

Windows of Alienation on Matthew  
Arnold's "Dover Beach".

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### Abstract.

On the surface, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1867), reads as a declaration that love is the source of human salvation. This thesis peers beneath that surface to demonstrate that a more ambivalent message of alienation and liminality is also present. It begins by using Arnold's strong construction of a window motif in the first verse of the poem to cast a theoretical lens through which the remainder of the text can be read: the window creates an impression of alienation and liminality that affect the other issues tackled by Arnold in the poem. The second chapter makes use of critical publications and writings such as those of William Wordsworth in his *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 and 1800, as well as other poetic works by Arnold, to show how "Dover Beach" grapples with its own understanding of the proper place and form of poetry. The third chapter uses similar sources and research to discuss Arnold's representation of the conflict between Charles Lyell's scientific publication, *The Principles of Geology* (1830-33), and the theology of Christian faith dominant in nineteenth-century society. The fourth chapter builds on this to show that Arnold's conflicted and alienated views of these issues cause him to undertake a re-assessment of the meaning behind human life cycles. Moving in stages from conception and birth to death and the possibility of rebirth, this chapter traces these depictions whilst comparing "Dover Beach" to other notable works by Arnold. These three focal issues build on the conclusions of the first chapter: that Arnold's attitude to the issues he presents is symptomatic of the kind of alienation and liminality that many Victorians experienced and which many twenty-first century readers can identify with. His only conclusion to the conflicts he perceives is not that a definitive resolution or decision must be made. Rather, he suggests there can be a removal from the violence and liminality through a turn to interiority and human companionship. Whilst this reading is often seen to be a positive conclusion, this thesis

examines the way that Arnold also presents it as one of foreboding, as the narrator is left entirely alienated, finding only temporary solace from the modern situation in "Dover Beach", until death and the possibility of oblivion inevitably take over.

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## Introduction.

In September 1849, Matthew Arnold wrote a letter to his good friend, Arthur Hugh Clough, which expressed deep-felt concerns that are reflected greatly in his most famous work, "Dover Beach" (1867). In this letter, he writes:

My dearest Clough, these are damned times- everything is against one- the height to which knowledge is come, the spread of luxury, our physical enervation, the absence of great *natures*...and the sickening consciousness of our difficulties: but for God's sake let us neither be fanatics nor yet chaf blown by the wind ("Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, 23 Sep 1849").

This telling comment foreshadows many of the issues that are deeply woven within the poem that Arnold was later to write, "Dover Beach". The complexities of this poem, and its pluralistic possibilities of interpretation, are a representation of Arnold's concerns shown above about "the height to which knowledge is come" through advances in scientific discovery, and the lack of "great *natures*" from which to derive great poetry. However, this extract also specifies a preoccupation with the "enervation" or fatigue of the physical body. Arnold beseeches Clough, and himself, to not allow themselves to be "fanatics" that stand rigidly in the face of advancement, nor "chaf blown by the wind" as are those who ignorantly and unquestioningly accept new thought and social fashion. Instead, the desired emphasis is on the use of "practical wisdom" as an antidote to their contemporary situation, and this kind of wisdom is shown

throughout "Dover Beach" as the narrator engages with conflicting issues in a detached and unaligned way. The entire poem is written with a definite "consciousness" which is indeed "sickening" due to a sustained and deeply moving melancholy that prevails throughout. This wisdom is specified in Arnold's concluding verse of "Dover Beach" to be an understanding that love and fidelity can overcome modern conflict to revive the human soul, but this conclusion is itself a melancholy one.

In the academy, "Dover Beach" is often taught in simplistic terms such as these: as being a proclamation of the power of fidelity and love to overcome and counteract the worries that modern life can inflict upon individuals. For example, Daniel Brown's contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*- a go-to source for any undergraduate researcher- focuses its summation of "Dover Beach" on the conclusion that the narrator is "bereft of the old grounds of faith" and so "scales down the demands that he makes upon the external world" in order to find consolation in the "truth" that can be found only between oneself and one's love (145). As such "Dover Beach" is an easily readable and engaging work that has a great role to play in engaging students with texts which, whilst being nearly 150 years old, remain accessible and relevant to twenty-first century life. However, once access has been gained to the text via this initial starting point, further more complex interpretations can be made and examined in "Dover Beach" that would allow a greater depth in understanding of the issues discussed by Arnold. These issues and the way that they are presented have much to say about the human condition as a whole, and can be applied to contemporary life as easily as they can be to that of the nineteenth century.

There appears to have been a flurry of critical works based on the life and works of Matthew Arnold around the mid-twentieth century, but publications after the late 1980s became somewhat rare. The academics that are most quoted in articles are those such as J.D. Jump and Kenneth Allot, who published collected editions and broad chapters on Arnold's work between the 1950s to 1970s. For example, both critics in 1965 published edited editions of Arnold's poetry and prose in Allot's *Arnold: The Complete Poems* and Jump's *Matthew Arnold Prose Selection*. As leading critics on Arnold's work, these critics have been drawn upon to write chapters as an overview of the writer, such as J.D. Jump's "Matthew Arnold" chapter in *The Penguin Guide to English Literature* (1960). Their authority is lent to editions of the poetic and critical pieces of Arnold in introductions, such as Kenneth Allot's "Note on the Text" that begins a 1964 edition of *Essays in Criticism*. As comprehensive but overarching explanations of Arnold's work, life, and themes these works are highly useful, however they rarely linger long to look in depth at any one piece, especially not of poetry. Similarly, there are many critics that look at Arnold's work in light of a certain theme, taking a view of a range of Arnold's poetic and critical pieces to comment on the theme of interest. A. Dwight Culler, whose article "Matthew Arnold and the Zeitgeist" (1987) is of particular use to the fourth chapter of this thesis, examines Arnold's preoccupation with 'the spirit' of the Victorian age and the effect that this has on his critical works. However, despite starting his criticism with the assertion that Arnold bases most of his poetry on symbolic landscapes, Culler rarely mentions in the rest of his article any poetry by the author. D.G. James' 1961 publication, *Matthew Arnold and the Decline of English Romanticism* is a richly detailed account of Arnold's relationship with and attitude to Romanticism as a literary tradition, however again there is a focus on the author's critical works rather than on any piece of poetry.

This thesis focuses on "Dover Beach" as a primary text, whilst looking to other works by the author to show that this poem is illustrative of a suite of the issues discussed by Arnold in his critical works. Academic works that have a specific focus on "Dover Beach" have a tendency to look at one issue in great depth, rather than looking at the ways in which these issues are interconnected. However, in "Dover Beach" each of the issues represented has great relevance to the others. Several of the more singularly focused articles are useful to this thesis as they provide a groundwork or basis for the discussions presented here. For example, Joseph Gerhard's "Victorian Frames: The Windows and Mirrors of Browning, Arnold and Tennyson" (1978) uses "Dover Beach" as its main point of reference when talking of Arnold's use of windows. However, this thesis argues that this extremely pertinent point has a great effect upon the way Arnold deals with other issues within the same poem. For example, the liminality and alienation that these windows create have a great effect on Arnold's handling of the issues surrounding the emerging discoveries of science in the mid-nineteenth century, as Fred A. Dudley discusses in his article "Matthew Arnold and Science" (1942). This thesis shows how these issues are interlinked in the works of Arnold, and how an examination of his poetry can offer just as much interest to their study as looking at his critical works alone.

The most recent notable publication to discuss the work of Matthew Arnold, *Overcoming Matthew Arnold: Ethics in Culture and Criticism* by James Walter Caulfield (2012), perhaps begins a return to the worthy study of the relevance of Arnold's work, but threatens again to focus on critical works to the detriment of the poetic. Despite its bias towards Arnold's prose, Caulfield's text paid sufficient attention to the poetic as to be highlighted by Clinton Machann, in his review of academic works on Arnold's poetry that had been published in 2012. He notes that the publication of *Overcoming Matthew Arnold* is illustrative of a "productive year for Arnold



studies" (337). Machann goes on to identify in Caufield's work a "new appreciation for Arnold's religious essays" which is symptomatic of a recent trend for "an increased interest in religious issues" displayed in the works of Arnold (340). A survey of publications from the last ten years, including Stefan Collini's influential *Matthew Arnold: A Critical Portrait* (2008), Anthony Harrison's *The Cultural Production of Matthew Arnold* (2009) and Michael Timko's *Matthew Arnold: Modern Victorian* (2011), suggests a preoccupation with issues of religion as the overriding theme of works such as "Dover Beach". Collini acknowledges the possibility that due to "Dover Beach" being rooted in contemporary issues surrounding "the corrosion of 'faith' by 'doubt'", Arnold is almost inevitably relegated to the status of "historical witness", merely describing events that were taking place around him (26). However, Collini challenges this diminishing status by pointing to the philosophical depth of Arnold's work, as the portrayal of 'love' being the only solace for this loss of faith is perfunctory in the context of ensuing images of "homelessness in a cold, indifferent world" in the final stanza (40). The influence that Arnold's work was to have on his own and the next generation, including writers such as George Eliot, is to Collini evidence of a poetical subtlety far beyond that which would have been the production of a mere "historical bystander" (41). In his article, Harrison specifies what he perceives to be the importance of religious issues in "Dover Beach" as an embodiment of a "medieval illusion" of religion contained by Arnold's 'Sea of Faith', which is exploded by the negation of "love" and "certitude" ("Dover Beach" 21, 24-5; Harrison 27). Arnold's "personae" in the poem is therefore left with only one ideal, of a realistic view of the world as a "bond" between himself and his "love"- whom Harrison identifies as being the reader (27). Timko's article argues that it is Arnold's focus on "various concerns regarding his own time ... over the loss of faith, a loss particularly due to the scientific thought of the day, especially concerning evolution" which gives him a continued "connection to our [modern] era" (paragraph 6). This is

illustrative of Timko's assertion that Arnold succeeds as a "Modern" poet where the like of Tennyson and Browning fail, as his struggle to find his own way in a society that discouraged non-conformity is relevant to today's reader (paragraphs 10-11).

Thus, as Machann correctly notes, much recent criticism is symptomatic of an "increased interest in religious issues" in the poetry of Matthew Arnold. But this recent criticism also reflects a renewed interest in "Dover Beach" and similar poems as texts that are still relevant in Twenty-First Century society. A wider view of the issues that Arnold portrays and the ways in which they interact, such as this thesis takes, allows specific considerations such as religious issues to be viewed as a part of wider questions of universal human interest. For example, Tracey Miller in *What Remains: Matthew Arnold's Poetics of Place and the Victorian Elegy* (2012) focuses on the elegies produced by Matthew Arnold, notably "Howarth Churchyard" dedicated to Charlotte Brontë (1855) and *Thyrsis* dedicated to Arthur Hugh Clough (1867), to show a preoccupation with mapping human life and death onto the landscape, with the effect of the human longing to return to places and times from the past (147-148). This could easily be extended to explore the ways in which "Dover Beach" can be read as a portrayal of anxiety surrounding the human life cycle and meaning of life, as discussed in the fourth chapter of this thesis, and this issue is applicable to the human condition regardless of era, historical context or moment. This possibility is suggested in Richard Cronin's *Reading Victorian Poetry* (2012). He outlines the ways in which "Dover Beach" departs from a "sensuous appreciation of the natural world towards a more general meditation on the character of that world and the human place within it" (156). In "Dover Beach" Arnold aligns himself with Sophocles whom he had described in "To A Friend" (1849) as one who "saw life steadily, and saw it whole" (159). Cronin refers to

Arnold's later *Lectures and Essays in Criticism* (1865) to suggest that "it is because of this that his poetry offered a 'criticism of life'" but also an ideal that this criticism was to be one the truth of which is unconfined by place or time; "a source of illumination and joy to the whole human race forever"(159)<sup>1</sup>.

This thesis moves beyond and beneath the unreliable surface declarations of love as human salvation to look at the issues represented by Matthew Arnold, in order to show the ways in which "Dover Beach" can be understood in terms of issues of alienation and liminality that remain relevant in Twenty-First century society. Critical works such as those listed above are used as a basis from which to look at the issues that have been identified collectively, side by side, in order to explore the ways in which they interact and build upon each other to raise enduring and universal questions of human life.

Using close reading, combined with reference to contemporary and historical critics and writers, this thesis works through key themes displayed within "Dover Beach". Firstly, a theoretical lens through which Arnold's contemporaneous issues can be viewed is presented: that of representations of alienation and liminality. This is used to analyse Arnold's strong construction of a window motif in the first verse of the poem. The interpretations of this chapter have a great effect upon readings in the second chapter of Arnold's engagement in the text with conflicts surrounding literary theory and the form of poetry, and in the third with the effect of scientific discovery on religious belief and faith. The second chapter makes use of critical publications and writings by intellectuals such as William Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 and 1800, as well as other poetic works of Arnold himself, to show how "Dover Beach" grapples

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<sup>1</sup> See Arnold, Matthew. "Lectures and Essays in Criticism." Ed. R.H. Super. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (1962). p209.

with its own understanding of the place and form of poetry. The poetic theories set out by Wordsworth in his anthology and its prefaces are both reflected and subverted by the format and content of "Dover Beach" in a way that illustrates Arnold's uncertainty as to its relevance and continued suitability to mid-nineteenth-century poetry. The third chapter forms a discussion that focuses upon Arnold's representation of conflict between his contemporary's scientific publication, *The Principles of Geology* by Charles Lyell (1830-33), and the teachings of Christian faith, as was dominant in nineteenth-century society. The fourth chapter moves on to show the ways in which Arnold's poem can be read as a discussion of the meaning behind human life cycles, which move in various stages from conception and birth to death and the possibility of rebirth, by comparing "Dover Beach" to other notable works by Arnold under the light of critical comment. Within these three foci runs the basis concluded within the first chapter: that Arnold's attitude to the issues he presents is symptomatic of the alienation and liminality that modern readers can recognise in "Dover Beach", in that no alignment or commitment to any one possibility or solution is ever made.

An examination of "Dover Beach" must begin with a look at the original publication and its primary interpretations, before deeper analysis is introduced. "Dover Beach" was first published in 1867 in Matthew Arnold's *New Poems*; however there is a certain amount of controversy and discussion surrounding the composition date of the piece. Extensive critical discussion in David Robertson's "'Dover Beach' and 'Say Not the Struggle Availeth'", which contains a useful review of critical opinion on the matter, convincingly challenges other critical opinions that "Dover Beach" could have been written before 1850 (922-923). Furthermore, it is widely accepted that Arnold's writing of "Dover Beach" was around 1851, as fragments of the

first three stanzas were discovered written in pencil on the back of a manuscript of *Empedocles*, which was published in October 1852 as the headline of the volume of poetry published under Arnold's pseudonym; 'A' (Trawick 923). Therefore for the purposes of this thesis, the composition date of 1851 will be used, although this would suggest that Arnold may have been writing "Dover Beach" at the time, or remembering a time, when he visited Dover whilst on his honeymoon in the same year. Even with this in mind, it would be dangerous to presume that the appeals of "Oh, love" in "Dover Beach" are addressed by the narrator to his new wife, and that this is a simple love poem, as this utterance introduces the most challenging and disturbing image of the whole poem, when the final stanza envisages a terrifying scene of chaos and destruction. The "love" in Arnold's poem, if it is to be that between two people, cannot be a traditional, romantic love: if it is indeed a mortal love then it is a more complex, "modern" love, in which "lovers plight their troth in the face of an awareness that there is no universal Love... Aloneness is now man's real condition, and love is founded on its own despair" (Miller 27). This bleak interpretation of the "love" shown in "Dover Beach" may even itself still be a little optimistic, as this thesis will examine in the first chapter the possibility that Arnold is disallowing his narrator even this small solace.

The pages of this edition are set out in very plain text with little embellishment; the only decorations included are small motifs that are printed in the centre of the remaining blank page after a text has ended. A short quote on the page proceeding the "Contents" page appears to have significance in light of what is about to be discussed in this thesis:

Though the Muse be gone away,

Though she move not earth to-day,

Souls, erewhile who caught her word,

Ah! Still harp on what they heard (*New Poems*).

From the beginning Arnold is introducing themes of loss and disconnection from philosophical ideals, and the idea of time changing spiritual understanding, and this is examined in detail towards the end of the thesis, in view of conclusions drawn from the themes and discussions raised throughout "Dover Beach".

As the reader moves into the edition they notice that it is separated into plainly named chapters that are titled alone on a full, unadorned page preceding each section faced by an entirely blank page, denoting that each section is a distinct group of poems to be viewed collectively. These chapters run as follows: *Empedocles on Etna. A Dramatic Poem*<sup>2</sup>; *Sonnets*; and *Poems*, and although "Dover Beach" is included in this last chapter along with extensive other titles, its starting position on page 112 out of 220 marks it as centrally important to the book as a whole. A glance at the poems either side of "Dover Beach" suggest a theme of separation and loss, between the poems of "Calais Sands", which is the first poem in the chapter named *Poems*, "Dover Beach", and "The Terrace at Berne". "Calais Sands" is thought to have been written in 1850, when Arnold was in Calais on his way to the Italian Lakes, hoping to catch a glimpse of the love he had been denied- Francis Lucy Wightman- who was holidaying with her family there at

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<sup>2</sup> This section includes the poems *Thyrsis*, dedicated to Arnold's life-long friend Arthur Hugh Clough, and *Saint Brandon*, after the lengthy text of *Empedocles on Etna*.

the same time<sup>3</sup> (Touche n.p.). Themes of love, but also longing are, as we would expect in these circumstances, abound in this poem as Arnold dreams of "those soft fringed eyes, [which] shall close/ Beneath one roof, my Queen! with mine (111). "The Terrace at Berne" is thought to have been written as late as 1863, and yet harks back "Ten Years!" to think of a former love- "my Marguerite"- from whom Arnold was also separated, and whom he had come to suspect had died or changed from the youthful beauty he knew (Allot and Super 553; "The Terrace at Berne" 116-8). Either way Arnold concludes that "Marguerite I will see no more", and so again there is a sense of loss and longing for a lost love (118). When viewing "Dover Beach" in light of these surrounding poems, it becomes expected that the themes of the poem will be in the same vein as those that surround it: of longing, loss and love; and this thesis shall explore ways in which this is correct, and the many ways in which this expectation is subverted.

When taking up *New Poems* the reader is to come, at almost exactly halfway through the volume, to the text of "Dover Beach"<sup>4</sup> which is set out very plainly on the page, as are the other poems in the volume. The title is set in block capitals, without underlining, subtitle or notes, meaning that the reader's eye flows freely and uninhibited from the title to the body of the text. This is aided by the fact that the first word of the first line is also capitalised, however the

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<sup>3</sup> Touche tells us that Arnold was forbidden from making his intentions known towards marrying Francis as her Father did not accept that he had the financial ability to support a wife, and therefore the couple were separated until he could prove otherwise. They did however appear to manage a regular exchange of letters in the period of their separation, before Arnold's appointment as Schools Inspector in 1851 allowed them to be officially engaged and married (Touche, J. "The Biographical Contexts of Dover Beach and Calais Sands: Matthew Arnold in 1851." *Victorian Web*. 2000. Online).

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<sup>4</sup> Please refer to Appendix A at the end of this thesis, for a digitalised copy of this text, as a version from a later (1885) text will be set out shortly and used throughout the work, as it shows several amendments made by Arnold to the original text at later dates.

simplicity of the poem's setting means that the reader is sensitive to small typographical oddities that stand out from the page. For example, the fact that the first letter- T- is oversized compared to the title and text, which could be a nod towards a medieval-style illumination, but the letter is plain and unadorned. The top of the "T" is aligned with the top of the rest of the word it belongs to- "THE", however the central stake is elongated below the line and almost touches the top of the line below, forming a symbol which can be likened to a crucifix which is missing the top, shorter stake. The fact that the line below is notably indented, leaving an empty void below the foot of this part crucifix, gives a foreboding of problems surrounding religion, emptiness and loss, before we have even begun to read the poem. The poem is aligned hard to the left side of the page, apart from the second line as mentioned, and this hard edge is made more abrupt by the consistent capitalisation of the first letter of each line regardless of sentence position, reminding the reader of a solid divide such as an abrupt cliff. This is set against emptiness on the left side, and the rise and fall of the lines of text on the right.

