

MATTHEW ARNOLD

# LIBERAL HUMANISM



HI!

HOW ARE YOU?

# “BRACKETING STRATEGIES”

- DISINTERESTEDNESS

To detach the *creation of knowledge* from

- Immediate concerns for USE
- External influence of politics, partisanship
- Related: Hume’s idea of the critic who is “healthy” and free from prejudice

WILDE:  
Art for Art's sake

**“the free  
play of the  
mind” (691)**

ARNOLD:  
Knowledge for  
Knowledge's  
sake



**INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM**

# Matthew Arnold: Key Terms

- Liberal Humanism
- Criticism
- Order of Ideas
- Epochs
- Disinterestedness
- Touchstones

# QUESTIONS

- What is the relationship between

ART and CRITICISM?

ART/CRITICISM and SOCIETY?

# CONTEXT: Liberal Humanism

- How do the precepts of LIBERAL HUMANISM shape Arnold's definition of CRITICISM and its relationship to
  - Literary creation?
  - Society?

# Liberal Humanism: Break it down

- PROGRESSIVISM
- EXPANSIONISM
- PERFECTABILITY
- POTENTIAL
- SOCIAL JUSTICE

# HUMANISM ACCORDING TO ARNOLD

- "...culture... places human perfection.... in the **ever-increasing efficacy** and in the **general harmonious expansion** of those gifts of thought and feeling, which make the peculiar **dignity, wealth and happiness of human nature.**"

*(Culture and Anarchy 717)*

PROGRESSIVISM  
EXPANSIONISM  
PERFECTABILITY  
POTENTIAL

# WHY WE NEED ART: the Dispossessed

Arnold recounts the tale of “a girl named Wragg” who is accused of strangling her illegitimate child (695).

He contrasts the self-congratulation of “Mr. Roebuck” who proclaims the English “the best race in the world” with the bleakness of the lives of those like “Wragg” “lost in the confusion of our unrivalled happiness” (695).

# The Crucial Role of Culture and ART

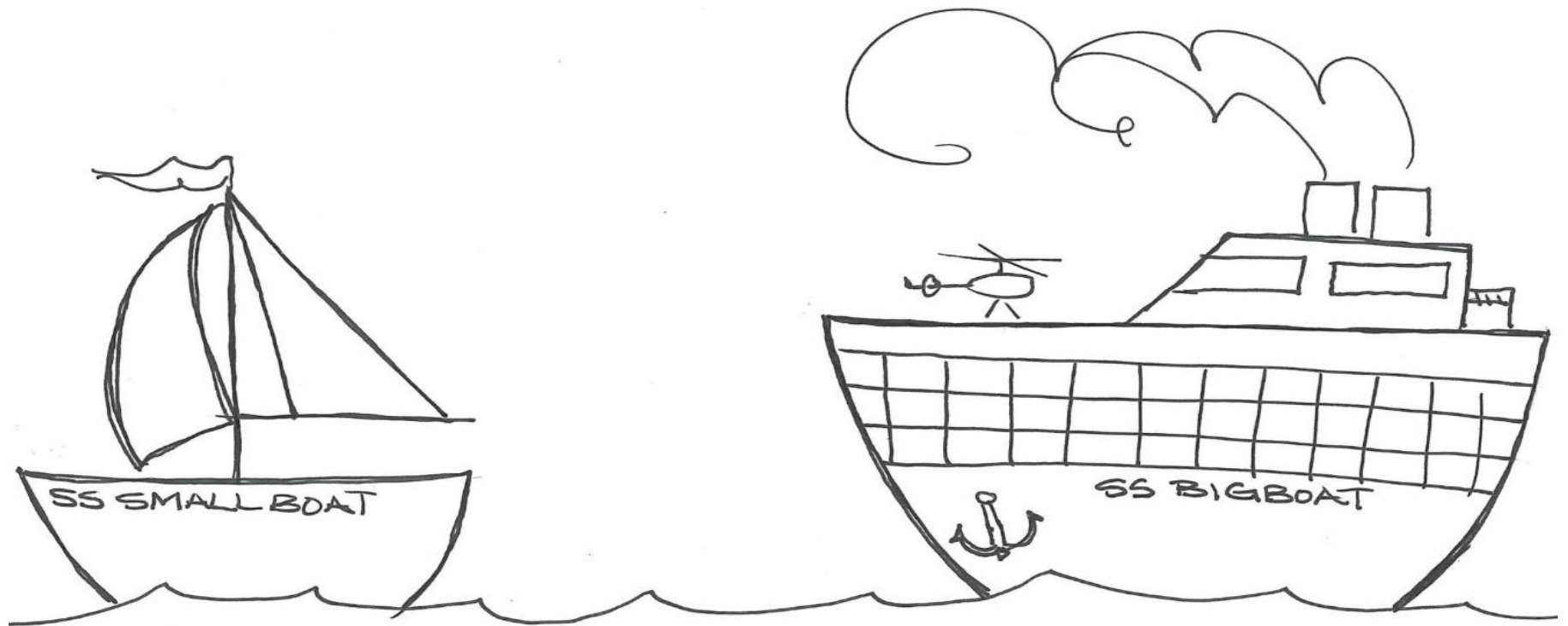
A means of shifting the spirit of the age: “in no other way will these songs of triumph be induced gradually to moderate themselves, to get rid of what in them is excessive and offensive, and to fall into a softer and truer key” (695).

