterly* (2009) 38 (4): 307-327. Collini, Stefan. " Arnold". pp. 195-326.

Thomas, Keith (ed.) *Victorian Thinkers. Past Masters*. Oxford, 1993. vii, 428 pp. controversies, which started around the time of Democracy. Arnold

retrieved from social criticism, when three of his children died in a short sequence of time. He started to focus on religion and got a lot of appreciation for that. Later, he declined becoming professor at Oxford again, as well as becoming Director of a University.

According to the Oxford Companion of English Literature Arnold was " the leading critic of his time". His contemporaries must have had a different view. According to Caufield , Arnold had been a " cast out" until the end of the 2nd world war. He was seen as a " frivolous dandy", " logical light-weight", " stupid weakling", " incoherent chatter" or " intellectual dandy" (237), whose " airy dogmatism" was " ambitious, vague and perverse" (244), and could only serve to impress " young ladies or old women" (243).

His style was deemed as " an almost feminine concreteness of mind that rarely rose above the simplistic level of anecdotal narrative" (242). According to Caufield, Arnold reproduced the Utilitarian versus Romantic polarity and concludes that " Arnold appears to be figure of late Romanticism", whose contemporaries claimed that his arguments lacked " the logical and moral toughness demanded by the disciplines of political economy and 'felicific calculus' (cf. Bentham)." . The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography confirms that " In much of Arnold's poetry one sees the disconsolate Romantic trying to turn himself into the resolute stoic." (489).

2. How to Analyse an Essay

2.2 Patterns of Organisation

Miller distinguishes 6 patterns of organisation for the information in an essay; illustration, comparison & contrast, definition, division and classification, process, and causal analysis. Illustration means giving

examples. Comparisons and contrasts are used to make things clearer, show the positive side of something or to find a general principle. A definition is the explanation of vague and ambiguous words.

A formal definition puts the term in a general class and then differentiates it from the other members of that class. An extended definition is used to explain an uncommon term which is new or abstract. A Differentiation is showing what is not part of the definition. A division is the separation into groups, and a classification is the placement of units into these groups. A process is " a sequence of actions and operations", which has no focus on the story. A causal analysis consist of necessary, contributory and sufficient causes.

2. 3 Different Types of Essays

There are different kinds of distinctions possible to differentiate between certain types of essays. On the level of topic, the author can use the a narration, description, exposition or argumentation. On the level of style, there are more or less formal essays to distinguish.

2. 3. 1 Narration, Description, Exposition, Argumentation

Miller (168 n.) explains that the narration has a clear time sequence, can use dialogues and a varying point of view, whereas a description is a " sensory diction" (ibid.). It can ether stay detached from the narration, be (objective/factual) or include personal feelings and opinions of the narrator (subjective/personal). An exposition is the explain Svaglic, Martin J. " Classical Rhetoric and Victorian Prose". pp 230-250. Weber, Horst (ed.) Der Englische Essay, Darmstadt, 1975. Nation of informations and/or ideas, and

an argumentation “ proposes” (366) of a point of view. In this view Culture and Anarchy clearly is an argumentation.

2. 3. 2 The Informal, Formal and Periodical Essay

Freiburg¹⁵ distinguishes three types (“ Muster”) of essays which developed successively in history; the informal essay, the formal essay and the periodical essay. The archetype of essay was ‘invented’ by Michel de Montaigne. He thought that the writer had to be able to unfold his thoughts without constrains. Form, topic and stylistic devices were kept open. Thematically, reading often was the starting point of de Montaigne’s thoughts, which were explicated, quasi ‘live’, in his essays. So they have hardly a structure, are rhetorical and associative.

According to Mace-Tessler Bacon called himself an “ imitator of de Montaigne”(15), but he shifted the focus from “ personal inquiry” (ibid.) to social and philosophical topics. According to Freiburg, the essays of Bacon had a clear intention and target group, and were written in tradition of the ‘Speculum Magistratis’. Therefore, the tone was kept rational and Bacon underlined his educatedness or cited other authorities to be accepted as an advisor.

The rational tone was achieved by the use of definitions and a dialectical logic. The stylistic devices used were comparisons, parables and metaphors. They served for illustration. To easy the memorisation of the conclusions, aphorisms and maxims were employed.

The aim of the formal essay is the transmission of lessons. The periodical essay was ‘invented’ by people like Daniel Defoe in the beginning of the

newspaper. It was dominant in the Victorian and fin-de-siècle period. There was an increasing readership, achieved by the cheapness of periodicals and there was a growth in reading public because of elementary education and the overall growth of the middle-class.