The text of the poem used within the body of this thesis is taken from *Poems* (1885): a collection of Arnold's poetic verse containing three volumes with "Dover Beach" in the second, entitled *Lyrical and Elegiac Verse*. This collection was published in 1885, and although it contains no new works, and is essentially a reclassification of three earlier collections from 1869, 1877 and 1881, alterations were made from the original 1867 text throughout the publications in between, culminating in the 1885 version to be set out here. As the 1885 version is the last published before Arnold's death in 1888, this version is considered the completed, definitive version that shows the poet's final intentions for his work, and is used by most scholarly publications in recent times. The chronology and effect of these changes is examined throughout this thesis as



their relevance arises in the discussion of the text. The 1885 version of "Dover Beach" reads as follows:

DOVER BEACH

THE sea is calm to-night.  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the straits;- on the French coast the light  
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,  
5 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.  
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!  
Only, from the long line of spray  
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,  
Listen! you hear the grating roar  
10 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,  
At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring

The eternal note of sadness in.

15 Sophocles long ago

Heard it on the Ægæan, and it brought

Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow

Of human misery; we

Find also in the sound a thought,

20 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.

But now I only hear

25 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true

30 To one another! for the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

35 And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

"Dover Beach" begins with a romantic scene that is seen, heard and smelt by the narrator through an open window above the beach. It is immediately noticeable as the text is read that no indication as to the identity of the narrator is given<sup>5</sup>. The scene before him is surveyed, taking note of the natural moonlight and the unending cycles of the tide, and he calls to his companion to join him at the window. This leads to a contemplation in the second stanza of the eternal nature of the earth that he surveys, and a recollection of Sophocles, the Greek tragedian, who classically viewed a similar scene. The idea of tragedy and "human misery" is solidly introduced (18). The narrator moves on in stanza three to iterate what he regards to be

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<sup>5</sup> Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis the narrator will be referred to in the masculine term for simplicity, if only due to the poet himself being male.

the tragedy and "human misery" of the modern time: the decline and perhaps death of "The Sea of Faith" (21). He is melancholy and longs for the time before this decline of faith, whether it be a personal or a social decline (21). In the final stanza he returns to his companion and beseeches them as his "love" to "be true/ To one another", as he has concluded that the modern world is hopeless and conflicted, and he therefore wishes to withdraw with them to a "darkling plain" away from the violent "struggle" (29-30,35,36). Hope is thus given to the melancholy situation portrayed by the idea of "love" and truth being consolation and defence against the failures of the modern world. However, the ending of the poem can be read differently, or this traditional reading taken much further, when discussions and portrayals of spatiality, literary tradition, the rise of human knowledge and the meaning of life are derived from the text and applied to the concluding action, as is done in this thesis. Central to all of these issues in "Dover Beach" is the motif of cycles: of cycles of time and of tidal and lunar cycles. Physical representations of these are transcribed onto the page by Arnold's visual and audiological presentation of the poem, as will be shown next.

The narrative of "Dover Beach" is portrayed not only by the words as they are read, but also by the physical appearance of the lines which are of varying length, giving the image of waves and tide ebbing and flowing against the sharp edge of the straight margin of text. These lines also vary in their number of syllables, which means that the rise and fall can be heard as well as seen when the lines are read. Each of the four stanzas has its own 'wave' pattern representing what is occurring within that section, as the first stanza's lines are long and rise and fall gently, in a reflection of the gentle and even tide depicted. The second is constructed of a mixture of shorter and medium lines that are illustrative of the poet's regression into historical narrative,

and the third continues to have short lines mixed with long to give an impression of great upheaval and uncertainty as Arnold talks of the decline of "The Sea of Faith" (21). The final verse moves from a single short line to consistently long ones, reflecting the distance and disconnection that Arnold portrays between himself, his love and the modern world (21).

The basic rhyme patterns of the verses are similarly illustrative of the themes that are discussed within each. The first and longest stanza has a very irregular rhyme pattern that is reflective of the narrator's gaze and attention moving from one thing to another across the panorama he is surveying from his window. The second contains a regular, easy pattern in the rhyme scheme that denotes ideas of reason and structure, which the poet believes to have existed more in the historical past than in his present moment. The rhyme of the third verse appears to be fairly regular but more drawn out with bigger gaps between rhyming words, and the word "breath" has no rhyming partner. In this way the reader is more aware of the drawn out death of "The Sea of Faith" (26,21). Finally, the last verse has a regular but divisive pattern, showing the conflict and isolation felt by the narrator within his conclusion, as there is a repeated construction of a rhyming couplet whose lines are effectively separated from the rest of the verse by two divided rhyming lines.

The lines that are isolated within Arnold's concluding verse are thus marked out for special attention, which leads to pertinent points that will begin the process of delving deeper into possible readings of the poem. The first of these rhyming couplets read as follows, surrounded by their containing lines:

Ah, love, let us be true

To one another! for the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new (29-32).

On their own, these four lines are full of positive implications of "love", truth, "dreams" and beauty, and yet this idea is held accountable to the world "lie". The phrases between the rhyming couplet are split in a lexically unorthodox way, as the natural break would come after "the world", and "which seems to lie before us" would be the beginning of the new line (30-31). The point at which Arnold has chosen to separate this phrase adds much emphasis both to the words "seems" and "To lie". Therefore, there is an implication that the positive connotations of love and truth in these four lines are unstable.

Arnold moves on from "So various, so beautiful, so new", to his next confined rhyming couplet:

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight (33-36).

Here an entirely negative construction contrasts the apparently positive one that has come before, in its representations of darkness and pain. The point is made implicitly that the "land of dreams" is a "lie" as it has none of the positive qualities that have previously been claimed (31). However this is problematic as it also denies that there is "love" in the world, despite the narrator having just appealed to his own "love" or lover for solace (33,29). The plain statement that follows- "And we are here as on a darkling plain"- is highly ambivalent, as there is no concept given of where "here" is, other than it is a "darkling" place, despite the hope previously implied in the consolation of 'truth' (35,29). Again the emphasis is on the word "lie", as there is no reliance on fact or what has been claimed before (31). The final line in this set of four speaks of "confused alarms", and the inability to decide between "struggle and flight", which can be read as conflicting with the view that the narrator is simply seeking the "love of one who has shed romantic illusions in favour of a more realistic, more resigned companionship of mutually pledged fidelity in an infected world" (Madden 64).

"Struggle" and "flight", regardless of which may ultimately be chosen, do not particularly imply the kind of resignation that Madden found in lines such as "Ah, love, let us be true", and the unspecific line "we are here as on a darkling plain" lacks the kind of realistic view that Arnold at first appears to desire (36,29,35).

The final line, in view of this repeated structure of enclosed rhyming couplets, reads almost as a postscript that trails after the final rhyme of "flight", describing how the 'companions' are left in a place not only of "confusion" but also a place "where ignorant armies clash by night" (36-37). As an ultimate line the emphasis is on ignorance and conflict, rather than any kind of resolution. The "clash" is depictive of the conflict between truth and "lie", with the armies of humanity left "ignorant" as to the difference between the two.

Therefore, the possibility arises that "Dover Beach" can be read in more complex and deeper ways than the surface themes of love and fidelity over strife might suggest. These readings can be informed by issues that run deeply ingrained throughout "Dover Beach", which question the very existence of humanity and the purpose of life in a world where truth and "lie" are indistinguishable. For "Dover Beach" is a poem that is purposely divisive and multitudinous in its possible interpretations, which conflict and contradict each side in turn, never allowing a definitive outcome. The final verse of the poem is the epitome of this, as initial readings are contradicted, but never overruled, by more complicated and less hopeful possibilities. The narrator is placed in absolute isolation, alienated from any definite resolution, which allows the full force of Arnold's melancholy situation to be undiminished, but contrasted by the softer and gentler alternative given by the hope and faith in "love" and companionship.



## Chapter 1:

### Windows of Alienation in "Dover Beach".

This chapter focuses on Matthew Arnold's use of a window motif that is foregrounded right at the beginning of "Dover Beach", in order to view the ways in which its treatment creates liminality, by alienating the narrator from the world he inhabits and views. The narrator is successfully positioned as being part neither of the world outside of the window, nor of the space behind it, and so becomes immersed in a liminal space between the two. However, in this reading the narrator can be seen to take refuge in the alienation created and he accepts his position. This idea is one which transposes onto the treatment of issues in the following chapters. For Arnold's depictions of issues surrounding the appropriate mode of literature for his time, and the effect of scientific advances on society's predominantly Christian faith, show a similar reluctance to align with any 'side' of the argument, and to instead take shelter in a liminal middle ground. As these ideas are vital to the rest of the thesis, this chapter focuses on the way that Arnold creates this powerful construction, by the use of close analysis of the text, alongside consideration of what is often seen as a being a partner piece to "Dover Beach": Arnold's "A Summer Night" of 1852. The comments of Gerhard Joseph in his 1982 article, "Victorian Frames: The Windows and Mirrors of Browning, Arnold and Tennyson", are used as a useful foundation for these examinations, as Joseph specifically assesses the literary effects of windows and mirrors in a way that is most pertinent to the theories that are formed. The resulting theoretical perspective is then applied to the following chapters to examine the

relevance of constructions of alienation and liminality upon the themes depicted by Arnold in "Dover Beach".

The most poignant and metaphorically loaded motif used by Matthew Arnold in "Dover Beach" is created within the first verse, and founded upon the portrayal of a window at which the narrator of the poem is positioned in order to survey the landscape of the Dover Beaches below him. This window at once frames and applies limitations to the "vast" seascape described, and separates the narrator from it (5). The narrator is essentially alienated from the world that he describes by the divisive window, and this alienation provides a basis on which the inference of issues surrounding literary form, the effect of developing scientific theory on religion, and cycles of life and death can be developed further. Arnold's presentation of the issues that are encapsulated in the very heart of "Dover Beach" are made more complex, but also more accessible to both the nineteenth century and today's modern reader, by allowing these broad and lofty problems to be applied to the very core of an individual human existence. As the narrator is never identified within the poem, the reader is lead to view himself or herself as the narrator, and so identify and apply the discussions that are implicitly made in "Dover Beach" to themselves in their own contemporary situation. This chapter explores the full implications of Arnold's central motif in view of philosophical perceptions of 'inside' and 'outside' space and applies the conclusions of this to the ideas in the next chapters, in order to illustrate further the ways in which Arnold's narrator can be read as being the epitome of an alienated soul. The technical composition of "Dover Beach" and its use of conflicted and multifaceted analogies are devised to be representative of alienation, and this is done in such a way that readers can identify and empathise with the situation created.

The use of a window motif to literally frame a view or ideal is not unusual in nineteenth-century poetry and art, but is a traditional device used to apply metaphorical load to a scene. For example, Tennyson uses architectural images of "casements" to portray a lost soul buried within the human body, as in his most famous 1832 poem, 'The Lady of Shallot'. Similarly, as Gerhard Joseph points out in his article "Victorian Frames: The Windows and Mirrors of Browning, Arnold and Tennyson" (1978), Pre-Raphaelite painters often used the iconography of a window as a background focus to represent the "perpetual opening" of the human soul, as in "The Eve of St. Agnes" by William Holman Hunt from 1848<sup>6</sup> (72). In his article Joseph details the ways in which windows form a central metaphorical motif in Victorian art that act as "perceptual apertures" (70). He comments that an incident related in Thomas De Quincey's autobiography, published in the early nineteenth century, can be identified as the beginning of literary accounts of a progressive withdrawal from, or of, God, and this incident revolves around viewing "boundless immensity" through a window frame after the death of a beloved sister<sup>7</sup> (70). Joseph concludes that in this prose work, "the limitless blank, the deep vacancy of infinite space, achieves a measure of relevance to the human scale only through the framing power of a window", and adds that De "Quincey's epiphany is paradigmatic... of the possibilities for windows- and mirrors- in Victorian art" (70). Later his article goes on specifically to describe Arnold's "Dover Beach" as being his "single most famous optical voyager" that is most telling in its epistemological themes and representations (81). After reading Joseph's thesis it appears that

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<sup>6</sup> This gorgeous but gruesome painting is based on stanzas XLI-XLII of John Keats's poem, "The Eve of St. Agnes", published in 1820. For this and other examples of Pre-Raphaelite paintings that relate to "British literary subjects" see <http://www.pitt.edu/~ebb8/PRBImages/PRBImages.htm>.

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<sup>7</sup> See De Quincey, Thomas. "Autobiography from 1785-1803." *Collected Writings*. ed. David Masson. London: n.p., (1896) 1.38. Print.

Arnold uses the motif of a window in "Dover Beach" with the primary purpose of portraying the sky, the sea, the cliffs and the distant shores of France that appear to be "vast", but that are given limitation and "relevance to the human scale" by the enclosure of the framing window (5).

Firstly, a view must be taken of Arnold's first verse of "Dover Beach" in order to appreciate the depth and complexity of the image that he builds, to give an air of limitlessness and infinity to the scene of "Dover Beach". The typography of the verse is particularly important in this. The construction of the scene rests upon the first five lines of the poem:

The sea is calm to-night.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits ;--on the French coast the light

Gleams and is gone ; the cliffs of England stand,

Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay (1-5).

Arnold's opening image of "The sea" is lent an air of immensity by being the very first word of the poem: this is not 'a' sea, or 'part' of a sea; this is "The" sea, which covers the vast majority of the earth's surface (1). "The tide" of this sea "is full", and as such is "at the full, and round earth's shore/ Lay[s] like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd" (2,22). Unlike the less literal "Sea of Faith", "THE sea" envelopes the physical world, and threatens restriction as well as comfort

(21,1). The image of the sea permeates into the image of the sky as the first line moves effortlessly between "The sea" and "-night", and the moon in the night sky reflects light from the far away, invisible sun, down onto the tide where it "lies fair" (1,2). This emphasises the distance but also the transmutable power of the natural world that are being viewed at this moment, as the sea and the sky join together and are able to stretch into both the dark of night and the reflected sunlight of day (1,2). The distance is accentuated by Arnold's use of punctuation, as the hyphenation between "to" and "night" is a visual representation which is continued and extended at the mention of "straits", which can also be read as 'straights' that have no obligatory ending (1,3). This is followed by an extended hyphenation that stretches from the sea to the "French coast" beyond (3). These inferences of straight lines stretching off into the distance extend the scene being described, towards things and places that are not conceivable to the human eye. Arnold's use of lengthening written lines on the page and gradually building the number of syllables in these lines, from 6 to 8, to 10 and 11 between lines 1-5, gives audible credence to this idea as well as visible. This only helps to strengthen the expansion of the picture created. Again there is an emphasis on human senses, as the narrator uses his vision in these five lines, but also later his senses of smell and hearing to appreciate the "sweet[ness]" of the night-air, the sound of the "grating roar" and of the tide and "the eternal note of sadness" as it comes in (6,9,14).

All of the technical constructions identified here lead to the scene of "Dover Beach" being one of immensity, and vastness. The scene stretches beyond the conceivability of human comprehension, and any effort to put limitation upon it fails, as the light on the distant "French coast.../ Gleams and is gone", leaving only limitlessness once more (3-4). However, Arnold's

window device allows this vast scene to be 'brought in' sufficiently to allow an application and relevance to the human figure of the narrator, as the implied frame of the window encloses the scene into a relatable picture. The hyphenation in the text of "Dover Beach" is also a visual representation of the strong geometrical lines that construct this window frame, even though it is not described by the narrator, but only imagined by the reader (1,3). The picture of the Dover scene is therefore narrowed in order to allow some level of comprehension and a manageable scale, and make the scene capable of carrying forward a metaphor that can be applied to a human level. Otherwise, the human body would be swamped by the image. This allows for the introduction of themes relating to the human soul, as a framing window is essentially a Victorian adaptation of a much older tradition of windows being presented as a psychological metaphor for eyes looking out of the human body onto the world, as was, and is, used frequently in the Gothic tradition of writing (Joseph 72). For example, works such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe (1794), use windows as a motif that is illustrative of the confined and tormented soul looking out onto a world that they cannot access or take part in, and in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) Emily Bronte uses windows as a way of seeing between life and death, and civility or heathenism.

Matthew Arnold's window can be read as representative of doubling as the narrator looks out from his soul through his eyes, and from a physical room through the window, onto the world. This doubling gives an impression of the Uncanny to the situation, as later identified by Sigmund Freud in his famous essay of 1919. At the time of composition, Arnold could not have been reacting to the theories identified by Freud, but "The Uncanny" recognises the phenomenon as being inherent in literature historically as much as in real life. The theory lends a useful

explanation through which the modern reader may better understand the feelings of uneasiness and eeriness that Arnold creates in his poem, whether this was intentionally done or not.

Although "Dover Beach" cannot be described as being of the Gothic tradition, the implications of windows as eyes watching from within, and the doubling of the metaphor by enclosing the narrator in a room while his body encloses the soul, gives an eerie and uncomfortable feeling that adds depth to the primarily intended function of the window as representative of alienation. The motif of human eyes seeing through windows is almost reminiscent of Freud's examination of E.T.A Hoffman's *The Sandman*<sup>8</sup>, in a scene where Nathaniel directs his sight into a telescope, to look through a window across the street into a room where Olympia, later revealed to be an "eyeless...automaton", is housed (Freud 6). The Uncanny here lies in the doubling of lenses, from that of the human eye, to the telescope and so to the window, as well as the recognition of alienation in that Olympia in fact has no soul to mirror that of Nathaniel. Illustrating this is the fact that she has no eyes to act as a window to a soul. Arnold's construction of alienation is similarly eerie and uncanny, and as such sets the narrator and the reader in a position of uncomfortableness that consolidates the negativity of the alienation presented: the position of the narrator is not desirable, nor pleasant.

The narrator of "Dover Beach" is almost entirely alienated from the scene he describes in such detail, as he is set above and beyond its reach, enclosed within the limitations of a room with only a small opening through which to access the vastness that lies without. The window constructs an obvious, but, as will be explored later- problematic, opposition between outside and inside. On the surface this opposition is simple: the narrator is 'inside', whilst the vast world

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<sup>8</sup> See Hoffman, E.T.A. "The Sand-Man." Montana: Keshinger Publishing, 2004. Print.

described is 'outside'. Hostility between the two ideas can be read in "Dover Beach" in the increasing violence and conflict portrayed as the narrative moves from the distance, to the foreground, to an internal space. As such, the structure of "Dover Beach" rests upon a "concentric layers topology" that moves centripetally towards the centre, or more specifically the inside, rather than centrifugally, from the inside towards the outside (Joseph 81). The effect of Joseph's theory of topology can be seen where the peaceful Dover scene is revealed to be non-applicable to the true inner feelings of the narrator, as its calm is destroyed as focus moves from the distance towards the narrator, and cannot penetrate the violence of conflict in the foreground. Peace and beauty are alienated from the narrator and humanity by their inability to find a concluding centre, and the window acts as the final insurmountable divide.

As previously examined, the eye of the narrator begins its view in the far distance, as he surveys the infinity of the night sky, and the vastness of the ocean (2,1). It is then brought sharply in by the abrupt exclamation of "Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!", which follows the more serene and peaceful image of "the tranquil bay", that is made finite by Arnold's use of a full stop (6,5). These two lines oppose each other sharply, therefore at the physical presence of the window there is a note of violence. Despite the proposal that the wider bay is "tranquil", Arnold quickly moves on to the immediate foreground of the scene, where "the sea meets the moon blanch'd land", and the conflict between the land and sea causes "the long line of spray" to erupt in a physical depiction of violence and hostility (5,8,7). This depiction, of violence that is only discernible when the eyes are drawn to the foreground, negates the previously proffered picture of tranquillity, and is consolidated within the next few lines by references to "the grating roar" of the waves that "fling" pebbles onto the shore (9,10). The narration then moves to the



internal scene, that the narrator and the reader are led to seamlessly by the first literal mention of human emotion in "sadness" (14). The poem transcends to the human soul seamlessly as Arnold leads it along "with tremulous cadence slow"; and as the "eternal note of sadness" is brought "in", so too is the narration (13,14).

The narration is brought in further by the image that is constructed within the human soul, which is an imagined scene of temporal transcendence. The narration is now truly 'inside', as the second and third verse are examinations of the internal thoughts and feeling of the narrator. However, a connection is maintained with the carefully constructed 'outside' as these thoughts and feelings are transposed and projected onto metaphorical re-interpretations of the physical scene presented within the first verse. For example, "Sophocles long ago" viewed the physical ocean as a means of reflection, and the narrator of "Dover Beach" later re-applies this metaphorically as "The Sea of Faith" which represents internal feelings (15,21). Similarly, the soulful "naked shingles of the world" of the third verse are re-applications of what in the first verse was termed simply as "pebbles" (28, 10). A manifestation of the theme of "full" undulations of the tides seen earlier, that "begin, and cease, and then again begin", is used metaphorically as an interiorised human feeling of "the turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery", that is 'brought in' by the repeated use of the word "full" at line 22 (2,22,12,17). Arnold therefore leads the narration and the reader from the distance of 'outside', to the foreground, and then to the 'inside', but also metaphorically brings the images of 'outside' to the 'inside' along with it. There is increasing violence as the view moves inwards, that grows between the supposed "tranquil[lity]" of the distant view, the "long line of spray" of the fore-ground, and the "roar" of the narrator's inner feeling (5,7,25).