# How we add the LIBERAL to the HUMANISM

“And because men are all members of **one great whole**, and the sympathy which is in **human nature** will not allow one member to be indifferent to the rest or to have a perfect welfare independent of the rest, the expansion of our humanity, to suit the idea of perfection which culture forms, **must be a general expansion. Perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated.**”

*(Culture and Anarchy 717)*

SOCIAL JUSTICE



... The expansion of  
our HUMANITY ... must  
be a GENERAL  
EXPANSION  
(Culture and Anarchy)

# The Purpose of Culture

Culture = “social impulses”

“...the desire for removing human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it...” (*Culture and Anarchy* 715).

# ARNOLD'S CORE CONCERN

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“what real service... the practice of criticism either is or may be made to [the critic's] own mind and spirit, and to the minds and spirits of others” (685).



CRITICISM provides the  
MATERIALS that artists use  
to create art.

THE ORDER OF IDEAS



# ORDER OF IDEAS

“the elements with which the creative power works are **ideas**” (686)

- “free play of the mind upon all subjects” (691);
- “the best that is known and thought in the world” (691)

CRITICISM is the place where

- IDEAS ARE TESTED
- The BEST IDEAS ARE RAISED UP



# BEST IDEAS

Are those that most closely express the

- “universal, certain, permanent” (688) and
- that are arrived at by “free assent of the will” (689),
- that is, by way of RATIONAL assessment by a FREE MIND.



# EPOCH OF CONCENTRATION

# PREPARING THE GROUND

“...an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself.... Presently these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere; **out of this stir and growth come the creative epochs of literature**” (686).

# THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

“The grand work of the literary genius is a work of **synthesis** and **exposition**, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain **intellectual and spiritual atmosphere**, by a certain **order of ideas**... [and] making beautiful works of them” (686).

The power of the  
“MOMENT” (686)



The power of  
the “MAN” (686)



EPOCH OF EXPANSION

# RENAISSANCE: EG of the ORDER OF EXPANSION

SHAKESPEARE was a perfect UNION of the man and the moment: GENIUS and SOCIAL CONTEXT:

“the poet lived in a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power; society was, in the fullest measure, permeated by fresh thought, intelligent and alive” (687).

# EPOCHS

- EPOCH OF CONCENTRATION (690)
  - CRITICAL;
  - Amassing of “material”;
  - The cultivation of an “order of ideas” that can support the
- EPOCH OF EXPANSION (692)
  - CREATIVE;
  - Synthesizing
  - Grounded in the “order of ideas.”

# NECESSARY CONDITIONS

- WHAT IS REQUIRED TO ENABLE “THE ORDER OF IDEAS” and the necessary relationship between epochs?

## DISINTERESTEDNESS

# THE RUSH TO “USE”

“There is the world of ideas and there is the world of practice... but neither is to be suppressed” (689)

HOWEVER

they must RESPECT their PROPER ORDER and the FREEPLAY OF THE MIND.

# DISINTERESTEDNESS

“[Criticism] obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of **practice** and **politics**, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best, **without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever.**”(691)