Mace-Tessler adds, that the periodical essay is considered as one aspect in the development of journalism. Freiburg describes it as a mixed form of informal and formal essay. The essays were published in magazines and journals. Topics were taken from everyday life in the newly established middle class. They were read silently at the breakfast table, or aloud at the coffee-house. There was a high variety of generic devices: letters, reports, poems and even fictional narrations are being subsumed under this category. *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins is one example. It was published in "All the year round", a periodical owned by Charles Dickens.

The focus of the periodical essay lied less on what was said, than on how it was said. There was a shift away from subject-matter, towards an examination of the author's attitude towards a subject. The result was an "almost conspirational" and "familiarly" (cf. Mace-Tessler) tone. The periodical essay had to have a certain predictability because the journal or magazine had to be sold. However, a variety of structures, styles and essay types were needed to sustain the readers' interest and attention.

This variety had to follow some predictable patterns. In general, there was a tendency to imitate what has been before which formed the style of the periodical essay (Mace-Tessler, 11). Drescher (228 n.) makes an over-all distinction between free essay, formal essay and mix-form essay.

This coincides with to Freiburg's informal, formal and periodical distinction. Drescher states, like suggested by Mace-Tessler, that the style of the periodical essay was foremost coined by the magazine which published it. He analysed 221 periodical essays in two Irish fin-de-siècle-magazines (The Mirror and The Lounger) and he omitted the use of a categorization by topic, tone or style in favour of four basic structures.

The additive, linear, discursive and integral structure. The additive structure is characterised by the fact that the parts of the text are not interrelated. They don't depend on each other and have different topics. In the linear structure, each part of the essay relates directly to the other, as well as to the topic, but there is no interrelation between the texts. The discursive structure has a progressive arrangement of the single texts.

The episodes have a causal relation, each text leads to the other and each unit references to the topic. In an integral structure, the parts of the particular essay develop their own structure, and the sense-level stays directly connected to the topic. Mace-Tessler distinguishes rhetorical, simple, unified, associated, unrelated and incomplete essays in his analysis of the periodicals The Tatler and The Spectator.

3. Analysis

3.1 Type of Essay

Culture and Anarchy was written as a rhetorical essay, published first in the periodical Cornhill Magazine over a period of almost a year. The Introduction was written at last and the particular chapters argument on a different basis of information because they were written in different periods. According to Chhibbar, there had been “ profound changes and tensions” (197) at the

time of the accrument of Culture and Anarchy. According to Altick¹⁷, all but the first part, Sweetness and Light, were written as reaction to the critiques. The structure of the whole text must be called linear, in the terminology of Drescher.

3. 2 Diegetic Level

As seen above, Arnold was publishing from different perspectives. Campbell¹⁸ states that the movement between the roles of school inspector, government official (as an expert), Oxford Professor of Poetry, critic and "polemical journalist" required the adjustment in the style and content. This shifting between different voices was especially present in the critical writing that used irony, imitation and parody to undermine the views of "formed personages". He sometimes even used a foreigners point of view to criticize his countrymen. Campbell suggests to read his criticism more like fiction.

3. 3 Rhetorical Mode

Because periodical essays were read aloud in the coffee houses authors often made use of rhetorical elements. According to Svaglic (234), the Rhetoric by Aristotle had long been a basic text of the "litterae humaniores program" at Oxford. Thus it must have been known by Matthew Arnold. Brown even calls him a "practised rhetorician" (259). Svaglic describes the three modes of rhetoric by Aristotle, who distinguished between the deliberative/hortatory, the forensic/judicial mode, and the epideictic/ceremonial mode.

The deliberative/hortatory mode is the persuasion of view-points, the forensic/judicial mode is concerned with guilt and innocence, and the epideictic/ceremonial mode is used for the praise of great men and deeds.

Brown states that all great Victorian prose writers were practising every mode of rhetoric at one time or another, but the most popular was the deliberative/hortatory mode (233).

Arnold announces that he is a "man without a philosophy" (94) and speaks of a "simple unsystematic way" which "best suits both my taste and my powers" (5), and continues "We ... having no coherent philosophy, must not let ourselves philosophise." (Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 201). This "plain-dealing" (Altick, 82) enables him to anatomise the failures of the middle class by being a "representative man" (ibid.) of it.

3.4 Use of Irony

According to Altick, the irony of *Culture and Anarchy* often lies in the fact that the professed respect is proforma and misdirected, or, what starts as epideictic rhetoric is negated by "deflationary techniques" (128). Due to the fact that *Culture and Anarchy* was written in pieces (linear structure), the use of "beautiful" is ambiguous. Wilhem von Humboldt is described as "one of the most beautiful and perfect souls" (140), which is supposed to be actually meant that way, for example. But on the other hand, there is, what Altick (132) calls "ironic praise"; the "touching and beautiful words" (61) of the fanatical anti-Catholic Mr. Murphy saying "I will carry out my lectures if they walk over my body as a dead corpse", which is definitely neither touching nor beautiful.