The violent opposition of outside and inside is made explicit in the final verse of "Dover Beach". "The world...seems/ To lie before us like a land of dreams" and is therefore separated and removed from the "us" of the narrator and his "love", in a reflection of the way that the narrator views the physical scene of Dover in the first verse from a separated and removed vantage point (30-31). As he assessed the world from an exterior point of view, focusing on the effect of the objective elements on his human senses in the first verse, he now assesses it from an interior point of view, focusing on the effects that the subjective world has on his inner feelings. The subjective world is embodied in images of variety, beauty and newness, but the narrator now appreciates that these qualities, like the tranquillity of the bay in the first verse, are a "lie" (32,31). When his consideration turns from the "land of dreams" to his inner soul, he understands that this tranquillity masks a lack of "joy...love... and light", and violence is implied in the loss of "certitude...peace" and "help for pain" (31,33,34). This leads to the defining image of violence and opposition in "Dover Beach", as Arnold's narrator pictures himself "on a darkling plain" that is "swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight" (35-36). The image of violence that builds throughout the poem, as it moves from 'outside' to 'inside', is inscribed within the soul of the narrator which becomes embroiled in violence where the two spaces, described by the end as "ignorant armies", meet to "clash by night" (37).

The narrator is therefore beset externally by the increasing violence of "Dover Beach". This is sharply contrasted by Arnold's depiction of the narrator being physically enclosed by a room, which houses the window from which he views the scene below. However, there is no physical representation of the room occupied by Arnold's narrator: the reader is only made aware of its

possible existence in the line "come to the window" (6). This is a definite assertion that there is a window, yet it only follows logically rather than definitely, that there is a room. As we can deduct from the narrator's ability to smell the "night-air", the window is open, and so a lack of visible representation can be forgiven (6). The narrator can see out through the window, and the outside air can flow in. However, the room that the narrator stands in is also not represented. There is no sight, sound or even emotional awareness of it in the poem, and so questions arise as to where, or what the "night-air" is flowing into. Even if a person was to stand within the very liminal space of an open window, it is unlikely that there would be no perception at all of the room itself, whether this be from sight, sound or general sense, especially if it can be assumed that this room is also occupied by another person. This lack of a visible and tangible room is most problematic when purpose is considered; for how can a house serve any narrative or poetic purpose if it is unseen, un-sensed and without limits? Why suggest that the narrator and his "love" are enclosed inside a room at all?

The answer to these questions can be found in an assessment of Arnold's intention regarding what he wished this room to represent. The question of an intimate centre, the expectation of which is logically implied by the concentric movement of the poem, must first be considered. Along with the lack of appreciation of any physical boundaries constructing a physical room, there is also a notable absence of any sense of the other person that Arnold's narrator addresses within the first verse. He bids them first to "come to the window" and then to "listen", and yet the presence of the narrator is not affected by being joined by another at any stage of the poem (6,9). There are several references to the poem being addressed to another person throughout, from the uses of personal pronouns such as "you", "I", and "us"

(9,24,29,31,35). Yet the reader has no other indication of the presence of this person, whether it be by sound or sense, despite the implied intimacy between the two people as the narrator refers to his "love" and an emotional relationship in the request for "tru[th]" between the two (29). The other person does not speak, they do not move, and therefore the possibility can be considered that they may not exist within the plane of reality that the narrator occupies.

The basis of this thesis is that Arnold positions his narrator between the 'inside' of the room and intimate relationship implied by the poem, and the vast 'outside' scene of Dover Beach, so that he inhabits the liminal space *apart* from, rather than between the two spaces, and so he is unable to align himself with either and as he such is effectively alienated from both. As is examined in the following chapters, the themes of "Dover Beach" are built upon the idea of alienation from nineteenth-century sociological issues that vary from conflict between perceived ideas of the suitable style and function of poetry, the effect of emerging scientific theory on faith, and the position of humanity on the earth and in life.

There is a formal linguistic juxtaposition between 'outside' and 'inside', and in "Dover Beach" this sees the narrator standing at the physical liminal point between the two, where the narrator is effectively removed from any association with either. The fact that Arnold does not make the house above "Dover Beach" either tangible or visible suggests that its primary function is not to enclose or define a space for the narrator to inhabit. By giving no tangible sense of the room, its limits and boundaries are lost. By negating the presence of a physical and intimate "another" in the room, its purpose is also lost (30). Because of this, the space on the opposite side of the window to the Beach becomes empty, dark and ultimately more "vast" than

the supposed 'outside' scene (5). The view of Dover Beach" is portrayed as limitless, as examined earlier in this chapter, but conversely limitation is later imposed by the frame of the window where the narrator stands (6). But, as the narrator is positioned looking towards the beach, no such effect is made on the space behind him, which remains as a limitless void. The possibility is that Arnold's narrator cannot be described as being 'inside', as he stands only in emptiness. The scene of Dover has definition down to the tiniest detail of "pebbles" on the beach far below, and the "sweet" smell of the "night-air", and this is given perceivable containment by the window frame (10,6). Therefore, if the Dover scene is, like the tide, "full" and has limitation, whereas the opposite side has none, then the Dover scene becomes the real 'inside', and the emptiness beyond becomes the 'outside'.

This possibility leads to the implication that Arnold's narrator in "Dover Beach" cannot ultimately be properly inside anything. His position above the night scene, separated by the physical window, puts him outside and apart from the world that he views- and therefore he feels himself to be separated and apart from this world. However, the alternative to this view, if he turns around and views the space behind him, is only void and emptiness. There is no possible 'inside' for the narrator to be a part of, and so he is absolutely alienated. He has no place in the world, but also no place to turn to as an alternative. Although he calls to his companion to "come to the window" and "listen", he is essentially alone (6,9). The references within "Dover Beach" to "you", "I", and "us" do not appear to be addressed to any specific person, but can be read as an appeal to fellow humanity, that the narrator is removed and apart from, but wishes to understand his feeling of alienation and separation (9,24,29,31,35). Where an address is made for "love" to "...be true/ To one another!" remains problematic, for it could

be that the narrator addresses a person that he has been removed or separated from, or he could be addressing a more subjective ideal rather than a person, such as the "love" of a certain deity, or the emotion of "love" itself (29-30). Either reading does not alter the real possibility that is presented here: that the narrator is physically alone, and removed from all perceivable worlds and spaces, as the lack of tangible limits and physical sense of the person does not allow for the intimacy implied by the presence of "another" person (30). Therefore the question of how a house can be considered a space for intimacy to be condensed or defended, without walls and limits, is answered simply. Arnold's house lacks these attributes in a way that successfully illustrates the absence of intimacy and belonging felt by the narrator, because he could not be truly alienated if he enjoyed intimacy and so belonging with another. The question as to Arnold's intent in implying a room and proper 'inside' is answered by recognising that the instability of the motif deeply and soundly immerses the narrator in alienation, on more than just a perfunctory level. By showing the narrator to be truly removed from the physical world, with no discernible place in which to retreat or take shelter, nor solace to be found in the intimacy of another, Arnold builds a representation of an absolutely alienated figure who is abandoned to spend his human life obscured within the shadows of liminality.

However, the withdrawal portrayed within the last verse of "Dover Beach" may be seen as the narrator taking solace in the alienation itself, without concern for a conclusion to the conflicting questions that are examined within the poem. The narrator is seen to withdraw to a "darkling plain", and whilst he is "swept by confused alarms of struggle and flight" he may not necessarily be taking part in the conflict himself (35,36). As much as he may be "swept" 'up' in the

"confused alarms", he may also be by-passed by them as he removes himself and allows them to 'sweep' past him altogether (36). As this line comes at the very end of the poem, in the penultimate line, this implies that the narrator may see withdrawal as the end of his involvement with the issues that he has portrayed. The ultimate line describes the "confused alarms" that sweep the "darkling plain" as those of "ignorant armies" that "clash by night" (35-37). This constructs the image of unenlightened strife and conflict, as the people or persons that continue to propel conflict are literally in the dark, and are ignorant of the kind of enlightenment that the narrator has discovered regarding the world being a "land of dreams" (31). Therefore, the narrator finds a kind of solace in his alienation from the world, and a peace in his inability to become further embroiled in the "struggle" of humanity (36). Arnold portrays the withdrawal from the world and issues that he has discussed within "Dover Beach" as the only way to achieve "peace" and "certitude", or "help for pain" that is a life lived in constant and hopeless conflict (34).

There is another poem by Matthew Arnold, written contemporaneously to "Dover Beach", which uses similar motifs to portray an alienation from the world, and ultimate withdrawal and the solace to be found only in the soul. "A Summer Night" was published in 1852 in *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems*, at around the same time that "Dover Beach" is thought to have been written. The poem opens with the image of "repellent" windows that are viewed by the narrator from a "deserted" and "moon-blanch'd street", which is directly comparable to the "moon-blanch'd land" of "Dover Beach" ("Summer Night" 5,1, "Dover Beach" 8). A highly irregular rhythm and rhyme scheme, along with fluctuating verse lengths, are reminiscent of "Dover Beach" in their construction of a sense of conflict and un-surety. The visual impression

of fluctuating line lengths throughout "Summer Night" literally ebb and flow across the page as do those of "Dover Beach", and in this case are representative of "restless pacings to and fro" with a "vainly throbbing heart" when the narration turns from the street that begins the narration to a "past night, and a far different scene" (23,24,13). This secondary, remembered scene, is very similar to that of "Dover Beach", and the terminology reflects the link in the presentation of houses that "girdle" the bay, however Arnold switches the descriptions of the moon and sea of "Dover Beach" to show a night that is "fair" and a moon that is "calm" ("Summer Night" 19,22,25, "Dover Beach" 23,1,2). The ways which "Summer Night" reflects "Dover Beach" are so numerous, and the remembered scene so close to that of "Dover Beach", that there is a strong possibility that "Summer Night" may have been written as a continuation and an elaboration of the personal alienation and withdrawal that are felt in "Dover Beach".

The narrator of "Summer Night" both sets himself apart from the rest of humanity and rejects the paths that he perceives to be available to them. The narration runs between these options, but neither one is viewed as satisfactory, and the narrator removes himself from either party, as:

...I, I know not if to pray

Still to be what I am, or yield and be

Like all other men I see.



For most men in a brazen prison live,  
... Death in their prison reaches them,  
Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest.

And the rest, a few,  
Escape their prison and depart  
On the wide ocean of life anew

...awhile he holds some false way...

...And then the tempest strikes him...

...And he too disappears, and comes no more (34-37,49-53,59,62,73).

A choice is presented for humanity between the "prison" which allows only "barren labour" and gradual decline without the gift of insight or personal blessing, or the freedom which does not offer any shelter or help for the "trade winds that cross it" in order to ultimately destroy them (37,43,58). These images are representative of the unwelcoming interiority offered by the windows, and the obscurity that is offered by the wide world in the first verse. The narrator questions, after considering these options,

Is there no life, but these alone?

Madman or slave, must man be one? (74-75).

As these questions are set apart from the rest of the poem with no surrounding lines, they form the basis of the entire poem. The interiority beyond the windows offers only a prison and choosing to inhabit the space is to make mankind a "slave", but the ocean of life that is the obscurity of the wider world is inhabited only by "madmen". Directly after these two quizzical lines, the narrator answers the questions with a possible alternative: the acceptance of the limitations of these two spaces, and an acceptance of his own alienation from both, in order to find solace in the "boundless[ness]" of his soul (88).

The windows of "Summer Night" are as "repellent as the world", and are described as being "white and "unopening" rather than opaque as one would expect (5,4). As the narrator notes "how lonely rings the echo of my feet" on the street that is representative of the world, there is no welcome to him in either the space beyond the windows or the world (2). They are both "repellent" and unwelcoming to his presence (5). The narrator looks to "a break between the housetops" that gives a view of the "dewy dark obscurity" which a "a whole tract of heaven disclose[s]", and so he aligns himself only with the obscurity that has been disclosed to him (6,8,10). This is a heaven that has limitation imposed on it by the word "whole", for what is whole is implied to have an end (10). Even the obscurity has a limit, as it ends at "the far horizon's rim" (8). These depictions within the first verse of the poem are contrasted by those of the last verse, where the heavens are described as being "a world above man's heads, to let

him see/ How boundless might his soul's horizons be" (87-88). There is therefore a clear outline of the narrator accepting the alienation that he feels from the world and the physical refuges of man, and instead finding solace in the alienation within his soul, which is "boundless" in a way that the world and heaven are not (88).

Therefore, "Summer Night" makes explicit the implications that can be found in "Dover Beach", in that the "darkling plain" can be viewed as a positive and a negative representation of alienation (35). The narrator is indeed alienated from the world and the usual places in which humanity finds shelter from the world, but there is the possibility of this alienation being a vehicle for a withdrawal from the conflicts of "ignorant armies", as a way to retreat to the true "boundlessness" of the human soul ("Dover Beach" 37, "Summer Night" 88). "Ah, love, let us be true/ To one another" can be read as an appeal for humanity to be "true" to itself, and recognise the "certitude" and "peace" that can be found within themselves by accepting alienation from the world (29-30,34).

Arnold constructs these complicated metaphorical and psychological motifs of alienation and withdrawal within "Dover Beach" as a basis for his discussions and portrayals of several issues that find no answers or end within the poem. Through his narrator, Arnold recognises the problems that beset contemporary society in the nineteenth century, but offers the suggestion that individuals do not necessarily have to align with or accept any party of conflict, but instead can appreciate the enlightenment and realisation that a removed view of them can provide. They do not need to make themselves party to the "ignorant armies" but instead can withdraw into an acceptance of their position (37). Arnold uses this basis in "Dover Beach" to present

issues of the perceived ideas of correct style and function in great poetry, the effect of emerging scientific theory on faith, and the position of humanity on the earth and in life. Throughout his poem, he does not show a preference for either side in any of these conflicting themes, but instead examines them in a removed and aloof fashion, calmly presenting the situation in the knowledge that humanity can ultimately take refuge and make an eternal home within their own souls.

## Chapter 2:

### "Dover Beach" and Wordsworthian Poetic Theory.

This chapter focuses on the text of "Dover Beach" in light of a select few of Arnold's earlier poems, in order to examine the influence of, and expressed views on, Romanticism as the prevalent literary form of the time. Arnold's own critique of the tradition in his 1853 "Preface" to *Poems: A New Edition* and the principles set down by William Wordsworth in his 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* will be drawn upon. Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* is viewed as having "entered the popular understanding of Romanticism", and so is invaluable to these discussions (de Piro 195). Firstly in this thesis there will be an examination of the relevance of Arnold's 1852 poem *Empedocles on Etna* and the "Preface" to his *Poems: A New Edition* to the aspects of Romanticism which are represented in "Dover Beach". Secondly, a view will be taken of the same in light of Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798" and Arnold's poem "Resignation" (1849), in order to show the ways that the three poems are symptomatic of Arnold's conflicted views of Romantic writing as the fitting form of writing for the contemporary period.

D.G. James, in his assessment of "Matthew Arnold and the Decline of English Romanticism" (1961), gives a succinct summation of the extent that, biographically, the literary form had a great effect on Arnold's life. Matthew Arnold was born in 1822, in the same year that Percy Bysshe Shelley died; his father Thomas Arnold was an "intimate friend" of William Wordsworth; and perhaps one of the greatest influences on this early academic life, church-man John Henry

Newman, was a great celebrant of Romanticism as "a disposition of mind" that was most "favourable to the reception of Catholic truth" (31). As Wordsworth's acclaim began to be eclipsed by that of Lord Alfred Tennyson after the publication of the latter's *Poems* (1842), a "new and different poetry...now reigned", and the star of Romantic poetry began to fade (32). Wordsworth died in 1850 and, after writing "Memorial Verses" as an elegy to his memory in the same year, Arnold moved on to write "Dover Beach". As such there is no surprise that the later poem can be read as one that is conflicted in its understanding and belief of what the most useful and suitable form of poetry was then to be. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these issues through the use of close reading of "Dover Beach" and comparative works by Arnold, in order to show how the author creates indecision and comes to no final conclusion to the issues within the framework of the poem, making it a liminal poem that is alienated from the contemporary writing mode.

The Romantic mode of creative writing in Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century has been described by D.G. James as:

An attempt to confine within the limits of the natural...feelings which in an earlier day of European history had been sustained and organised within a framework of supernatural Christian belief. It created a religion without the supernatural. Everything became in some sense divine; human nature, in proportion as it had not been contaminated by urban civilisation, was seen in its true divinity; and the natural world evoked a kind of worship and provided, to the injured spirit of man, a sort of healing and saving grace (21).

However, by 1849 to 1851, Matthew Arnold had begun to express doubts as to the ability of the natural world to act as a divinity over humanity and its needs, as advances in human understanding of the physical world dissolved previously assumed Christian teachings, but also challenged humanity's claim upon the earth. The effect of science on Christian faith deserves a full examination, as is found in the next chapter of this thesis. However, this chapter examines the ways in which Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" reflects his uncertainty as to the correct mode of poetry in a world that was changing due to influences such as scientific discovery. The poem appears to portray Romantic writing and its reliance on the religion of nature as insufficient in the contemporary time to sustain the human spirit. However, Arnold fails to recommend or develop an alternative mode, which results in "Dover Beach" being an example of alienation and exclusion, as the poet turned his back on a literary tradition of the time without any real concept of what the new tradition should be. This very uncertainty is now understood to be a product of High Victorian literature in the latter half of the century, however at the very turn of the century and the transition period between the two, Arnold's "Dover Beach" is a liminal piece that sits between both.

The significance of Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna* to "Dover Beach" is great, in light of "the major poetic statement" made by Arnold in his "Preface" to the 1853 volume of *Poems: A New Edition* (Campbell viii). *Empedocles* was published in October 1852 as the headline of the volume of poetry published under Arnold's pseudonym; 'A'. Arnold's next volume of poetry, *Poems*, was published in November 1853, but the previously central work of *Empedocles* was omitted. In his

Preface to the edition, he professes to have felt compelled to pre-empt accusations that this had been carried out:

...in deference to the opinion which many critics of the present day appear to entertain against subjects chosen from distant times and countries; against the choice, in short, of any subjects but modern ones (11-12).

In the Preface he outlines his reasons as concerning his self-perceived failure to "inspire and rejoice the reader" whilst succeeding to provide interest through the use of delineation, as he believed that poetry must not only "add to the knowledge of men" but also "should add to their happiness" (10). What follows in this Preface is a direct attack on the "morbid" model of Romantic writing, which was still the style that pervaded much of mid-nineteenth-century art. Thus, *Empedocles* is viewed by Arnold as failing in its poetical duty due to its construction upon Romantic ideals, and so was not published within his subsequent anthology (11). The question must then be asked why Arnold also consciously omitted "Dover Beach", which was to later become one of his best-known and acclaimed pieces, from the 1853 *Poems*. There is a possibility that Arnold saw "Dover Beach", like *Empedocles*, as a failure, due to an inclination towards Romanticism, and this thesis suggests that "Dover Beach" is illustrative of Arnold's indecision and confusion concerning his poetry in relation to contemporary models of the era. As such it can be read as both representative and subversive of the prevailing Romantic literature of the time.



Arnold contends that omission of *Empedocles* was due to its failure to provide enjoyment to the reader, not due to its tragic nature- as portrayals of "calamity" and "anguish" do not necessarily impede enjoyment but rather *deepen* it as the tragedy becomes "more terrible" - but due to a lack of resolution to this suffering through action . This is the situation that Arnold viewed as being "morbid", and recognised as a key product of Romantic literature ("Preface" 11). Upon reading *Empedocles* it can be understood why Arnold may have considered it to be monotonous and lacking in resolute action, as Empedocles and Callicles embark on numerous lengthy monologues, in some cases of up to seventy verses from Empedocles. He ruminates on the futility of man against the restrictions of life, as

In vain our pent wills fret

And would the world subdue

Limits we did not set

Condition all we do.