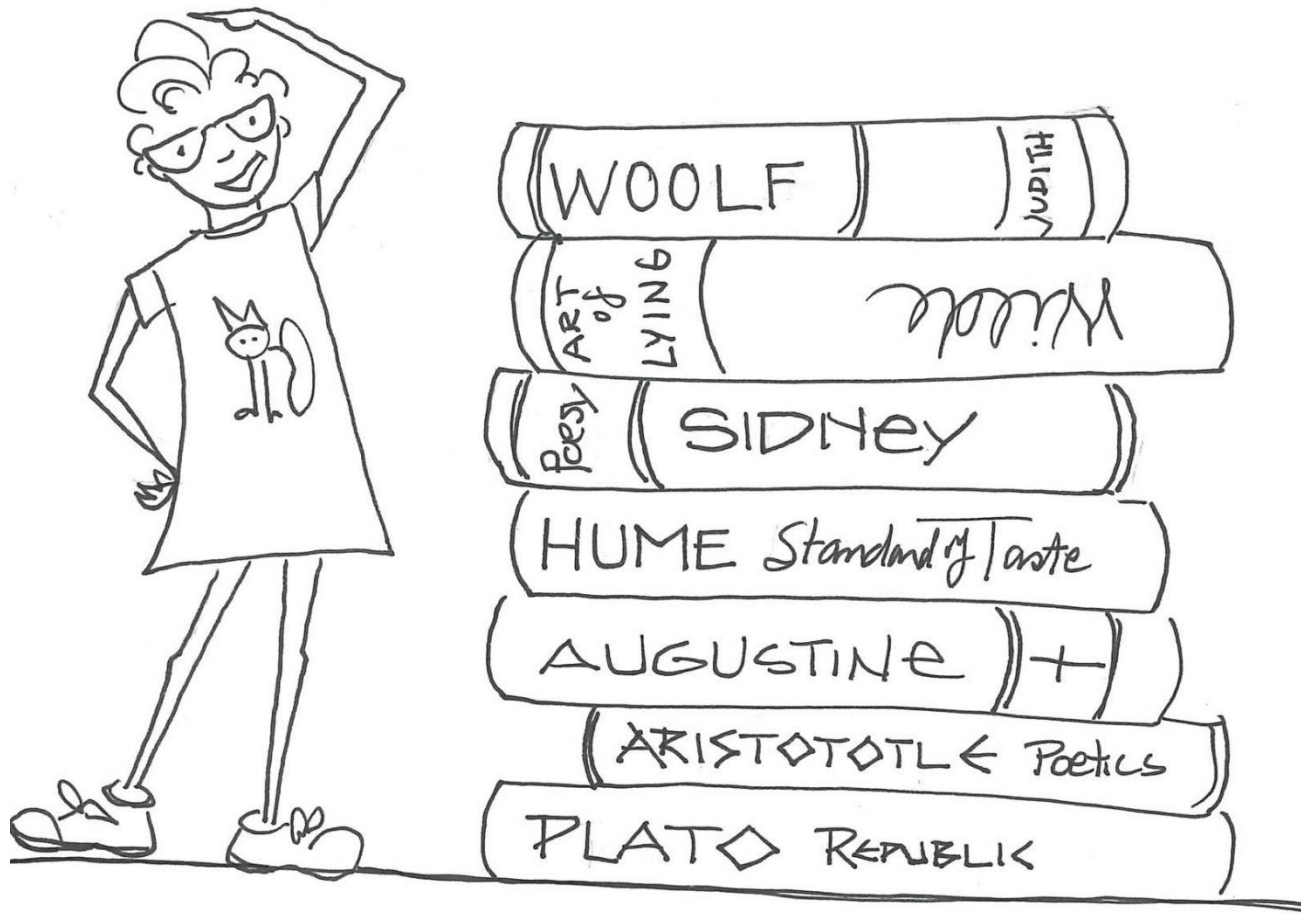
- This is the basis of ACADEMIC FREEDOM

“to keep man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarising, to lead him toward **perfection**, by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself, and the **absolute beauty and fitness of things**”  
(693).



# TOUCHSTONES

- Texts that represent “the best that is known and thought in the world” (*The Function of Criticism* 701) and against which we can measure literary and cultural VALUE.
- LITERATURE becomes the antidote to material preoccupations and partisanship by providing a SHARED CULTURE of VALUES.



# SO!



## WHAT IS ART?

Art is a **SYNTHESIS** and beautiful **EXPOSITION** of the materials provided by the **ORDER OF IDEAS**. It aims at reflecting that which is universal, certain and permanent

## WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND THE WORLD?

Art relies on a convergence of individual **GENIUS** and “the moment” or a social “atmosphere” provided by robust **CRITICISM** and **INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM**.

# WHAT IS THE “FUNCTION OF CRITICISM AT THE PRESENT TIME?”

- How does criticism serve “the cause of perfection” (693)?

IDENTIFY EXEMPLAR: “to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas” (701);

PREPARE THE GROUND: “to make a beginning for that more free speculative treatment of things, which may perhaps one day make its benefits felt even in this [pragmatic] sphere, but in a natural and thence irresistible manner” (696);

AIM FOR THE IDEAL: “to be perpetually dissatisfied with these works [of one’s party], while they perpetually fall short of a high and perfect ideal” (700)

## WHAT DO ART/CRITICISM REFLECT?

They reflect both the world and the mind, the “order of ideas.” It aims at reflecting that which is universal, certain and permanent.

## WHAT IS THE SOCIAL USE OF ART?

To provide the “best that is known and thought in the world” in order to move society toward a contemplation of truth and perfection as a means of **preparing the way for action** aimed at justice; to keep us from self-congratulation.

# Things to think about

- How does ARNOLD'S idea of DISINTERESTEDNESS compare to WILDE'S idea of ART FOR ART'S SAKE? What distinguishes them?
- How does ARNOLD'S notion that the "power of the man" and the "power of the moment" must converge to make the best art relate to HORACE's or BOCCACCIO's ideas of DECORUM or the relationship between GENIUS and CRAFT?
- How does ARNOLD's idea of the perfecting potential of literature relate to SIDNEY's defense of poetry?

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE AUTHOR?

To respond to the order of ideas; to unite “his” genius with the material of the age to produce beauty.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE READER?

To test the artwork in the order of ideas, to discover which ideas best reflect universal beauty and justice, and to provide material for artists to work with.