"Interesting" is one of the most equivocal words in Arnold's argumentative vocabulary. For example, the "interesting speakers" (74), he heard during the Reform Debates in the House of Commons. One is later described as "perfection", the other as "excess". Excess is not interesting. Another

example is “ this very interesting operation” (223), for the attempt to legalise the marriage of a man with his deceased wife’s sister. It was illegal in Britain, but how often does such a case happen? There were much more important problems to be solved at that time – at least from Arnold’s point of view. The absurdity of this “ interesting operation” is emphasised in the aftermath of the text by repetition.

3. 5 Use of Repetitions

The phrase “ deceased wife’s sister” gets repeated nine times in Culture and Anarchy. This rhetorical method of Arnold attempts to humiliate the opponent. This is also acknowledged by Collini, who states: “... by mercilessly repeating the least happy phrases over and over again, he drowns his opponent in a sea of comic associations.” (216).

Sometimes repetition only serves in substitution for a sufficient vocabulary, like in “... real thought, real beauty; real sweetness and real light.” (49); or to show similarities like the “ half-sized, half-fed half-clothed” children “ without health, without home, without hope” (245). These similarities all hint to one point: the lack of a sufficient policy. As a “ polemical journalist” (vid. *infr.* Campbell), Arnold tries to persuade (deliberative rhetoric). One big part of this early type of propaganda is the attempt for coinage by excessive repetition of newly defined terms.

3. 6 Definitions, Comparisons and Contrasts

Culture is “ the best which has been thought and said in the world” (ix). This is thereby nearly equal to religion. “ Religion says: The kingdom of God is within you; and culture, in a like manner places human perfection in an internal condition, ... distinguished from animality.” (13). An attribute of

culture is "right reason" as well as "best self". The "really blessed thing is to like what right reason ordains" (68).

"But for us,— who believe in right reason, in the duty and possibility of extricating and elevating our best self, in the progress of humanity towards perfection, ... we ... support them in repressing anarchy and disorder; because without order there can be no society, and without society there can be no human perfection."

The chasm of "without" and "society" serves the rhetorical effect. Anarchy is more or less defined as "doing as one likes". The natural instinct of the ordinary man towards liberty is thereby degenerated into an "anarchical tendency" (59), caused by liberty. This "doing as one likes" is juxtaposed with "sweetness and light" (differentiation).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary¹⁹ "Sweetness and Light" is a quotation from Jonathan Swift and means the noblest characteristics of humanity. His definition of "sweetness and light" is juxtaposed with "fire and strength", his own coinage, repeated twelve times. Sweetness and light are "right reason", "best self" and "culture"; but sometimes this must be protected by the forces of "fire and strength". "State" is defined as "the nation in its collective and corporate character"(66). This is based on the "best self" and becomes the "national right reason" (93). Culture and Anarchy is full of juxtapositions.

According to Miller, Signalling words for comparisons and contrast are 'in contrast' (1 time), 'on the other hand'(14 times), 'on the contrary' (3 times) and 'however'(28 times); or transition words like 'likewise' (3 times),

'similarly' (2 times 'similar') and 'in a like manner' ('manner': 21 times). On the level of content, the most obvious contrasts are between the 'bad examples' like the liberals Roebuck and Bright, the Alderman of London and Mr. Murphy as well as the writers of the Times, the Saturday Review and the Daily Telegraph, who are compared with the with the good examples of Bishop Wilson, Duke Wellington and St. Augustine.

3. 7 Dialogues

As mentioned above by Freiburg, its not uncommon to use a dialogue in an essay. The following one can be found in the introduction to Culture and Anarchy where Arnold reports his conversation with a Nonconformist "... I said, that seemed a pity. 'A pity?' cried he; 'not at all! ...'" (xxxiv)

3. 8 Metaphors

One can always find thousands of metaphors in every text. But the poetic language of the late Romanticist Arnold, used on a nearly Utilitarian topic makes a very picturesque use of metaphors. Arnold describes himself as " delivered from the Bondage of Bentham" (46), to implicate that he has liberated himself from a philosophy which holds the enemies of culture captive. (Altick, 124).

4. Conclusion

This paper has shown that non-fictional prose needs to be investigated by literary studies. It has shown the importance of the essay in the Victorian and fin-de-siècle period in his parallelism to the development of the periodicals and - with it - the journalism. This might give a hint for the future, on how to analyse hypertexts like bloggs, which can also be read as more or less formal essays.

Culture and Anarchy is an example of polemical rhetoric. It was written by a poet of late Romanticism and is thus not well-structured, but very effective. In the words of Caufield (325) " Arnold the poet knows that stained glass and plainsong will sooner quicken hearts than scholastic disquisitions and cosmological proofs."