Born into life we are, and life must be our mould... (25)

Immediately after this lengthy monologue, which ends with a reference to birth and life, Empedocles throws himself to his death into the volcano with only the cry of "Receive me ! Save me ! [*He plunges into the crater*]" (67). There is no resolution to Empedocles's melancholy and suffering other than death. In her article "Matthew Arnold and the Muses" (1985), Joyce Zonana concludes that in this final action, Empedocles chooses "neither life nor art", as even

"death with hope, not despair...cannot- except symbolically- serve others in similar straits" (66).

Furthermore, in the modern day suicide may be seen to be a resolution, albeit a tragic one, whereas in the predominantly Christian Victorian society this would be unacceptable (70).

There are many similarities, but also differences, between *Empedocles* and "Dover Beach" in view of the theories that Arnold set out in his 1853 Preface. "Dover Beach" opens to a melancholy but peaceful scene where the lonely figure of the narrator is framed by a window, from which he surveys the panoramic view before him. The emphasis in this first verse is on the unending natural cycles of the moon and the tides, where "the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land" (8). This framework provides two advantages to Arnold in that it firstly provides a simple but solid basis for him to effect the kind of delineation to which he aimed but professed to have failed in achieving in *Empedocles* ("Preface" 9). Secondly, it serves as a contrast to the unchanging situation and comparatively fleeting presence of the narrator, whose state is aligned to the far away light, which simply "gleams, and is gone..." (4). With consideration to the first point, it is obvious that any kind of precise description or portrayal of time and place in *Empedocles* is lost amongst obscure introspections. The narrative begins well, with the slightly clumsy "so fair a morn;- the sun/ Is shining on the brilliant mountain crests/ And on the highest pines" moving swiftly into the more promising evocation of a valley,

...in shade; the sward

Is dark, and on the stream the mist still hangs;

One sees one's foot-prints crush'd in the wet grass,

One's breath curls in the air... (14).

Arnold is clearly more able in *Empedocles* to evoke a precise but emotional line when describing water and darkness than light, and this becomes more evocative in "Dover Beach" when he inverts his own poetic preference to depict the light of darkness in the moonlight shining upon the darkened beach (2-3). However in *Empedocles* this early flare of poetical genius is lost by Scene II when the description of the landscape becomes more vague, consisting of

...trees, and their veins of turf, and long dark shoots

Of ivy-plants, and fragrant hanging bells

Of hyacinths, and on late anemonies

That muffle its wet banks...(16).

There is no atmosphere in these passages, for even though Arnold describes the individual aspects of the scenery, the sensory aspects of the descriptions that are abundant in "Dover Beach" are missing. This means that the place is hazy and one dimensional for the reader, whereas in "Dover Beach" the sounds of "the grating roar/ Of pebbles which the waves draw back" in the perpetual motion of the tide is *felt* as well as heard by the reader (9-10). Surely then, in "Dover Beach" Arnold achieves the effectiveness of delineation which he admits to having failed to in *Empedocles*, as, instead of the one-sided precise descriptions of what can be seen in *Empedocles*, the array of senses which are manipulated in the description of Dover allow

the reader to empathise with the feelings of the narrator. The reader can see, hear and smell the "eternal note of sadness" that is brought in by the Dover tide, unlike the misplaced "Eternal showers of spray on the moss'd roots" of Etna ("Dover Beach" 14, *Empedocles* 16). The descriptions in "Dover Beach" are considerably shorter and more succinct than those of *Empedocles*, and yet despite this, or because of it, they are much more precise and effective than those given in the earlier work. In this "Dover Beach" succeeds where *Empedocles* fails.

When examining the second effect of the motif of lunar and tidal cycles in the first verse, there are again similarities and differences between *Empedocles* and "Dover Beach". Perhaps due to the lack of human response given to the narrator by his conversant, the narration swiftly turns from the observation of external scenes in the first verse, to the kind of introverted "self-complacent reverie" and "refined indolence" that Arnold is accused of indulging in *Empedocles*, within the second verse (Garrod 312). A transcendence of time is introduced by the word "eternal" in the last line of the first verse, and the second verse moves away from the present moment to "Sophocles long ago", who heard "the eternal note of sadness...on the Ægæan", that brought to mind "the turbid ebb and flow of misery" (4,15-18). The narrator hears a similar "eternal note of sadness" in the effects of the unaltered lunar and tidal power of "northern sea" as Sophocles heard in the "distant" past beside the warm Ægæan (4,14,20). This transcends both the temporal and spatial settings as the human problem that both figures contemplate has remained unchanged. The "eternal" natural powers of the universe long outlive the presence of any man, who is allowed only to see "gleam[s]" before they are "gone" (14,4). This is a similar proposition to one presented in *Empedocles*, as the protagonist muses that

We mortals are no kings

For each of whom to sway

A new-made world up-springs

Meant merely for his play.

No, we are strangers here; the world is from of old (25).

Empedocles explicitly spells out a similar thought to that which the narrator of "Dover Beach" has only to infer: that humanity believes the world to be "new made" by the lunar inspired seasons, and "made merely for his play", whereas in fact he is irrelevant to the world which is "from of old". The emphasis of "Dover Beach" on sensory invocations to involve the reader allows them to infer this idea for themselves as it occurs to the narrator, instead of excluding them by telling limited information without involving the reader at all. This again renders "Dover Beach" a success where *Empedocles* is a failure: the reader cares about- and *feels*- the anguish and frustration of the narrator of "Dover Beach" when he moves on in the third stanza to describe its cause, whereas in *Empedocles* the danger is that they simply will not care. The precise and yet only implied theme of "Dover Beach" mean that its turn towards introspection avoids the kind of overindulgence in subjectivism that J. D. Jump, in his 1960 Chapter "Matthew Arnold", explains that Arnold struggled to balance in his poetry. Jump is of the view that the absolute exclusion of "subjective elements" in "Merope" and "Balder Dead" rendered the works unreadable, but in the later "Sohrab Rustum", Arnold allowed this element to take over and "ruin the poetic whole" with "ruminating, that 'thinking aloud, instead of making anything' which he deplored in his contemporaries" (309). Yet in "Dover Beach" Arnold appears to have

found a perfect balance by implying the kind of deeper introspection that Empedocles goes to great lengths to express, as by making the reader care deeply about the situation with his manipulation of the senses, he passes the responsibility of rumination to the reader and relieves the narrator of that potentially smothering burden.

Therefore the 'feelings' of the reader are imperative to the success of "Dover Beach", and that 'feeling of enjoyment' that Arnold prescribes in his 1853 "Preface" absolutely exists in the construction of the poem, as "the situation is more tragic in proportion as it becomes more terrible" ("Preface" 11). The reader can intrinsically feel and be involved in the terrible situation of the narrator, and subsequently the action it prescribes must be followed. This action gives "vent" to the tragedy to ensure that the situation does not occur, as is the case with *Empedocles*, where it is "painful, not tragic" because "a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done" ("Preface" 11).

In his Preface, Arnold goes on to explain that as well giving hope and resistance to the situation, this action should be at once "an excellent action"- meaning to Arnold that it must be "interesting solely in proportion to its greatness and to its passion- and that this action must be treated with regard to the whole" (13-14). It has been seen that "Dover Beach" can be described as being of a "great" action as it "most powerfully appeal[s] to the great primary human affections" through its vivid manipulation of the range of senses, and so "those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race", construct "passion" within the reader ("Preface" 12). *Empedocles* fails in this, not because its temporal setting in ancient times

does not allow the poet to have the action clearly and deeply in his mind as Romantic theory would contest was the case, but because it fails to show this action as great due to its inability to produce passion within the reader (14). The reader must hope, for the continued success of "Dover Beach" after the second verse, that the great action of the poem that has produced such pleasure by its tragic situation within the first half of the poem, will go on to culminate in some "action" in the final half that gives hope or resistance against "morbid" despair (13,11).

The third and fourth stanza of "Dover Beach" tell the reader what the narrator sees as being the tragic situation facing himself and humankind as a whole- that the reassurance of religion had withdrawn, leaving human life without solace or compensation. The narrator sees that "The Sea of Faith" which was previously "at the full", had "retreat[ed]" in the face of the modern situation (21-22). The cause of this retreat is implied within the text itself, and is examined in full in the next chapter. After the withdrawal has been recognised, the narrator continues to keep the passion that it is invoked for the reader alive by continuing to emphasise the physical, sensory feelings of withdrawal, as they hear along with the narrator a "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar", and feel "the breath of the night-wind" which chases it away (24-27). This withdrawal has left the narrator in what he sees as being the modern situation, where the beauty of the world is deceptive, as there is in fact "neither joy, nor love, nor light/ Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain..." (33-34). Again, there is an emphasis on emotional feelings, but also on the sight of "light", the sound of "peace" and the physical feeling of "pain". There is however hope in this situation as well as resistance, unlike in *Empedocles* where the lack of either results in the definitive suicidal actions of Empedocles. This hope lies in "love", and being "true" to the one that is loved (29-30). The idea of hope and resistance is

strengthened by Arnold's use of punctuation when he addresses his "love"; firstly in stanza one, when he asks them to "Come to the window" and to "Listen!", and secondly in the fourth stanza where he asks them to be "true" (6,9,30). The solidness of the exclamation marks in these appeals, which are at odds with the gentler punctuation throughout the rest of the poem, marks that the narrator's companion is to act as their rock, their anchor. Whilst the words uttered give hope for a way to overcome the portrayed adversities, the solidness given by the punctuation marks these ideas as being resistant to the changes which threaten to propel the narrator spiritually "down the vast edges drear" along with his faith, leaving him "naked" as the "shingles of the world" (27-28). The narrator and his companion withdraw to the "darkling plain", but there is resistance in this withdrawal as they allow the "ignorant armies to clash" around them, whilst remaining removed and protected by the truth of their love (35,37).

Therefore "Dover Beach" can be seen as fulfilling all of the parts prescribed by Arnold as the "eternal objects of poetry, among all nations, and at all times", as it is constructed upon great actions, which reflect and affect eternal human emotions by delineated manipulation of the senses. The tragedy of the narrator's situation is given hope by the resistance of the ultimate action in the final stanza. The reader may ask, then, why "Dover Beach" was omitted from Arnold's 1853 *Poems*, as it seems to have succeeded where *Empedocles* had failed. The reasons given for the omission of *Empedocles* do not appear to fit the framework of "Dover Beach". As this chapter will now show, "Dover Beach" reflects the confusion that Arnold felt concerning the Romantic principles of poetry that he criticises in his 1853 "Preface", and so the decision to omit its publication may have been due to the stand that he consciously makes in the "Preface" against Romantic principles. Arnold in his "Preface" resolves to construct an alternative



framework to work to, and "Dover Beach" would have revealed upon any kind of detailed analysis the indecision that he really felt surrounding this. The poem takes what U.C. Knoepfelmacher describes as a "Wordsworthian matrix" of Romantic construction as its "frame of reference", but also as a matter for inversion and irony (47).

Knoepfelmacher points out that criticism of Arnold's views on Wordsworth and the Romantic writing mode are generally limited to referencing his critical work, and only occasionally have "ironic echoes of Wordsworth" been examined within his poetical work, which he contends contain a "criticism and a rejection of [his] view" (46). He asserts that Arnold's 1849 poem "Resignation: To Fausta" is a deliberate inversion of Wordsworth's "Lines Written above Tintern Abbey" (1798), with its "core" being Wordsworthian in setting, situation and creed (47). Indeed even the position of the two poems in their respective first volumes are identical, as both occupy the very last pages of the editions, marking them as being a last word on the poets' intentions for the overarching themes of the works published within. However, similarities and "inversion[s]" of "Tintern" can also be traced through "Resignation" and into the later poem, "Dover Beach", which reflect Arnold's confused attitude towards Romantic theory as presented in Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* from 1800. The theory that is set out in the "Preface" is neatly encapsulated within the construction of "Tintern", and, as M.H. Abrams suggests in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), the "Preface" itself is viewed as a being "something of a... Romantic manifesto" that was "widely accepted by Wordsworth's contemporaries" as such (100). Abrams explains that Romantic literary theory is largely a "convenient fiction of the historian" used to describe the general mode of creative writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when writers were

...very open to ideas from many sources so exhibit greater diversity in philosophical presupposition, descriptive vocabulary, dialectic motifs and critical judgement than writers of any earlier period...[so had] no specific body of doctrine in common (100).

However, a discussion of 'Romanticism' must have some basic framework, and as Wordsworth's criticism in *Lyrical Ballads* is viewed to be the most succinct and accepted example of this, it acts as a useful touchstone for discussions in the remainder of this chapter. "Tintern Abbey", like most of the works in *Lyrical Ballads*, is a direct representation of the guidelines that are set down within the Romantic manifesto of the "Preface", and as such there is much to be gained by comparing the works of Matthew Arnold to "Tintern Abbey" in order to gain an understanding of the representations that Arnold makes of the literary movement.

With this in mind, the settings of "Tintern" and "Resignation" are remarkably similar, and although at first glance the setting of "Dover Beach" does not appear to be the same, it represents a progression that is rooted in "Tintern" and inverted in "Resignation", culminating in a dramatic alternate scene in the later poem. "Tintern" is set in the rolling hills of the Wye Valley, and a focus is established from the beginning on the motif of water. Here the water image is a calm and settled one, as the narrator describes at the beginning of the first stanza "these waters, rolling from their mountain-springs/ With a sweet inland murmur" (3-4). Celia de Piro, in the comments to her edited edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (2006), notes that this motif is constructed around the fact that "the river is not affected by the tides a few miles above

Tintern", and so this is the river at its formation, and the projection of the water's flow is gentle, as it comes "rolling" from below the earth (117). Wordsworth goes on to describe "steep and lofty cliffs/...on a wild secluded scene", but the water does not tumble down these cliffs and, we can presume, continues its course quietly inland (5-6).

This image is subverted in "Resignation" in the implied water imagery used to describe the movement of the "jovial host" who accompanied the narrator and Fausta on a remembered trip to the Lakeland scene, as "a gate swings to: our tide hath flow'd/ Already from the silent road" (48-9). The "tide" of people had formed a physical body of water, but they have left the "silent" and smooth road which is the place of their formation- a reflection of Wordsworth's quiet and orderly stream forming from a mountain spring- and have "flowed/ *Already*" through the gate which seeks to confine them to their orderly place within the scene (48-49, emphasis added). The company are "upstreaming slowly still/ Over the summit of the hill", across the "mild hollows and clear heathy swells" and towards where "springs the brook [that] will guide us down" (62-3,66,76). The stream of people is propelled over the top of the hill, to join the beginnings of a literal body of water, but their propulsion foreshadows forces similar to those found in "Dover Beach", as the company is taken by "upstreaming" winds and tidal "swells" (62,66). Wordsworth's "inland murmur" is subverted in "Resignation" to show a more literal depiction of the representation of human life as comparative to the movement of a body of water (4). However, where Wordsworth's water, and view of human life, is peaceful and moves along without any real exertion, Arnold's metaphoric water in "Resignation" is presented as more impetuous and subject to upset from outside forces such as wind and tide.

Moving on to "Dover Beach", the inversion of Wordsworth's setting is taken further, to a more final and opposing end-point. Its focal water imagery is, of course, of the vast "northern sea", to which both Wordsworth's early formed stream and Arnold's troubled brook are bound to later join (20). Images of the natural forces that perpetuate the movement of the water are continuous throughout the poem, as "the moon lies fair/ Upon the straights", and its pull forces the waves breaking on the shore to "begin, and cease, and then again begin" (2.12). The waters of Wordsworth no longer "roll.../ With a sweet inland murmur" across the peaceful and bounteous countryside as the "steep and lofty cliffs" of "Tintern" have become the comparable "cliffs of England.../...out in the tranquil bay" ("Tintern" 3-5, "Dover Beach" 4-5). The sweetness of the sound of gentle water has become a sweetness in the night air that is heavy with the spray of the sea from the tidal impact, and the "murmur" has become a coastal "grating roar" ("Tintern" 3-5; "Dover Beach" 6-7,9). Where "Resignation" makes a metaphorical stand in constructing its focal water motif objectively from human bodies, and so represents the whole of human life rather than sticking to Wordsworth's more subjective personification of water as representative of the soul, "Dover Beach" personifies the water as "The Sea of Faith", which represents humanity as a whole in their individual bodies, lives, souls and existence as a race (21). In "Resignation", the water or people are propelled by the winds, "upstreaming slowly still/ Over the summit of the hill" instead of staying their peaceful inland course away from the cliffs as in "Tintern" (62-3). However, they later return to the "head" of the brook that will "lead [them] down" from the heights transversed by the group, where only "sailing foam" on the "shining pool" shows that there have been, or remain, any undercurrents or unseen forces in action (90,105). "Dover Beach" takes this inversion further, when it depicts the personified "Sea of Faith" that can be heard with

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
  
Retreating, to the breath  
  
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear  
  
And naked shingles of the world (24-8).

This is the death of Arnold's descriptions of a subverted Romantic scene in "Dover Beach", as shown by the shortened lines of the verse that represent a retreat of the personified life of humanity. The violent fall of the water body to the "naked shingles of the world" shows an absolute and final end in a way that the cyclical imagery of "Resignation" does not (28).

The setting of the three poems also shows a progression in the inversion or subversion of the Romantic precedent, as again "Tintern" and "Resignation" have a similar situation that is only partly modified by Arnold, and although "Dover Beach" on the surface is devoid of this situation, it is in fact indicative of a further subversion beneath. "Tintern", from the specifics of its original long title, draws attention to the fact that this is a scene that has been visited previously. The first lines indicate that "five years have passed; five summers, with the length/ Of five long winters!" since the poet visited with his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth (1-2). However, the poet has now returned alone. Wordsworth reflects that his younger self had "like a roe/...bounded o'er the mountains" where

as by this later visit "the courser pleasures of [his] boyish days/ And their glad animal movements [have] all gone by", and so he can now only hear "the still, sad music of humanity"

(68-9,74-5,92). He takes heart however, in the fact that his sister still appears to have the connection with nature that he himself has lost, exclaiming that "...Oh! yet a little while/ May I behold in thee what I was once/ My dear, dear sister" (120-22). Knoepfmacher explains that this constructs the theme of the "redeeming" of Dorothy, which is inverted by Arnold in "Resignation" by the idea of Fausta being "unredeemable" (49). Fausta has returned along with the narrator of "Resignation" to the scene previously visited as "ghosts of that boisterous company" (89). The two are alone on this visit, but alone *together* as it were, as opposed to completely alone as was Wordsworth's solitary narrator. The narrator of "Resignation" appears to argue with Fausta as she "listen[s]:- but that wandering smile/ Fausta, betrays you cold the while", and so she does not hear the sermon that "The poet" hears from nature in "the murmur of a thousand years" (199-200,188,144). The narrator, in this poem, has kept some closeness to his revered nature, and it is the companion that has lost her way.

This situation is further inverted and also made more complex in "Dover Beach". Although there is no literal reference to the narrator having previously visited Dover beach, whether alone or in company, the first line states that "The sea is calm to-night", and the word "to-night" is emphasised by a dividing hyphen, implying that the sea is calmer tonight as opposed to other nights when it may have been otherwise. Also, this could imply that the sea is calm 'into' the 'night', when it may have been otherwise during some previous daytime visit (1). The narrator appears to address a figure that is physically with him when he calls "come to the window", and "Listen!" in the first verse, much in the same way that "Resignation" implies that the narrator is in company in "that wayside inn we left today" ("Dover Beach" 6,9; "Resignation" 41). However, by the last verse, which has completely turned away from the carefully constructed natural

scene of the earlier verses, the tone of address suddenly turns to resemble more those seen in "Tintern". The earlier poem utters "Oh!" and "My dear, dear sister!" as "this prayer I make", and similarly the narrator of "Dover Beach" now cries "Ah, love, let us be true/ To one another!" ("Tintern" 120-2; "Dover Beach" 29-30). Both poems from this point then read very much like a prayer or internalised monologue in that the line lengths and regularity of their encapsulated clauses read in a regular and even rhythm. The repetitive structure of the phrasing enforces this, as "Tintern" develops

...lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,

Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men,

Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all

The dreary intercourse of daily life,

Shall e'er prevail against us... (129-133).

"Dover Beach" almost mirrors this construction with its pronouncement that the world really "hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light/ Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain" (33-4). These lines in "Dover Beach" are particularly important in the representation of a 'creed', which is discussed next, but in this first instance they imply that the person that the narrator addresses may not in fact be now physically present. The earlier part of the poem contains an address similar to that in "Resignation", to a physical presence that is with the narrator before the natural scene, but once this scene has been dismissed in the last verses of "Dover Beach" they

appear to no longer be there. The narrator is effectively alienated or removed from the very person in whom he wishes to find the solace of being "true/ To one another" (29-30).

The presence or absence of the narrator's accompanying figure in these poems makes an important comment on Wordsworth's Romantic theory, as in his Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* he demands that the poet is "a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply" about his poetic subject (230). This, however, is not alone sufficient, as he goes on to explain that:

...Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind (239).

The tranquillity demanded is certainly present in "Tintern", as numerous references are made to "deep seclusion", the possibility of a "hermit [who] sits alone", and remembered feelings that pass "even into my purer mind/ With tranquil restoration" (7,23,30-1). "Resignation" inverts this principle by allowing the physical presence of Fausta, but the pair have been removed from the "boisterous company" of their previous visit, and so from "general Life", and are now "Alone...you and I" (88-9,251). Both narrators use the tranquillity of the present to summon the emotions and thoughts of their earlier visit, as the narration of "Tintern" describes how



...with gleams of half-extinguish'd thought,

With many recognitions dim and faint,

And somewhat of a sad perplexity,

The picture of the mind revives again (59-62).

The tranquillity of the narrator of "Resignation" is inhibited from creating this 'revival' of the past "dim and faint" scene by the presence of Fausta, and he suppresses the "more than usual sensibility" of the Poetic mind, as

The Poet, to whose mighty heart

Heaven doth a quicker pulse impart,

Subdues that energy to scan,

Not his own course, but that of man (144-6).

The narrator in this passage is suffering from a disconnection from the kind of inspiration of nature that is displayed in "Tintern", which is denoted by the inhibiting presence of Fausta, and so must turn to matters concerning humanity as a whole by suppressing or ignoring the "quicker pulse" that he inherently possesses as a poet (145).

"Dover Beach" in turn shows a progression of this inversion, as the narrator only appears to be in company within the first verse of the poem, and by the last verse the refrain of "Ah, love, let us be true/ To one another" can be read as a cry to a person removed from the moment presented, as it has no physical sensory grounding such as the earlier appeals possess (29-30). There is no smell of the "sweet...night-air", or sound of the "grating roar" to draw attention to the physical existence of the person (6,9). Furthermore, the tense setting of each verse is called into question as the firmness of the statement "and we are here" of the last verse supersedes and over-rules the apparent present tense of the earlier statement that "The sea is calm tonight" (35,1). On this basis it would appear that the last verse is in fact the present moment for the narrator, and his solitude allows him to reflect 'in tranquillity' on a scene visited previously- possibly more than once- in the first verse. As prescribed by Wordsworth, this scene "does itself actually exist in the mind" of the narrator, as denoted by its dependence of the physical senses (239). The narrator appears to remember the philosophical reveries that were caused or allowed by the sublimity of the poetic mind in the first verse, and goes on to portray these within the second and third verses. So far then the first three verses are almost subscribing to Wordsworth's theoretical approach, as the poem constructs a return to a scene previously visited that allows the narrator to access his poetic conscience, and is not inhibited in this by the apparent presence of another person as is the case in "Resignation". However, the addition of the final verse inverts this earlier scene, as it describes a world "like a land of dreams", which is pronounced to be a "lie" (31). The narrator is now alone, but can no longer achieve the Romantic reveries of the earlier verses as he has found the natural stimulus to fail in satisfying the needs of its human dependants. There is "really neither joy, nor love, nor light/

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain", and so he must turn to human company, 'love' and truth to sustain him (33-4,29).

Whereas "Tintern" shows that nature *alone* allows the reveries and sublimity of the poetic mind that act as consolation for the human condition, "Resignation" adapts this to show the poet as being disconnected from the sublimity of nature by the failings of mankind represented by Fausta. However, "Dover Beach" blames the loss of the natural connection on the apparent failings of nature itself in aiding the human condition, and so turns away from nature altogether and only to the love of humanity for consolation. He now seeks poetic inspiration and solace in the person who accompanied him in the past, rather than in any kind of communion with capricious Nature. Wordsworth's Romantic creed in showing his narrator to find answers to "the fever of the world" in "how oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee/ O sylvan Wye" is inverted in "Resignation" to show the disillusioned narrator despair in the loss of "the poet's rapt security" ("Tintern" 56-7, "Resignation" (246). "Resignation" describes how humanity comes to the end of their life, and death finds them

...with many an unsolv'd plan

With much unknown, and much untried

Wonder not dead, and thirst not dried (24-26)

These lines are an understanding and acceptance of the ultimate failure of humanity to make a mark or difference upon the world, and the narrator resigns himself to focus on this "eternal mundane spectacle" of human life, as he can no longer connect emotionally with

The World in which we live and love

[Which] Outlasts aversion, outlasts love:

Outlasts each effort, interest and hope,

Remorse, grief joy... (215-218).

"Dover Beach" goes on to further this principle in its assertion that humanity must turn away from "the naked shingles of the world" and towards the consolation of human relationships for "joy", "love", "light", "certitude", "peace" and "help for pain"(28,33-4).

Thus, the subversion and inversion of Wordsworth's Romantic example is displayed clearly, as pointed out by Knoepfmacher, in Arnold's "Resignation", but this chapter shows that this is done more aggressively in "Dover Beach". If "Resignation" shows ambivalence towards Wordsworth's literary theory in its effort to create a "contemporary application" to his work, then "Dover Beach" shows a complete despair of, but also yearning for, the unattainable achievements of these Romantic ideologies (Knoepfmacher 51). John Woolford, in his article "The Sick King in Bokhara: Arnold and the Sublime of Suffering" (1986), blames Arnold's "stylistic irresoluteness" and "proclivity for pastiche of Romantic modes" on the "illness" of

Arnold's era: an illness which was "directly *caused* by the elder Romantics, whose greatness [inflicted] an irreparable anxiety of influence upon their successors", who could not hope to achieve the emotional sublimity of their forbearers (105). Arnold's wrangling between great actions and the "self-complacent reverie" of Romantic literature in *Empedocles* and "Dover Beach", and his inversion of Wordsworth's basic Romantic principles in "Resignation" and "Dover Beach" are symptomatic of this condition (Garrod 312). Arnold appears to have given up on attaining the greatness of feeling achieved by the Romantics by the time he finally published "Dover Beach" in 1867, and therefore felt ready to denounce Romantic principles such as those set out by Wordsworth as dead. At the time that it was written, in around 1851, he appears from the compositions of *Empedocles* and "Resignation" to have still been battling with doubt. Arnold mourned the death of Wordsworth, and the possibilities of Romantic poetry, in his "Memorial Verses, April 1850" with the telling verse,

Ah! Since dark days still bring to light

Man's prudence and man's fiery might,

Time may restore us in his course

Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force;

But where will Europe's latter hour

Again find Wordsworth's healing power?

Others will teach us how to dare,

And against fear our breast to steel;

Others will strengthen us to bear-

But who, ah! who, will make us feel? (58-67).

However, the legacy of Wordsworth resonates much more within "Dover Beach" than in the ways outlined in this chapter, as in his "Preface" to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* he sets out a guideline to what he saw to be the appropriate relationship between literature and science. This issue was to have great effect on writers such as Matthew Arnold from the mid-nineteenth century, and the next chapter examines of Arnold's reaction to it within "Dover Beach".

### Chapter 3:

#### Poetry, Geology and Faith in "Dover Beach".

Following the previous chapter's discussions of Matthew Arnold's anxiety over the correct place and form of poetry for the contemporary society, this chapter moves on to extend these ideas to show how he reacts to newly emerging issues of the relationship between literature and science within "Dover Beach". Once the relevance of this relationship is appreciated, readings of the poem emerge that show a portrayal of the effects that scientific theory was having on religious sentiment in the mid-nineteenth century. For scientific theories regarding the creation of the world and human species at this time had a profound effect on the poetry of the period, such as that of "Dover Beach", in their examinations of the place of humanity in the world and the belief and trust in a higher deity as Creator. In this poem Arnold displays a complex depiction of the effect that science and religion had on each other, and he draws the conclusion that whilst science did not hold any comfort to the human soul, traditional Christian teachings would have to adapt to the 'new world' that was dawning in order to stay relevant and essential. The relevant chronology of the composition and publication of "Dover Beach" encompasses a time that was predicted to some extent by William Wordsworth in his 1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, when science became "familiar" to society, and as such, the relationships between science and religion, and critical views of the purpose of poetry, were forced to change (250). In this chapter, there is a particular focus on one of the most eminent contemporary scientific works, that of Charles Lyell in his *Principles of Geology* (1830-33), to assess the level of reaction to scientific and religious issues that are reflected by Arnold in "Dover Beach" at the time of its composition. This thesis gives an insight into the relevance of poetry to science, and the relationship of conflict between the geological theory of scientists

such as Lyell and Christian theology. This shows how Arnold projects for his narrator an attitude of alienation and liminality, as he views both science and religion as necessary, but favours neither as an absolute solution to the contemporary situation.

It is interesting that amid scientific revelations made by natural scientists such as Jean Baptiste Lamarck, who in 1802 claimed an evolution and heredity of all natural entities towards greater and more complex physical attributes<sup>9</sup>, that Wordsworth felt compelled to revise the 1802 edition of his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* with an addition that commented on the appropriate relationships between poetry and science. This addition insisted on the action that poetry must take if science became 'familiar' to everyday life (249). Upon writing the addition at the beginning of the century, Wordsworth assesses the precedence of poetry over science, in that poetry "cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance", whereas science is only "a personal and individual acquisition...and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow beings" (249). In this Wordsworth asserted that poetry had a duty to bring nourishment to humanity and society as a whole, whereas science had no real connection to the human state and relationship with the world. He continues by pondering what would be the duty of poetry if science were to become "familiar", and so become a concern to the race as a whole, if "the labours of men of science" were to:

...create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, [then] the Poet will sleep then no more than at

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<sup>9</sup> See: Lamarck, J.B. *Zoological Philosophy: An Exposition with Regard to the Natural History of Animals*. Trans. Hugh Elliot. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.



present, but he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of Science...he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the Science itself (250).

By the mid-nineteenth century, this emergence of scientific theory into the social conscience indeed came to pass, as early evolutionary works such as Lamarck's were succeeded by works such as Lyell's *Principles* (1830-33) and Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the History of Creation* (1844). These works certainly encompassed a "material revolution" in the human condition, and the "impressions" that humanity receives of itself, as they challenged what had previously been accepted to be the condition of our life on Earth being at the behest of God himself, who had been the original and purposeful architect of our physical world. The old acceptance that humanity was created 'in the image of God' was challenged as scientists such as Chambers traced an evolutionary creation of the human species as descendant from others, rather than there being an original design and purpose to the human biology and appearance. In a primarily Christian era these questions and challenges, once made explicit and unavoidable by the explosive publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, was to shake society and its faith to the core.

Therefore, as predicted by Wordsworth, the mid-eighteenth century poet had a duty to assist the "man of Science" in bringing "sensation" to the "objects" that they had brought before society (250). Charles Lyell published his *Principles* in three editions between 1830 and 1833, and these works presented a "uniformist hypothesis" that claimed that the physical earth as we know it was formed and influenced by powerful forces that were still observable at the present time, rather than by an external intentional design (Stevenson 28). His works had a

great impact on intellectuals including poets such as Lord Alfred Tennyson, who is known to have purchased the volumes at the same time as he was writing his famous poem "In Memoriam, to A.H.H.", in 1837, and who was generally accepted to be "a poet who understand science" (Stevenson 60, Snyder 27). Reflections of his interest in scientific theory can be seen in Tennyson's writing of "In Memoriam"<sup>10</sup>, which took nearly seventeen years to publish from the time it was begun<sup>11</sup>. Once published in 1850, "contemporary readers",

...appreciated Tennyson's poem because it frankly confronted the crisis of faith that troubled so many mid-century thinkers...[as] by 1850 the scientific and technological progress on which the Victorians so prided themselves seemed painfully at odds with the religious beliefs and practices of earlier times. Readers were therefore grateful to Tennyson for combining a poetic exploration of such concepts as evolution with an ultimate affirmation of faith (Gray xiii-xiv).

Tennyson's work does not only reflect contemporaneous issues surrounding evolution, but also those surrounding geological theory, and some of these points are discussed within this chapter in relation to the strong geological representation in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach".

Tennyson's "In Memoriam" had a profound impact on society in these contexts, as society had

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<sup>10</sup> For more information and readings upon Tennyson's discussions, there are many excellent articles, notably: Gliserman, Susan. "Early Victorian Science Writers and Tennyson's In Memoriam: A Study in Cultural Exchange." *Victorian Studies*. 18.4(1975). 437-459.

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<sup>11</sup> Upon the death of his friend in 1833, Tennyson is said to have written a short poem dedicated to the ship that was to return Hallam's body home to England, and this poem was later to become a small section of "In Memoriam". This "drawn out and piecemeal process of composition... was not concluded until the elegy was published at last in May 1850" ("In Memoriam" xii).

begun to feel a need to explore personal applications of the conflict between theory and theology, and poetry appears to be instrumental in this, as Wordsworth predicted. From this time there are notable examples of efforts by scientists themselves, such as James Clerk Maxwell and Matthew Arnold's close friend John Tyndale<sup>12</sup>, endeavouring to write poetry as a means of making sense of their own discipline's theories in relation to theology and human existence, and- "although never as skillfully executed as the work of Tennyson and his ilk, these poems are witty, playful, and reveal much about the interests and personalities of their writers" (Collins, paragraph 3). The works of 'literary' poets and 'scientific' poets all endeavour to bring the kind of human and emotional application to science that Wordsworth predicted would be necessary.

It is not surprising, then, that Matthew Arnold felt compelled to write a poem which showed reflections of the scientific theories that had caused conflict within society and challenged "The Sea of Faith" in an emotive representation that contrasts greatly with, but adds human appeal to, the dry and factual treatise of "the man of Science" (21). In this he followed the predictions of Wordsworth, but importantly that is not to say that Arnold attacks religion on scientific grounds, nor defends science against religious outrage. In his 1873 critical work, "Literature and Dogma", Arnold shows a deep understanding of what he saw as the correct composition of human life, which included essential room for both science and art, and was analysed by Fred A. Dudley in "Matthew Arnold and Science" (1942) as being composed of:

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<sup>12</sup> See publications such as Francis O'Gorman's "John Tyndale as Poet" *The Review of English Studies*. 48.191 (1997) and Daniel Brown's *The Poetry of Victorian Scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2013) for more information and examples of these scientists' poetry.

...Conduct, morality, goodness (three-fourths), plus art, beauty, feeling, emotion (one eighth), plus science, knowledge, truth (one eighth, further divisible into an awareness of fact and an attitude of disinterested objectivity) equals Life, an integer, a perfect unity (281).

This "curiously precise elaboration" of Arnold's calculus shows a desire to accommodate science and art as much as those issues such as morality, goodness and conduct that often are derived from religious faith (281). These principles, to Arnold, should be based on "objectivity" and detachment from emotive issues (281). The poetry of "Dover Beach" is an example of this principle, as Arnold does not emotionally engage with either side of the conflicting factions of science and religion, but instead seeks to accommodate some degree of each in order to maintain a personal balance.

Just as Tennyson's poetry and scientific works by such men as Chambers and later Charles Darwin made an effort to accommodate a certain degree of Christian influence in allowing for an original Creator of sorts, Arnold wishes to preserve the religion of society and find a medium in which the two fields could co-exist. In 1853 he wrote to his friend Arthur Clough, contending that "poetry must convey the emotional and spiritual power that religion was losing in an era of sectarian strife on the one hand and agnostic indifference on the other" (*Poetry Foundation*, paragraph 23). However, despite his personal lack of religious commitment, Arnold goes on to qualify that he,

...would have others—most others, stick to the old religious dogmas because I sincerely feel that this *warmth* is the great blessing, and this frigidity the great curse—and on the

old religious road they have still the best chance of getting the one and avoiding the other (*Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1853*).

Earlier in the letter, Arnold had discussed the Reformation of the Christian Church in the sixteenth century and "the human spirit" which had an impact on the poetic works of that time, and goes on to suggest that a "vigorous crop of new ideas", meaning Protestantism, that took root at this time was in the nineteenth century "beginning to fail". In the Poetry Foundation's biography of Arnold it is suggested that this letter "foreshadows" Arnold's later literary criticism of the 1870's, in which he seeks to promote a "humanistic reinterpretation" of the bible to "preserve...Christianity for the masses" (paragraph 22). In his criticism Arnold can be seen to rally against what he saw as "theological metaphysics" that read the bible too literally with God as "man" rather than an abstract power, and call for the Church to establish itself, like science, on "veritable proposition, or perish" (Dudley 281-2). Here Dudley is referencing Arnold's discussion in *Literature and Dogma* (1873) of the action that the church must take, as he believed that,

...the bible cannot possibly die; but then the churches cannot even conceive the Bible without the gloss they at present put upon it, and this gloss, as certainly cannot live...this basis is inevitably doomed (viii-ix).

He states in *Literature and Dogma* that the church must "find, for the Bible, a basis for something that can be verified, instead of something that can be assumed", as with the assumption of a "Great Personal First Cause, the moral and intelligent Governor of the Universe" (ix-x).

This belief that the church must move away from ideas of purposeful creation by an omnipotent God was a subject that Arnold appears to have dwelt upon at length throughout his life, as in 1870 he wrote to Thomas Henry Huxley, commenting that,

*The gospel* itself was not what [Protestant dissenters] imagined, or as they imagined, but that it followed the same law as other productions, was a thing growing naturally and with many parts which must fall away from it or be transformed, and not comprehended rightly so long as it is isolated as they isolate it ("Matthew Arnold to T.H. Huxley", 10 May 1870).

Here Arnold states with definition that parts of the gospel "must fall away or be transformed" if it is to be comprehended, and must be viewed in the light of emerging human knowledge of the creation of the world and place of humanity upon it. Although Arnold is seen to have been unaligned with any formal religion for much of his life, he appears to have worked towards preserving Christianity "for the masses", as an avoidance of the "frigidity" that would prevail without it, even if he could not commit himself to these same beliefs. It is unsurprising, then, that Arnold's "Dover Beach", as it is presumed to have been written in 1851, is symptomatic of an emotive and emotional response to issues arising from the emergence of scientific theories of evolution, with its depictions of the "long, withdrawing roar" of "The Sea of Faith" that he perceived to take place thereafter (21,25). He takes the side of neither party in this poem, but places his narrator in representation of humanity as a whole, that will be left with only "confused alarms of struggle and flight" if the "ignorant armies" cannot be reconciled (36,37). Perhaps Arnold saw himself and his inability to commit

to any religion as already having resigned to this position, allowing him to interject his own feelings into "Dover Beach" and give to the poem the pervasive melancholy and foreboding that the reader feels throughout their reading.

In her 1973 article, "On Dover Beach", Ruth Pitman outlines the relevance of Charles Lyell's work to Victorian society, and specifically to Matthew Arnold, as a basis for her discussions of the motif of erosion in "Dover Beach". Following an outline of the Arnold family's interest in Dover as a geographical place, she states that,

Arnold's interest in Dover, like his use of geological reference, proves nothing about his sources. He could have read the descriptions of...Dover and Dover Straits in Lyell, but he apparently never mentions him in his writings. Lyell, however, and those who argued with him, dominated mid-nineteenth-century geological thought. [Lyell's]... views were widely reported...Arnold had nothing to do with professional geologists...but if he knew something about Dover Straits and the relation of land masses, he is likely to have had an intelligent layman's concern with contemporary scientific debate (118-9).

It is inconceivable that Arnold, as a poet and critic who was preoccupied with human situation and society, could have been oblivious to a work that had such a massive impact on the understanding of human life and social states. Within the outline of the passage above, Pitman mentions his friendship with T.H Huxley, the eminent biologist. An article by W.H.G. Armytage from 1953 outlines in detail the relationship between Arnold and Huxley, who was "then the foremost protagonist of the scientific school", indicating that Arnold both discussed

theological matters with Huxley and attended his lectures on physical science (346-7). As discussed above, Arnold and his contemporaries saw an obligation for poetry to help society to understand and interpret science. Pitman mentions in her article that Lyell displays a Uniformitarian attitude to geology that was opposed by Catastrophist thinkers, but moves on to dedicate her article to showing the way that "Dover Beach" and other poems by Arnold can be read broadly in terms of geological representations (111). However, this chapter uses Pitman's excellent point as a beginning to show that "Dover Beach" can be read specifically as an illustration of the Uniformitarian view, and of its limitations. Arnold appears to accept this view, but shows that it holds no possible nourishment for the human soul: meaning that theology must 'mend its ways' in order to provide it. As such Arnold's attitude is one of liminality and alienation, as he sees the positive and negative aspects of both sides whilst only his removed situation allows him to appreciate their limitations.

To return to the poem, geological representations in "Dover Beach" must be identified, before more specific issues are introduced. Clearly, within the first verse of the poem there is a preoccupation with the physiology of the earth, which focuses on formations of rock and its state as subjected to physical forces of time and tide. The opening proposition that "the sea is calm to-night" emphasizes the focus to come on "The" sea as being central to Arnold's iconography and the effects that this sea can be seen as having over time (1). The hyphenation of "to-night" indicates simultaneously that there has been a movement in time "to" or towards night and away from day, as well as indicating that the sea is only "calm" 'tonight', rather than on all nights (1). The next line continues to elaborate on the theme of time as "the tide is full" at the moment the narrator views the scene, but this introduces the idea of the in-coming and out-going of the sea in a "full" and unending tidal cycle that is



influenced by "the moon" (2). Arnold's use of the words "the moon lies fair" initiates a question of truth and "lie" that is reflected in the last verse, and suggests that the 'fullness' and "calm" that is assumed is an illusion that covers the true power and effect of lunar and tidal power which is presented in succeeding lines (2).

In chapter XX of *Principles* Lyell discusses in great detail how the "forces [that] may be viewed...as employed in destroying portions of the solid crust of the earth, and...as reproductive of new strata" had been at play in the creation of the cliffs at Dover, which had "suffered greatly and diminished in height" due to these "forces" since Shakespearian times, when the heights would have been much more "fearful and dizzy" (302). The relation between Lyell's comments upon this specific place and Arnold's poem are twofold, firstly as there is precedent for the poetical use of Dover cliffs in discussions of reason and imagination, and secondly as the geology of the opposed landlines of England and France at this point give rise to questions surrounding unity and separation. In summation of this first aspect, Lyell points us towards a Shakespearian use of the Dover cliffs as being of "fearful and dizzy heights", and if the reader turns to Winfried Schleiner's 1985 article "Justifying the Unjustifiable: The Dover Cliff Scene in *King Lear*", the relevance of this inclusion becomes obvious. Schleiner discusses a scene in *King Lear*, Act IV Scene IV, when blind and "Melancholy" Gloucester wishes to commit suicide, and means to do so by leaping from Dover cliffs with the aid of Edgar, who instead keeps Gloucester on level ground and fools him into believing that he has leapt from and yet survived the "fearful and dizzy" heights of the cliffs<sup>13</sup> (340-341). Edgar hopes that the shock of this "the violent approach" will work in

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"rectifying the imagination by making it properly receptive to reason"<sup>14</sup> (Schleiner 340). A notable part of Edgar's deception focuses on the confusion between the human senses when Gloucester questions whether he is really making an ascent to a lofty cliff edge, as Edgar suggests that Gloucester's newly blind-state may be affecting his sense of hearing and sight:

Edgar: Hark, do you hear the sea?

Gloucester:                      No, truly.

Edgar: Why then your other senses grow imperfect

By your eyes' anguish (*King Lear* iv.iv. 4-6, quoted in Schleiner 340).

In this thesis the relevance of Arnold's use of representations of human senses has already been discussed, in the context of the ways in which this makes the poem more relevant to the reader. The excerpt from *King Lear* above now brings a new light to these assessments, as thoughts turn towards representations of truth and lie which often hang upon perceptions of the senses, such as sight, smell and hearing. Whilst Arnold convinces the reader of the validity of the scene that his narrator describes with a detailed account of what he can see from his window, conviction is strengthened by his description of the "sweet" scent of the "night-air" and the audible "grating roar" of the tide on the shore (6,9). In *King Lear*, Gloucester cannot see the place that he treads, but despite the efforts of Edgar he questions

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<sup>14</sup> This farce is made more believable by Shakespeare in his work than this short summation would have us believe is likely, as he handles the deception by an extraordinary amount of psychological cunning on the part of Edgar in his efforts to make Gloucester, and the reader, believe this is possible.

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<sup>14</sup> This depiction, Schleiner tells us, is not unreasonable when Renaissance attitudes to mental illness and 'melancholy' are taken into account, as it was generally thought that the 'imagination' was a negative aspect of human psychology which was inextricably linked to deception and false impression, the cure for which should also be found in the imagination, hence Edgar's hope in curing Gloucester's suicidal state with an imaginary fall and survival (338).

his situation based on his reliance on the remaining senses. He does not 'blindly' accept the truth that is presented to him by others. Arnold's narrator, however, presents an absolute faith in what he believes to be true in representations of sense, but he also suggests that this solid construction of a truthful perception may be a "lie" (2). The overall effect is one of a conflict between truth and fallacy, between reason and reality. The possibility is suggested when comparing the two representations that a person may become 'blind' to real truth if they accept what is presented to them on face value.

Lyell's link between the geology of Dover cliffs and Shakespeare's *King Lear* can have a profound effect on the reader's perception of Arnold's use of place in "Dover Beach", as there are associations with historical references to a battle between imagination and reason, and the human interpretation of truth. "The straits" that the moon is to "lie" upon represents the line between imagination and reason, that is representative of Lyell's desire for a reasoned interpretation of natural history rather than one based on "delusion" and "mystical" beliefs of the imagination (2-3, Lyell 111-113). However Arnold's implication is that 'blind' acceptance of any information such as that presented as solid fact by contemporary scientists, can be fallible, and in fact just as harmful as allowing one's self to be ruled by imagination. This questions the human interpretation of truth, as the "lie" of the moon is presented on "the straits" as a fallacy that hides its violent attack on the earth under a guise of "calm", and yet the alternative, manmade light that shines from the opposing coast, is only intermittent, ultimately fails, "and is gone" (2,3,1). Arnold creates opposition between imagination and reason, which can be read in this context as representative of a belief in a supernatural deity and the 'reason' of science, in order to discuss the human struggle in extracting truth from the two presentations.

When "Dover Beach" is read in light of this, the references to geology and issues of the construction and age of the physical world become obvious within the first verse. There is much that can be ascribed to an influence of Lyell's *Principles* in its depictions of erosion and development of strata, and again this returns to Arnold's choice of "Dover Beach" as setting for his poem. A pertinent section of Lyell's theories on the forces that created the world as humanity knows it come from Chapter V of the 1840 edition, entitled "Prejudices that Retarded the Progress of Geology". A summary of this chapter can be found in the passage where Lyell explains that "the first observers" of geology,

...conceived the monuments which the geologist endeavors to decipher to relate to an original state of the earth, or to a period when there were causes in activity, distinct, in kind and degree, from those now constituting the economy of nature. These views were gradually modified, and some of them entirely abandoned in proportion as observations were multiplied, and the signs of former mutations more skillfully interpreted. Many appearances, which had for a long time been regarded as indicating mysterious and extraordinary agency, were finally recognized as the necessary result of the laws now governing the material world... [these causes] may have been sufficient to produce...the endless diversity of effects, of which the shell of the earth has preserved the memorials; and...the recurrence of analogous changes is expected by them in time to come... In the early stages of advancement... an eclipse, an earthquake, a flood, or an approach of a comet...are regarded as prodigies. The same delusion prevails as to the moral phenomena, and many of these are ascribed

to the intervention of demons, ghosts, witches and other immaterial and supernatural agents (111-112).

Lyell continues to explain that these mysteries are, over time, banished as geology becomes more sophisticated and understanding greater, until,

The philosopher at last becomes convinced of the undeviating uniformity of secondary causes; and, guided by his faith in this principle, he...often rejects the fabulous tales of former times, on the grounds of their being irreconcilable with the experience of more enlightened ages (113).

He goes on to defend "the first cultivators of geology" in what he now regards to be their erroneous interpretations, as it would have been impossible for them to have come to any other conclusion than that the earth had been modified by "conformity" within the "last several thousand years" as they were "under a delusion as to the age of the world, and the date of the first creation of animated beings" (113).

There are three pertinent points to be derived from Lyell's extracts above, the first being that the physical world could now be assumed to have been formed due to physical forces which were still actively working at the time, and that these forces result in the "endless diversity of effects" that geologists were concerned with (111). Secondly, Lyell believed that this contradicted the assumption that the physical appearance of the earth was due to a "mysterious and extraordinary agency" behind its construction, the belief in which is aligned with such "delusions" as the "moral" belief in "demons, ghosts" that are relegated to such

"fabulous tales of former times" as had inhibited human understanding previously. Thirdly, these new appreciations of the forces that had and still acted in shaping the physical world denied the "delusion" of a mythical creator when equated to the emerging understanding of the age of the earth and the time that animated beings had inhabited it. These are all points that can all be interpreted as being under discussion in Arnold's "Dover Beach".

Arnold's choice of the Dover cliffs as a setting for his poem is highly pertinent. The physical appearance and composition of the cliff lines are demonstrative of geological investigation as they expose to the human eye "portions of the solid crust of the earth" that had been "destroy[ed] by Lyell's "forces", resulting in the "reproduct[ion] of new strata" (302). Arnold describes the English cliffs at Dover as "glimmering", as the moonlight reflects on the chalk composition of the rock. *The Oxford English Dictionary* states that,

...chemically, chalk consists of carbonate of lime with some impurities. Geologically, it is a deep-sea formation composed of fragments of shells of Foraminifera, abounding in certain important animal fossils, and interspersed with nodules of flint.

In terms of Lyell's theory the chalk composition of the cliffs literally embodies the idea that the physical earth was made by active forces, as he showed that the rock was formed by the sea over time as it deposited the fossils of long dead ocean organisms, thus indicating the lack of "mysterious and extraordinary agency" in its formation over millions of years. Darwin was to later suggest that other chalk formations in the south-east of England would have taken around 300 million years to reach their then state of erosion- however, although nineteenth-century scientists predicted the age of the world 'only' at these millions of years, rather than

the billions that contemporary science rests upon, there was still an incomprehensible variation between contemporary scientists' estimates and the accepted 6,000 year supposition on which Christians theology was based (Cain, section I).

The "forces" that Lyell describes in *Principles* are clearly portrayed by Arnold in "Dover Beach" as being illustrative of an "eternal note of sadness" (14). As previously indicated, Arnold's "sea is calm to-night", rather than on all nights, which impresses the idea that the tide is itself "eternal" as an unending physical manifestation of the forces of the moon's pull on the earth (1,14,2). The moon is described as "fair", which can be interpreted as an allusion to its beautiful appearance, but also as an indication of its pale, white colour. Even though the sea is "calm", its physical force is still destructive to the rock, as "pebbles" that have previously broken from the body of the rock are continuously "fl[ui]ng...up the high strand" (1,10-11). Similarly the pale, "fair" moon has exerted its power onto the rock itself, having "blanch'd" the "land" to the perceivably white colour of chalk (2,8). As well as the chalk of the Dover Cliffs, Arnold makes a reference to Lyell's development of "strata" in the problematic motif of a "girdle" as a representation of the layers of rock surrounding the earth's core in the third verse, which "round earth's shore/ Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd" (22-23). Again this is problematic, as Arnold mixes the iconography of his motifs, when his imagery constructs a simile between "The Sea of Faith" surrounding the earth "once", and a geological presentation of the physical mantle of the earth, with its layers and levels of strata (21-23). It is suggested that "Faith" loses the contest within this conflicted simile, as it is seen to be "retreating" in the face of the "night-wind" that is another example of Lyell's active forces (26-27).

In the third verse the personification of "The Sea of Faith" is highly problematic in view of Arnold's depiction of the earth's forces at play on Dover Beach, as once read in context the implication is that "Faith" is destructive and corrosive (21). This could suggest that although Arnold's land is illustrative of geological interest in its exposure of "new strata" by natural "forces", the land actually is not a figurative embodiment of 'Geology' or 'Science'. Instead, the land is an embodiment of humanity, whose life and soul is under violent attack from the combined but ultimately conflicting "forces" of "Faith" and science (21). This conflict is pointedly outlined in a direct reference to human presence in "come to the window", with a qualifying "only," as human life and belief in what is "sweet" is under conflict, creating a "long line of spray/ Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land" (6-8). Here is a visible result of the conflict whose ferocity produces a "long line of spray" when "The Sea of Faith" meets the human shore which has already been "blanch'd" by the natural "forces" of the moon that Lyell tells us has such power in shaping the earth (7,21,8). This can be viewed as a direct interpretation of the conflict detailed in the section of Lyell's theory above, between the scientific facts presented by geology and science, and the Christian belief in "mysterious and extraordinary agency" he dismissed as "fabulous tales" and "delusions" (111-113). Again, this could be interpreted as a presentation of the opposition between imagination and reason, as used as a motif in *King Lear's* Dover Cliffs scene. The mid-nineteenth century may have been described by scientists as "more enlightened" times, but the effect on humanity is that of "blanch[ing]" rather than enlightenment, which leaves human understanding pale and fragmented, with its core eroded into "pebbles" of doubt and inconstancy (Lyell 113, Arnold 8,10). The fluctuation caused by conflicting influences is reflected on the page of "Dover Beach" as the visible length of each line rises and falls, leaving "vast edges drear" on which humanity and their belief is reduced to "shingles", and the soul is left "naked" (27-28). The



pace of the rhythm quickens towards the end of the first verse, leading to a highly stressed conclusion to the conflict embodied within, and the result of this "bring[s]/ The eternal note of sadness in" (13-14).

The "eternal note of sadness" in "Dover Beach" is analogous to a perceived decline in religious faith, that was seen to be "retreating, to the breath" of scientific development in the nineteenth century (14,26). E.E. Snyder, in his article "Tennyson's Progressive Geology" (2010), argues convincingly that Tennyson showed Catastrophist views in "In Memoriam", as opposed to a Uniformitist view such as that shown by Lyell in *Principles* (27-28). He describes those aligned with Catastrophism, such as Tennyson, as "religious scientists" who wish to "harmonize" the mechanism of geology with the teleology of their faith, and those aligned with Uniformitarianism, as this thesis argues Matthew Arnold to be, as the "pure observer" who views the Catastrophist's efforts as being "beyond the scope of science proper" (28-29). Tennyson and Arnold explore the interaction between geology and faith in their poetry, but the two men approach the issue from two very different viewpoints. In "In Memoriam", Tennyson aligns himself with Catastrophist geological theory, which argued for the existence of progressive teleological development of species and habitation (Snyder 27-28). However, this chapter will now show that in "Dover Beach" Matthew Arnold aligns himself with Uniformitarians such as Lyell, who argued for the "non-progressive hypothesis" that claimed that humanity lived in a "cyclical world, in which a beginning cannot be traced, or an end foreseen" (28). The two respective poems of Tennyson and Arnold are both illustrative of their different allegiances and show opposing attitudes to what affect geology should have on interpretations of theology, or theology on the interpretations of geology.

Snyder points out in his examination of Tennyson's work that the "Prologue" of "In Memoriam" essentially encapsulates the "model by which to read the eventual reconciliation of faith and geology that is reached over the course" of the poem (29). As this section was written after the vast composition of the poem in 1849, it will be treated as a form of 'thesis statement' of the general views of Tennyson that are elaborated within the whole, for the purpose of this thesis (Tennyson 5, note 1). This prologue is forty-four lines long, split into eleven verses of four lines that are composed in a regular hexametric beat. This is typical of the composition of the rest poem. The regularity of Tennyson's composition is illustrative of his effort to present a reasoned affinity between issues of faith and the emerging scientific thought of contemporary scientists. He opens his "Prologue" with a direct appeal for his Deity to accept the belief and trust that humankind can offer, in the lines,

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,  
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,  
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,  
Believing where we cannot prove... (1-4).

The essence of the opening appeal names this Deity as the "immortal love", that cannot be fully understood by humanity, whom must "embrace" belief without discernible proof (1,3,4). The implication here is of an attitude that although God is the power behind geological creation and continued change, as is portrayed in "In Memoriam"'s prescription to Catastrophist theory, "it is impossible for humanity to understand his plan through the study of geology" (Snyder 27). He continues that:

We have but faith: we cannot know  
For knowledge is of things we see;  
And yet we trust it comes from thee... (21-23)

This is an important concept when comparison is made with elements of "Dover Beach", as Tennyson draws a line between human knowledge and belief, and between what is seen and what is felt to be true (21-22). Arnold's "love" is of a physical person rather than of a supernatural deity, and yet it is in this person that Arnold finds 'truth', in a similar way that Tennyson finds "trust" in his God ("Dover Beach" 29, Tennyson 23). Tennyson places this "trust" in the "immortal Love" as truth is indiscernible to humanity, in that "knowledge" is based only on "things we see", and "believing" must fill the void of what cannot be "prove[d]" by physical observation (23,1,22,4). Therefore, truth is only present in a belief and trust in the unseen supernatural Deity, and not in the limited knowledge of what can be proved by visual observation. This is an implicitly Catastrophist view, as "religious scientists" strove to find proof of teleologically progressive development in the physical earth, and as such interpreted "things we see" within the framework of belief in the unobservable (22).

Arnold, however, portrayed the knowledge of truth and human belief in an entirely different way, which aligns with Lyell's Uniformitarian stance. The only truth possible for Arnold exists between the "one" of the human self, and "another" equal that is a mortal "love" (29-30). This directly opposes Tennyson's trust and faith in an "immortal Love" (1). For Arnold, the alternative to this truth is "a land of dreams", "which seems/ To lie..." in its claims of unobservable consolations such as beauty, variety and newness (30-31,32). His conclusions regarding the correct placement of trust and truth are drawn from knowledge not only of the

observable things we see, but also from subjective human senses such as that there is "really neither joy, nor love, nor light/ Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain" (33-34). The inclusion in Arnold's list of the sources of human knowledge of "love" and "light" are problematic, but important when viewed in terms of Uniformitarian principles, as they dispute the Catastrophist belief in transcendence and an "immortal Love" (Tennyson 1). Arnold clearly argues that the only 'real' existence of love and truth lies between humanity in the physical world- the "land of dreams" or Christian spiritual plain, is a "lie" if it claims to hold any eternal "Love" (30-31). This aligns with Lyellian geological theory, which "insists on mass extinctions and non-directionalism, [claiming that] there is no meaning to be found in death", as opposed to Catastrophist theory which claims that the human soul is joined in a general spiritual self after death, implicating the loss of the individual self, but also a meaning to death in the belief of an acceptance of the individual into a greater 'truth' (Snyder 27,29). Arnold portrays a belief that the only 'truth' available to humanity lies in the individual soul and its joining with another, as the "light" that Catastrophists such as Tennyson describe as "a beam in darkness" is in fact a "lie" (33, Tennyson 24).

For Arnold, death promises only the kind of "darkling plain" envisaged by his narrator, which echoes with the "confused alarms of struggle and flight" of humanity that is left with no "beam in [the] darkness" to give it hope (35-36, Tennyson 24). Arnold portrays a hopeless situation for humanity, as Christian faith in transcendence is a "lie", but the consolation he offers of human "love" gives very little comfort, as it heads towards oblivion and unending darkness. In this way, knowledge for Arnold is a painful acquisition that only makes clear the futility of life on earth. For thousands of years human minds, such as that of Sophocles, had questioned the truth of the relationship between faith and the physical world. This question

will eternally "ebb and flow" in an unending "human misery", but will remain unanswered (17-18).

Arnold places his narrator in "Dover Beach" as unable to accept religious faith due to his view of human 'truth', but the consequences of this are that he is left in hopelessness. Therefore, religious faith may offer a more pleasant alternative in its offer of transcendence, but theology itself must adapt to emerging human knowledge of the world, rather than scientific discovery being interpreted in view of existing spiritual belief. The "warmth" offered by religion is preferable to the kind of "frigidity" that is the place of Arnold's narrator, but "theological metaphysics", which Lyell describes as "delusions" must be reinterpreted in view of advances in human knowledge, to base itself on "veritable proposition, or perish" (Dudley 281-2, Lyell 111-112).

Arnold's stance on religious theology as indicated in "Dover Beach" is made explicit in his poem "The Grande Chartreuse", which was composed during a visit to the Alps in 1850, very shortly before the composition of "Dover Beach" in 1851. The physical place of the Chartreuse is an embodiment of the kind of liminality and transitory state that Arnold creates in "Dover Beach". An 1832 edition of *The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* prints an article- maybe with the aim of describing destinations that the rich saw upon their great Victorian 'Tours' to readers who would have been too poor to travel themselves- describes the Chartreuse as being on the "very edge of France, close to the borders of Savoy" at the most western line of the Alps, isolated from all of the main local towns (65). Interestingly, it also describes the position of the nearby "Guiers Vif" river, which is also known as "Guiers Mort", conversely meaning "Quick" or "Living" river, or "Dead" river,

respectively (65). This is, therefore, a fitting place for Arnold to set a poem that alludes to issues of alienation, liminality and the life or death of religion and the human soul. In "The Grande Chartreuse" Arnold continuously alludes to the resident Monks as being incased by their monastery as in a "coffin" or a "tomb": they are living "their death in life" (48,72,54). He states that he has come to the Chartreuse, "not as their friend, or child", but to stand beside the monks as a fellow man who is "forlorn" and alienated from the modern world, left "wandering between two worlds, one dead/ The other powerless to be born" (79,88-89,85). The traditional iconological Christian faith that the monks maintain is "deride[d]" by the world as "dead", but a new, more acceptable interpretation of the faith to modernity is as yet "powerless to be born" (89,85-86). These parallel the ideas later set out in "Dover Beach", as the narrator is left stranded "as on a darkling plain" after traditional faith has failed under the scrutiny of modern science, but no cohesive alternative has been left to humanity, who are now left with nothing but human love in which to console themselves.

Arnold's narrator longs for a faith that offers consolation and comfort to the human condition but that is also based on "veritable proposition", and as such is compatible with growing human knowledge and reason (Dudley 282). M.H. Abrams comments that in Arnold's lifetime, "the war between science and poetry was openly extended into a war between science and religion", and Arnold saw the need to save what he viewed as being essential in religion by extending to it the principles that he had already applied to poetry: "the innovation" being "to place on poetry the tremendous responsibility of the functions once performed by the exploded dogmas of religion and religious philosophy" (334). Hence the preoccupation in "Dover Beach" with religious and scientific conflict is essential to understanding the meaning of the poem, which seeks to show humanity, through poetry, a

way in which to find a new faith in human love. However, until these ideals of renewed poetry and religion come to fruition, Arnold appears to wish humanity to take some kind of sanctuary in what remains of the old faith, as at Chartreuse he wished to find a place to:

...hide...in your gloom profound  
Ye solemn seats of holy pain!  
Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round,  
Til I possess my soul again (91-94).

"Dover Beach" as a poem is immersed in preoccupations with the geology of the physical earth inhabited by humanity, yet an existence lived by the knowledge that can be drawn from this by scientific reason is presented as being as barren as the exposed cliff faces of Dover. Arnold wishes for humanity to take shelter in the "warmth" of faith whilst accepting the reason of knowledge that was becoming increasingly a part of mid-nineteenth century life- not because he believed there to be any 'truth' in an extraordinary agency behind Creation- but because he perceived the necessary "veritable proposition" of an adjusted faith to be as yet "powerless to be born" ("Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1849", "The Grande Chartreuse 89). He shows a wish to preserve faith, albeit it a new reasoned faith that does not found itself on the availability of a "supernatural agent", in a way similar to that expressed by William Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, where in Book VI he appeals that,

...if Past and Future be the wings  
On whose support harmoniously conjoined  
Moves the great spirit of human knowledge, spare

These courts of mystery, where a step advanced  
Between the portals of the shadowy rocks  
Leaves far behind life's treacherous vanities (448-453).

If the "past and future" have "harmoniously conjoined" enough through geological discovery as to sufficiently "move...human knowledge", then a space must still be reserved for faith, which is the only offer available to humanity of an escape from human "life's treacherous" position. The narrator of "Dover Beach", as a "pure observer" of the interactions between geology and faith, is alienated from the comfort of faith, but perceives the need of the souls of humanity for comfort.



## Chapter 4:

"The Sea of Life" in "Dover Beach".

This chapter follows on from discussions of poetic theory and the effect of science on religion to show the ways that Arnold applies feelings of alienation and liminality to questions of the place and point of human life. He effectively personifies "The Sea of Faith" in "Dover Beach" to represent the gestational female body in order to introduce problems that stem from the futility of the human life from conception to death, and the liminal place that is the human Life between (21). Issues of alienation are felt in his portrayal of a separation between humanity as a Child and its literal Mother, as well as the Mother that is Nature. Several of Arnold's poetic works are considered alongside "Dover Beach" in order to investigate the extent of these creations, and the ideas drawn from this are then assessed in view of relevant critical works. Added to close readings of "Dover Beach", these discussions will show the importance of Arnold's characterisation of "The Sea of Faith" as a focal motif representing the alienation and liminality that the narrator feels after discussing issues of poetic form and the effect of science on faith (21).

In his 1967 essay, "Dover Beach and the Tragic Sense of Eternal Recurrence", Murray Krieger finds Arnold's motif of a humanised ocean to be "much more successfully handled than elsewhere in his work", due to the way that the poem grows towards a human subtext in the second and third verses, without losing view of the initial natural grounding that is so carefully constructed in the first (41). He convincingly argues that "when the development and

application" of Arnold's metaphor and tenor are made in the poem, "we do not feel them as unnatural" due to this gradual progression(41). Kreiger notes that Arnold's application of the "stereotypical use of a metaphorical sea" in other poems such as "To Marguerite- Continued", "Despondency" and "Human Life", which were all published in 1852, fail to make the idea "come alive through his manipulation of the central image of the poem", as he does so successfully in "Dover Beach" (41 n.2). The application of this metaphor in "Dover Beach" is however separate and apart from the use of similar in Arnold's other poems. Whereas the examples given above refer to "the sea of Life" in various formats, the metaphor of "Dover Beach" specifically refers to the "Sea of Faith" (64.21). "To Marguerite- Continued" names "the sea of life" which is dotted with small "islands" of humanity, where "we mortals live *alone*" (1-4). "Despondency" identifies the narrator as being "on life's cold sea", where thoughts from above "rain" only fleetingly "And never come again" (2, 8). Similarly, "Human Life" depicts "life's incognisable sea" and "the sea of life by night", on which humanity floats without intention or direction, at the mercy of "some unknown powers" (8,27,26). However, as Krieger indicates, these metaphors are not developed on a natural level in quite the same way as they are in "Dover Beach", and they are not marked out as being humanised to quite the same extent as "The Sea of Faith" (21). The capitalisation of the name, unlike the other examples given, marks the image out as being central to the construction of the poem. Arnold may have deliberated at length, and have been plagued by indecision regarding this capitalisation, as the original copy of "Dover Beach" from 1867's *New Poems* reads plainly as "The sea of faith", however this was changed in the 1869 edition to "The Sea of Faith", back to "The sea of faith" in 1877, and again back to "The Sea of Faith" in 1885. This was the last edition to be published in Arnold's lifetime, and so most modern editions of the poem remain capitalised<sup>15</sup>. Whether this was a conscious decision by Arnold or by his

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publishers, the strength of the effect that these changes had remain. This simple typographical component changes the emphasis and power of the personification created, as "the sea of faith" is a subjective poetic metaphor similar to "the sea of life" used somewhat loosely in Arnold's other poems, but "The Sea of Faith" is a more objective, literal embodiment of the central idea of the poem. The Sea of Faith is, as can be seen from several aspects of the poem, a person. The Sea of Faith is a woman.

The central theme of "Dover Beach" is concluded by Krieger as being a portrayal of "the repetitiveness of the human condition and its purposeless gyrations", but this motif is transposed onto the figure of "The Sea of Faith" in the poem in the construction of an image of a female body, its reproduction and subsequent feelings of loss and longing, separation and alienation (46-7). This assertion rests upon an image in the third verse of "Dover Beach" that constructs a complex image that is somewhat jarring in the flow of the poem thus far-

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd (21-23).

The introduction of "The Sea of Faith", despite its strong personified implications, appears to be quite a natural progression as the emphasis so far has been on a seascape that is subsequently

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<sup>8</sup> Scanned copies of all of the original texts from 1867, 1868, 1869, 1877, and 1885 edition of poetry can be found at through Hathitrust Digital Library (online).

applied to a human level by the shift to a Sophoclean perspective (21). The image of "The Sea of Faith" having been "once, too, at the full", like the full tide in the first verse, sits easily as an image of the world being lovingly enveloped by Faith as by the oceans. However, a sudden move to the image of "the folds of a bright girdle furl'd" does not appear to sit as easily within the framework of the poem so far, or of that to come. The only references made in the first two verses to physical objects with human implications are of a fleeting light "on the French coast", and to the window from which the narrator surveys the scene below him (3,6). As is discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the light and the window are used as metaphorical framing devices, to introduce concepts of alternative psychological plains and metaphysical space. However, they do not really relate on any human level to a physical object in the same way that a "girdle" does. Indeed, even though the window effectively 'frames' the narrator and is linked to his unseen companion by him calling out, there is no physical reference to the narrator or his companion to the place in which they stand, to their appearance or even to their identity. In this way the "bright girdle furl'd" is a problematic image, as it is too much of a strong humanised *object* to fit with the rest of the poem. Even verbally saying the line, moving from the 'br' sound of "bright" to the 'gir' sound of "girdle", and then to an 'f' and 'rl'd' sound of "furl'd" feels like a bit of a tongue twister, as it does not flow in anything like that same way as "the moon-blanch'd land" or the "tremulous cadence slow" have previously done (8,13).

This image stands out considerably from the rest of "Dover Beach", and once read within its surrounding context, alternative meanings are implied in the rest of the text, and new depictions are caused to form in the mind of the reader. This leads the reader to reimagine and reassess the surrounding references in a different way, as the image of a female body and the

"round"-ness and "full"-ness suggested by the line above is strengthened by the assonance of "once", "too", "round" and "shore" (22). With the visual appearance of the repeated 'O', there is a suggestion of a distended and swollen female body, like that of gestation, and from this image the emphasis of the ebb and flow of the sea's tide in the first verse takes on new possibilities, as,

...the waves [to] draw back, and fling,

At their return, up the high strand,

Begin, and cease, and then again begin (10-12),

This motif is also representative of the ebb and flow of the pain of contractions in childbirth as the "pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling" become the product of the labour that is eventually expelled from the water that has carried it, and left upon "the moon-blanch'd land" (10,8). The child of the female body is effectively lost to its mother's and "the eternal note of sadness" and agony of separation begins (14). The Mother can "now...only hear/ Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar", and there is emptiness in the "vast edges drear/ And naked shingles of the world" (24-25,27-28).

As the embodiment of the Mother has been identified with the sea, or "The Sea of Faith", it can be assumed that the Child is represented by the narrator (21). The first hand reference to "I" in the third verse, which is separated from the presentation of "The Sea of Faith" by the girdle

image, seems to bear this out (21, 24). The termination of the previous image in a solid full stop at "lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.", followed by the qualifying "but" of "but now I only hear", suggests an abrupt severance between the Mother and the Child, and the narrator can "now only hear" the "melancholy" of a "withdrawing roar" of the Mother, as he is left "naked" as a new-born in the world (23-28). The feeling of loneliness is palpable from this verse, as the first has represented the affinity between the Mother as sea-image and the narrator or child when he is enveloped by the sea image in the verse as if by the Mother's waters in the womb. The second verse implies that the child feels a connection to humanity as a whole and to his predecessors in history, when the "turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery" takes over in a metaphoric representation of labour, as all people of all ages have made the same journey into the world as he must do now (17-18). Therefore, by the third verse the narrator or child is left alone and separated from the Mother by "vast edges drear" (27). He is left in a place that is comparative to that of the narrator in Arnold's "To Marguerite- Continued", where "the shoreless watery wild" no longer meets with the Mother of the sea, and "we mortal millions live *alone.*" (3-4).

The invocation of a Mother-Child separation and its implicit feelings of isolation, alienation and longing for renewed unity are not unusual in Arnold's poetry. Similar central metaphors are used in the poems "Stanzas on a Gypsy Child by the Seashore, Douglas, Isle of Man" (1849) and "The Future" (1852). "Gypsy Child", which was published in *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* (1849) under the pseudonym of 'A' and subsequently omitted from the majority of later publications, presents the Mother-child relationship transposed onto the motif of a gypsy child as the central metaphor, representing Arnold's "fondness for themes traceable to an obsession

with the problem of estrangement" (Johnson 148). The use of a stereotypical Gypsy character to embody this theme is also not unusual in Arnold's poetry or that of Romantic writers in general<sup>16</sup>. "The Gypsy-Scholar" (1853) sees Arnold position his narrator as an Oxford scholar who, much to the perplexity of his peers, casts aside the academic life to live the life of a wandering gypsy, and this famous poem embodies Arnold's poetic use of the natural environment, as,

...what the gypsy scholar has is not only a connection to the rural landscape but an ability to escape from the "shocks" that the "strange disease of modern life" inflicts through, presumably, his wandering" (Bardi 178).

"Gypsy Child", whilst using the identity of the child in a symbolically similar way to "Gypsy-Scholar", differs in that the emphasis is on an estrangement between the child and its Mother, who is "half averse/ From thine own mother's breast, that knows not thee", rather than solely on the separation between nature and modern life (14-15). Although the manner and presence of the child are examined in detail from the opening verse of the poem, the Mother figure is not, and seems only to be aligned to the "Earth and Ocean" that "labour on" in the second verse (7). Here, as in "Dover Beach", the cycles of nature are emphasised in "the swinging waters" and

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<sup>16</sup> For an excellent examination of the representations of Gypsy people in the works of Arnold and Wordsworth see Nord, Deborah Epstein. *Gypsies and the British Imagination 1807-1930*. New York: Columbia Press, 2006. Print, where it is suggested that "Wordsworth and Arnold saw themselves and their poetic projects in relation to the patterns of existence that Gypsies...seemed to embody: wandering, unproductive repetition, cyclical movements, detachment and marginality" (45). See also Trumpener, Katie. "The Time of the Gypsies: A People without History in the Narratives of the West." *Critical Enquiry*. 18.4(1992). 843-884.

"labour" of the second verse; and this "labour" can be seen to continue the theme of a piece named only "Sonnet" that is placed as the very first poem in the 1849 edition of "The Strayed Reveller"<sup>17</sup>. In this verse Arnold explores the juxtapositions between the labour of nature as "toil unsever'd from Tranquillity" and that of man's "far noisier schemes" ("Gypsy Child" 6-7, "Sonnet" 5,7). However there also exists an alternative theme, derived from the emphasis of the estranged Mother-Child relationship, of the "labour" of child birth in lines such as "not idly Earth and Ocean labour on" and "what wonder shall time breed, to swell they strain?" (7,43). The intonations of the cycles of life are similar to those found in "Dover Beach", as the reader finds at the very start of the poem a direct reference to "sails that gleam a moment and are gone", which is akin to "on the French coast the light/ Gleams and is gone" in its implications of the transitory nature and futility of life ("Gypsy Child" 5, "Dover Beach" 3-4).

In this verse the narrator feels that the knowledge that is apparent in "Dover Beach" - that "the world" is but "a land of dreams" with no help for human pain and suffering- will result in the "funereal...pall" of death, as the cycle of life demands (30-31). However, this cycle also demands that death and rebirth into the same situation is unavoidable, when,

Once, ere the day decline, thou shalt discern,

Oh once, ere the night, in thy success, thy chain!

Ere the long evening close, thou shalt return,

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17

<sup>17</sup> Later named as "Quiet Work" in 1967's *Poems* and so usually known by that name thereafter.



And wear this majesty of grief again (65-68).

Here the "success" of a return to the Mother is also "thy chain", as the unhappy saga is destined to be repeated once more, leaving the narrator and subsequently the child to face a dilemma of reaching a consolation to the feelings of alienation and estrangement from the birth Mother, only by accepting the knowledge of life's inevitable end in death. This crisis is the "confused alarms of struggle and flight" which face the narrator of "Dover Beach", and the inner turmoil of humanity as "ignorant armies clash by night" at the end of the human life (36-37).

As has been shown in the last chapter, "The Sea of Faith" in "Dover Beach" is an important characterisation: firstly as it personifies the literal Faith of the mid nineteenth century as was examined in detail in the previous chapter; but secondly as it personifies the Mother figure in the thesis of this chapter (21). In the second context there is more emphasis on an embodiment of "the Sea", rather than "Faith" as a vital part of the natural world. The reader is already convinced of the centrality of Arnold's depictions of the cycles of moon and tide in this poem, as in many of his others, but within the framework of the Mother-child myth of "Dover Beach", "The Sea" is found to be a representative of the "earth" or "the world" as a whole, as shown by the proximity of the lines describing the fullness of "earth's shore" withdrawing to leave the "naked shingles of the world" (22,28). "The Sea" and the Mother of this thesis, in "Dover Beach" are portrayed as being embodiments of nature, and of the natural world. This is the Mother that produced humankind in the first verse, who felt the "eternal note of sadness" as they were separated, and who is "retreating" from the child who has dismissed human life as "the turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery" (14,26,17-18). Humankind has become broken by

the separation from Mother Nature and has chosen to forget her rather than confront their "ignorant armies", as outlined in "Gypsy Child" where,

...not the nectarous poppy lovers use,

Not daily labour's dull, Lethaeon spring,

Oblivion in lost angels can infuse

Of the soil'd glory, and the trailing wing (53-56).

The implications of this verse are of wilful forgetfulness and disassociation, as "poppy lovers[]" opium and the daily grind of humanity's "labour's dull" are used to numb the feelings of alienation, and forget the missing Mother's absence by following the path of the "Lethaeon spring". The "Lethaeon spring" is a critical motif in "Gypsy Child" as it has an important association with death, as Harald Weinrich in his 2004 *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting* explains:

Lethe is above all the name of the river in the underworld that confers forgetfulness on the souls of the dead...in its soft flowing the hard contours of the remembrance of reality are dissolved and, so to speak, liquidated (6).

The Lethe is therefore mythically an embodiment of forgetfulness as well as a representative of a female body of water, from the early Greek feminine divinity descendent from the race of Night: Lethe (Weinrich 6). Traditionally its portrayal has been used in this way by writers such as Oscar Wilde in "Panthea" (1881), who wrote of it as a place "where one whose feet with tired wandering/ Are faint and broken may take heart and go" in order to "drink, and draw balm, and sleep for sleepless souls, and anodyne" (69-70,72). Arnold's poetry devises similar wandering, gypsy-style characters that crave the anaesthesia of their pain. In "Gypsy Child" and "Dover Beach" this pain is clearly that of alienation and separation from the Mother.

A purposeful movement away from the Mother character of nature is portrayed strongly in Arnold's "The Future", in which a gypsy-type version of humanity is a "wanderer...from his birth" who is born "on the breast of the river of Time", but whom "spreads his arms to the light/ [and ] Rivets his gaze on the banks of the stream" that he is being swept away from (1-6). Here the "river of Time" sweeps humanity away from "the green earth" which it "had left ere he woke on its breast" and they forget the place and person of their birth, as,

Who can see the green earth any more

As she was by the sources of Time?

Who imagines her fields as they lay

In the sunshine, unworn by the plough? (22, 27-30).

This is an accurate portrayal of what A. Dwight Culler in "Matthew Arnold and the Zeitgeist" (1987) describes as the "River of Life or Time", which carries humanity from its original birthplace in accord with nature, to,

This tract which the river of Time

Now flows through with us, [that] is the plain.

Gone is the calm of its earlier shore.

Border'd by cities and hoarse

With a thousand cries is its stream.

And we on its breast, our minds

Are confused as the cries which we hear,

Changing and shot as the sights which we see (Culler 110, "The Future" 50-57).

This verse is directly comparable to the "darkling plain" where "confused...ignorant armies clash by night" in the conclusion of "Dover Beach", and the narrators of both poems have been carried to this clamorous place, away from the calm and tranquillity of their earlier life, by 'Life' and 'Time' (35-37). In the respective sections of both poems there is an emphasis on momentum, as the slow meter and unstressed syllables of the earlier lines are overtaken by a quicker and much more stressed composition in the latter half of the verses. In this way, humanity is portrayed as having been swept away from its Mother by life itself. "The Future",

like "Dover Beach" does not see a resolution or end where a return to the Mother of nature is permitted, and instead turns to an alternative consolation in the waters of Life, which "may strike/ Peace to the soul" and tempt the narrator to supplicate himself to the "murmurs and scents of the infinite sea" in a similar way that the narrator of "Dover Beach" turns instead to human "love" ("The Future" 81-82,87, "Dover Beach" 29). However, the shadow of death is also present in this poem. If the world and nature is the Mother that humanity is being swept away from by the waters of 'Time', then necessarily the "Ocean" and "sea" that he is being swept towards are the end of time and "infinite" space (81,87). The only redeeming feature to this cataclysmic possibility is the hope of rebirth, and its resultant return to the Mother that is nature.

Arnold's portrayal of the image of a female body that is synonymous with loss, longing and separation is symptomatic of what Culler describes as "the central organising symbol of all [of Arnold's] poetry": the "myth" of the journey from an individual's birth and childhood, to maturity, and to old age and death (110). He describes how Arnold transcribes these themes onto his poetry in "three regions", that,

...we may call...the Forest Glade, the Burning or Darkling Plain, and the Wide Glimmering Sea. Through these regions runs the River of Life or Time, carrying both the individual and the whole of humanity from a period of unity of being, when one lived in harmony with nature and oneself, to a period of fragmentation, when one is alienated from God, divorced from nature, and at odds even with one's own soul, to a final period of

restored unity, which is a synthesis of the innocence of the first period with the bitter knowledge of the second (110).

Importantly, in the case of "Dover Beach" and the thesis of this chapter, Culler explains that Arnold's myth is symptomatic of "all who take a tragic view of life" and is in fact reflective of,

...the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth which was the basis of Greek tragedy, and to the cycle of Paradise, the expulsion from Paradise, and the "Paradise within" which is the substance of Christian myth (111).

In "Dover Beach" the footprints of this "myth" can clearly be seen, as the first verse is an encapsulation of a human soul that is "in harmony with nature" when the narrator sees, tastes and hears nature all around him, whilst feeling himself to be a part of the natural scene that envelopes him in the "full" tide and "glimmering and vast" line of cliffs (2,5). The narrator takes part via the use of his senses in the natural cycles of the tide and moon, and these senses are strengthened by Arnold's use of varied line lengths which rise and fall softly across the page in time with the ebb and flow of the tide. However, in this first verse there are already foreboding shadows of the alienation and fragmentation to come in the second phase of the mature and comprehending adult, as the narrator sees "the light" which "Gleams" fleetingly on the "French coast" (3-4). He is already beginning to notice, even if subconsciously, that the natural scene of the ocean is not limitless: it has an end and he will one day outgrow the world that he is currently immersed in.

This dislocation is felt sharply when the narrator moves suddenly to the "long ago" past in the second verse, as the feelings of the new born child or youth are also of "long ago", and the subsequent narration is in the present tense as indicated by the use of "we/ Find" and "this...sea" (15,18-20). The narrator looks back to the fresh and vital world of childhood as he describes the world then as being "bright" in a reflection of the "glimmering" cliffs and the "gleam" of the distant light of the first verse (Culler 110; Arnold 23,5,4). He looks "forward hopefully to the future" from this present moment as he deliberates on the "turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery", which has been the eternal problem for humanity from the time of Sophocles to the present day, and hopes for an epiphany of spiritual understanding, if not cure, for the situation in "a thought" that comes to him "by this distant northern sea" (Culler 110; Arnold 17-20). The import of this "thought" is denoted by the strong punctuation and construction of the written phrase, in,

...the turbid ebb and flow

Of human misery ; we

Find also in the sound a thought,

Hearing it by this distant northern sea (17-20).

The first strong punctuation of the verse is the semi-colon that separates the "thought" from its catalyst of "human misery". On the page there is a clear separation between the word "misery",

the semi-colon, and the word "we", which is left hanging somewhat onto the end of the line as though "we" too are in danger of being blown by "the night-wind, down the vast edges drear" (27). The internal partial rhyme of "misery" and "sea" hold the line together, however the building polysyllabic sounds of "human" and "misery" separate the idea severely from the single syllable of "we", and from the mainly monosyllabic preceding line. A much stronger rhyme pattern is introduced in this verse, as opposed to that of the first verse, in the symmetrical nature of the 'abacac' rhyming of ago/brought/flow/we/thought/sea, in an effort to create a feeling of the rationalisation of thought that the narrator hopes to obtain in the future from his present "thought". There is a realisation that the world that was known by the child in the preceding verse is not, and never was, the only world that is possible or present, as the narrator introduces the figure of Sophocles and 'his' sea- "the Ægæan"- which is contrasted with "this distant northern sea" (15-16,20). The narrator is beginning to understand in the present moment that there was no dependable reason to the first period of his existence, and he hopes instead to glean from the world a truth or understanding that will bring him peace in the next stage of his life. The second and third verses solidly present the kind of spiritual, natural and personal alienation that Culler describes as being a vital part of Arnold's "myth", as "Faith" is seen to be "withdrawing" or "retreating" irrecoverably "down the vast edges drear", leaving the "shingles" of humanity "naked" and without comfort (21,25-28). As has been shown between this chapter and the last, "Dover Beach" constructs a complex image in the lines,

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled (21-23).



This can be read in several ways, but in another context can be seen to portray the physical globe, with its mantle and overlying oceans having been aligned with "Faith". This gives rise to the reader's mental picture of the layers that make up the world from its burning molten core to the surface on which humanity exists. The "naked shingles of the world" are left once the "girdle" of faith has "retreat[ed]", leaving behind a "Darkling Plain" above the "Burning" core of the earth, which is required by Culler's second phase of "young manhood and maturity" ("Dover Beach" 28,23,26; Culler 110).

The fourth and final verse of "Dover Beach" represents the phase described by Culler as "a final period of restored unity, which is a synthesis of the innocence of the first period with the bitter knowledge of the second" (110). The narrator certainly recognises the "bitter knowledge" that has been gleaned from the "thought" that was introduced in the second verse and developed in the third (19). He pronounces that "the world, which seems/ To lie before us" is in fact a fallacy and a "lie", and so the world that he felt so at one with in his early period is "a land of dreams" (30-31). He now understands that the world "hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light", despite the light that appears momentarily and the reflection of the moon "upon the straits" in the first verse and earlier period suggesting otherwise (33,2-4). Furthermore, the world has no "certitude, nor peace, nor help for [the] pain" that has been named as "human misery" in the second verse (34,18). This strong sense of the narrator's developed understanding of the human situation is enforced by the introduction of a reliable and steady rhyme at the end of each line. The rhyme is set out so that there is a pair of matching clauses- "to one another! for the world, which seems/ To lie before us like a land of dreams", and "nor certitude, nor peace,

nor help for pain/ And we are here as on a darkling plain" - are enveloped on both sides by a split rhyming pair, that read "Ah, love, let us be true/...so various, so beautiful, so new" and "hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light/...swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight" (29-37). This construction gives a rhythmic mental picture that suggests to the reader the same kinds of isolation and feeling of entrapment as the narration of the poem, whilst consolidating the feeling of internal understanding that is contrasted with the "confused alarms" that embroil the rest of humanity (36). The narrator, now apart from the rest, still inhabits "a darkling plain" which was constructed in the third verse, but upon this plain the narrator returns to a kind of innocence that is reflective, but also subversive, of the innocence of the first phase. He finds certitude, peace and relief from the pain in the return to an innocent and simple relationship, but rather than this being with nature, or the world, or a spiritual presence, he finds this in a simple human relationship with "love" and truth (35,29). The last line of the poem and fourth verse stands apart from the carefully constructed rhyme scheme, which gives emphasis to its meaning and makes the line read as an afterthought or subscript. The narrator feels apart from humanity as a whole, that is described as the "ignorant armies" that "clash by night", but there is hope that they may too gain a similar understanding from their journey on "The River of Life or Time" in the continuation of the rhyming "light" and "fight" with the terminating rhyme of "night" (Arnold 37, Culler 110).

This is despite Culler's assertion that this last period is one "which Arnold does not reach in his poetry and which is barely adumbrated in his prose" (111). The narrator has reached the third, final phase of old age and potentially death in this concluding verse, in that he has outgrown and rejected the world that he was a part of in the first three verses, and retreated into a death-

like place that is separated and apart from it. He and his love withdraw from the world to the "darkling plain", and simply remove themselves from the "confused alarms of struggle and flight" of the life that he has left behind (35-36). However, the narration shows something of a wish to return to his earlier affinity with nature as the narrator appears to be waiting for a resolution to the battle that is being fought by "ignorant armies", and is left in limbo by his indecision between joining the battle in "struggle" and leaving in "flight" (36-37). Here the "struggle" represents continued life and a constant battle for understanding and consolation, whereas "flight" represents an end in death, as the poem ends in the depiction of the darkness of "night" as a parallel to the setting of the first verse's "to-night" (37,1). The narrator is considering the possibility of returning to the early period of affinity with nature that is presented in the first verse, whilst simultaneously contemplating a return to the darkness of oblivion in death, which similarly existed before his life began.

These considerations are also portrayed by Arnold in his 1852 poem, "The Youth of Man", which from its publication in *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems* has been presented as a partner piece to "The Youth of Nature" from the same volume, in a way that echoes William Blake's illuminated poetry that progresses from *Songs of Innocence* (1789) to *Songs of Experience* (1794). In his twin poems, Arnold examines the relationship of man and poets with nature after the death of William Wordsworth and hears nature declare that "the poet who sings" the songs of nature,

...may die

But they are immortal and live

For they are the life of the world ("Youth of Nature" 84-86).

"The Youth of Nature" ends in the acknowledgement that nature outlives the life of every man and that its continued presence is unaffected and unconcerned with the passing of any one. In a similar way, "Dover Beach" recognises in the final verse that the world and nature has no remedy or consolation for human ills as,

'Race after race, man after man,

Have thought that my secret was theirs,

Have dream'd that I lived but for them,

That they were my glory and joy

-They are dust, they are changed, they are gone

I remain ("The Youth of Nature" 129-134).

"The Youth of Man" continues this theme directly by banishing "Nature", as,

We, O Nature, depart,

Thou survivest us! This,

This, I know, is the law (1-3).

It goes on to portray "this pair", which the reader may align with the narrator and his love in "Dover Beach", whom are standing as they did "in this self-same garden" previously whilst denouncing nature,

...for she

Hath neither beauty , nor warmth,

Nor life, nor emotion, nor power (29-31)

The pair now recognise the folly and arrogance of their earlier life, as they do not wish "to grow old in darkness and pain" but desire a return to nature for comfort until their death (17,25,58).

They wish to return to nature in a similar way that the narrator of "Dover Beach" wishes to return to, for they reject the follies of their younger life and dismissal of nature false, not as a way to eternal life, but as a comfort in their old age before death. They recognise their lives "Stretching out, like the dessert/ In its weary, unprofitable length", as the narrator of "Dover Beach" does his life as "a darkling plain", and all "yearn [for] the greatness of Nature" ("The Youth of Man" 109-110, "Dover Beach" 35).

Culler goes on to note that "since the third period of the myth is a synthesis of the first two, it may also be considered as forming the first period of a new cycle", and this point is vital to the thesis of this chapter (111). "Dover Beach", in its representation of Culler's tri-period "myth", is representative of a cycle on a human level as much as it is of the cycles of the moon and sea. Portrayed within the poem is the cycle of birth, separation from the human Mother, and the longing to return to the Mother in a literal and a spiritual sense. This human cycle can be read both literally and as a representation of Mother Nature, or the World as Mother, as nature gives birth to humanity who is to return to nature and the physical earth upon their death, often with the belief of being born again in this life or an afterlife. Without this final possibility, the cyclical life envisaged by Arnold would be incomplete.

Arnold uses his poetry to comment upon the loss of humanity's natural roots and affinity with nature- an affinity that was revered by Romantics writers in the earlier nineteenth century- by applying the problem to a theme of an alienated Mother representing nature, which is separated from its child, representing humanity. In all of the poems examined in this chapter, Arnold pronounces that this affinity is only possible during early childhood, and only attainable again by death and the hope of rebirth. Nevertheless, he also offers consolation in the love of each other in humanity, to sustain us until the end.

### Conclusion.

Within this thesis there is an effort to trace the ways in which Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" contains varied devices and motifs that can be read in diverse ways in order to show an uncertainty within issues surrounding such contemporaneous concerns as poetic theory, the philosophical effects of science on religion and the meaning of human life. What becomes increasingly apparent is that although Arnold portrays conflicting ideologies in positive and negative lights, he does not present a preference to any one ideal or philosophy, and instead comments upon the issues that he sees from an external, removed perspective. "Dover Beach" can be viewed as the epitome of a representation of alienation due to the duplicity of the poetic motifs that Arnold constructs. These motifs illustrate the conflicting possibilities of the issues that they encapsulated, but there is a lack of definitive resolution presented by the poem to these very issues. As outlined in the first chapter, the construction of "Dover Beach" displays an overarching theme of alienation and liminality that is derived from the focal motif of the open window, from which the narrator surveys the natural scene before him. Arnold uses this traditional device to portray a vast 'outside' that is contrasted by the 'inside', which encloses the narrator who occupies a liminal space between the two at the window. This theme of liminality rests upon the construction of the window, which is reflected in Arnold's treatment of the issues portrayed throughout the poem. He inhabits a liminal space between the conflicting factions that each issue is created by: between the Romantic mode of literature and what was to supersede it, between science and religion, and between the darkness of life and death in the human cycle of life.

To begin to trace the ways in which Arnold's 'window of alienation' is reflected onto contemporary issues in "Dover Beach", the second chapter of this thesis presents a discussion of the ways in which Arnold's writing can be seen as an inversion or subversion of the traditions of Romantic writing. The poet dwells upon the successes and limitations of his own poetry and that of Romantic writers such as William Wordsworth, and attempts to invert and subvert the writing modes that he found there. Arnold offers a new way of writing for his contemporary era, that draws upon Classical writing and reflects the dawning of a new social uncertainty and personal anxiety that was to pervade the remainder of the nineteenth century. This was later to become known as the 'High Victorian' literary period, but as "Dover Beach" was written right at the beginning of the dawning literary period, it is a poem that is on the outside looking in on both the period past and that to come. Metaphorically, the narrator can be seen at the window that provides an opportunity to assess and consider what can be seen through its opening: in this case the possibilities and limitations offered by Romantic poetic theory. He can see the "fair[ness]" that is possible in works of Romantic giants such as Wordsworth, he can smell the "sweet[ness]" of the atmosphere that they can create, but he also recognises the inadequacy of the form in the context of society from the mid nineteenth century (2,6).

This line of thought in "Dover Beach" is extended to turn its attention to the previously assumed precedent of poetry as a vital means of conveying representations and understandings of "the household of man" ("Wordsworth's Preface of 1802", 250). The third chapter of this thesis assesses the ways in which contemporary scientific progress in the nineteenth century had shaken the foundations of society, which had previously been very much based upon traditional Christian teachings, leading to a new inclination for poetry to portray issues relating to science



and its effect on human faith. Here Arnold appears to portray a liminal attitude in his treatment of an absolute acceptance of scientific fact leaving the human soul without comfort or solace, whilst traditional religious teachings fail to provide the comfort or solace that they had done in previous times. Although the author expresses the opinion that traditional Christian theology and teachings must change and adapt, this had yet to be realised in his era, and Arnold, like the monks that inhabit the Chartreuse, is left "wandering between two worlds, one dead/ The other powerless to be born" ("The Grande Chartreuse", 85-86).

The fourth chapter of this thesis examines the ways that Arnold can be seen to have move beyond issues of poetic theory and the effect of science on religion in "Dover Beach", to apply the uncertainty that he found there to a more overarching application of his metaphor in an assessment of the meaning of the human life cycle. The narrator of "Dover Beach" inhabits a liminal space between life and death, but is unable to become part of either due to this indecision, and so is effectively alienated. However, if this view is taken further, it could be said that the narrator is on the very edge of life, which itself could be viewed as a transitory phase of light between the darkness and unknown places that are the soul before birth and after death. The narrator is frozen within the liminality of life, unable to accept the inevitable progress of his life from being non-existent before birth, to the oblivion brought by death.

It is to be admitted that all of the points set out above are in danger of making a bleak and melancholy reading of "Dover Beach". However, this view does not have to be entirely pessimistic. There is hope in "Dover Beach" in that the narrator can, and ultimately does, make the choice to remove himself from the turmoil and "confused alarms of struggle and flight" that

sweep through life due to human concerns with art, religion, science and contemplation of the meaning of our own lives (36). He does not have to take part in these metaphorical battles, but can use his knowledge and ability to see juxtaposed philosophies without taking an absolute stand with either. Arnold's narrator instead views these "ignorant armies" and their "clash by night" from a removed and elevated position (37). This position is one of alienation, and liminality between opposing factions, but it is also one of acceptance. There is the possibility that humanity may not have to take sides in these warring philosophies, nor claim to have the knowledge of absolute right of wrong. Solace can be found in removing oneself from these issues, and instead attending to the 'truth' and "love" of the human soul, whether this be with another connected soul or "love", or whether this is to be alone (29). "Dover Beach" is a poem that allows, and even encourages, single motifs such as that of a window, or "The Sea of Faith", to be duplicitous in their representations and meanings, leading to multifaceted and varied readings of the poem that are individual to each reader, but also relevant to their respective place in time (21).

For, after a century and a half has passed of frantic human life and development, "Dover Beach" is a poem that is still relevant in today's society. The poem has been viewed as a kind of precursor to modernist works such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), and to works such as those of Virginia Woolf, as its displays of "existentiality...stands up to modern contemplation and is represented later" in the constructions of "the eternal and yet never existing present" that these writers are usually associated with (Kreiger 40). J.D. Jump comments that "Dover Beach" can be seen as "an early instance of the expressions of a horror of the utterly negative which occur from time to time in modern literature: in *A Passage to India* and *The Waste Land*"

(38). Therefore, it can be argued that Arnold was to some extent presupposing, in his creation of themes of alienation and liminality, what is often seen as being the symptoms of twentieth and twenty-first century life. Now that the literary period is suggested to have moved from Modernism to Postmodernism, and out of the other side, Arnold's poetry remains just as relevant, as preoccupations with the function and purpose of literature, the effect of scientific development on human life, and the purpose to Being are very much a large part of twenty-first century philosophy. As such, it is unsurprising that "Dover Beach" appears in acclaimed contemporary works such as Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) as an example of humbling and beautiful poetry that has the power to move a hardened criminal, but also one that is only to be understood or known by an elitist literary class. In October 2008, The Guardian printed "Dover Beach" as their "Poem of the Week", and even though its composition was pared down in the introduction to being a "honeymoon" poem, the article does applaud its "superbly accurate" descriptions of sight and sound, and outline the meaning as being "about a withdrawal into personal values" as "pessimism moves in swiftly as a tide" (Paragraph I). The article goes on to suggest that as "Dover Beach" is Arnold's "most anthologised poem" it is also,

... formally, his most radical. If he had written more in this vein, he would have been canonised as a great poet. Instead, until relatively recently, he was regarded as a great thinker. Works like *Culture and Anarchy* have been an enormous influence on twentieth-century literary criticism. Perhaps they deserve to be revisited. Of course, the idea of culture Arnold presents would be utterly alien to us now – but have we better replacements? Creative Britain, perhaps, instead of classical "sweetness and light"? Progress indeed (Paragraph VII).

As a conclusion to this thesis, I would like to suggest that if Arnold's critical works "deserves to be revisited", then even more so do his poetic works such as "Dover Beach". The idea of Culture that he discusses in his critical works may well be "alien" to modern readers, but could be useful to academics and philosophers. However, they would be of no use to the vast majority of people outside of these disciplines. "Dover Beach" is a poem that is at once relevant to twenty-first century life, and accessible to the population as a whole. It can be read as a "honeymoon" poem that understands the pressure of pessimism that is a symptom of modern life, and presents the possibility of a focus on the personal life, or it can be read as a deeper representation of liminality and alienation in the face of humanity's contemporary situation. The reader can draw from the poem what they will, and what they need. After a decline in academic interest for the late half of the twentieth century, I suggest that now is the time that criticism may turn increasingly to delve under the surface of "Dover Beach" in order to explore the unending possibilities of meaning within the intricacies of this- Arnold's greatest work- and let the poem speak to the modern reader from deep within the Victorian era, as if it were only yesterday.

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Appendix.

## DOVER BEACH.

THE sea is calm to-night,  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the Straits;—on the French coast, the light  
Gleams, and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,  
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.  
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!  
Only, from the long line of spray  
Where the ebb meets the moon-blanch'd sand,  
Listen! you hear the grating roar  
Of pebbles which the waves suck back, and fling,  
At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in.

*DOVER BEACH.*

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Sophocles long ago  
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought  
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow  
Of human misery; we  
Find also in the sound a thought,  
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The sea of faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle fur'd;  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
Retreating to the breath  
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,

I

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*DOVER BEACH.*

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.



