
Unit-2 □ Matthew Arnold ‘Dover Beach’; ‘To Marguerite: Continued’

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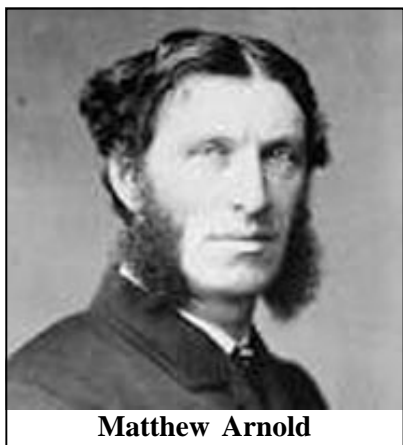
2.2.0. Introduction

You have already read in the earlier module on Victorian society and politics that in Victorian England there was peace and prosperity on the one hand and poverty, doubt and anxiety on the other. Culturally, this was reflected in some ways in the simultaneous increase in the taste for luxury, decadence and a revival in the taste for both Baroque and Gothic architecture and an increase in the awareness of poverty and other social evils and a feeling of isolation and loneliness. The literature of the period mirrored this stark contrast through the simultaneous existence of the literature of writers like the Pre-Raphaelites and the writings of Charles Dickens and Matthew Arnold. However, it may be said of Tennyson and Browning that they had, in some

ways, incorporated both tendencies in their work. In the writings of the Victorians, therefore, one encounters, simultaneously, the religiosity of *The Blessed Damozel*, the doubts against religion raised in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, the soul-searchings of *In Memoriam* as well as the attempt to restore lost faith in *Dover Beach*. It is with Arnold's search for a wavering faith that you will be introduced in this unit.

2.2.1. Matthew Arnold: Biography

A school teacher and historian named Thomas Arnold married Mary Penrose, the daughter of an Anglican priest, in 1820 and settled in Laleham-on-the-Thames. The couple had seven children and their eldest son was Matthew Arnold, born on 24th December, 1822. In 1828, when he was six years old, his father was appointed the



Matthew Arnold

headmaster of Rugby School and the family moved from Laleham to Rugby. The next year, Arnold met Arthur Hugh Clough, a boy four years older to him, who would go on to become a poet, an educationist, and his lifelong friend. In 1829, the Arnold family moved to a holiday house at Fox How in the Lake District where Arnold met William Wordsworth.

Arnold began his studies at his uncle the Reverend John Buckland's Preparatory School, as a boarder, and was enrolled at Rugby School in 1837, where he began to win prizes for essay writing and for poetry in Latin and English. In 1840, he composed the poem *Alaric at Rome* which won a prize and was immediately printed. In the same year he received an open scholarship to Balliol College, and he joined the institution the following year. In 1842, however, his father died of a sudden heart attack just before his forty-seventh birthday. Arnold won the prestigious Newdigate Prize for his poem *Cromwell* in 1843, but in the following year he received a second class honours degree, dismaying his family and friends who had expected he would secure a first. He went back to Rugby School, in the same year, to work as a trainee teacher of sorts. In 1846 he secured a one year open scholarship at Oriel College much to the joy of those whom he had dismayed earlier with his second honours. During his studies at Oriel College, he toured places like Ireland, Wales and France and also cultivated his poetic talent.

In 1847, Arnold was appointed the private secretary of Lord Lansdowne, the president of the Privy Council, and two years later he published his first volume of verse, *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*. He got the position of an Inspector of Schools in 1851, a job that he would be doing for the next thirty-five years, retiring in 1886. Having secured a stable means of livelihood at twenty-eight, Arnold married Frances Lucy Wightman, the daughter of a titled judge. The couple settled at Laleham-on-the-Thames and had six children together.

Arnold did not remain very happy in his profession after the first few years. He often complains, in his letters, of the drudgery of the work that he had to do. Robert Lowe, the minister who had been responsible for introducing certain changes into the education system that made Arnold's professional life difficult to endure, was critiqued later in *Culture and Anarchy*. The nature of Arnold's profession, taxing though it had been, had enabled him to observe his country and its people from very close quarters. Arnold's job required him to travel across a large part of England and to interact with the Nonconformist¹ part of the population, who were the poor and the middle class people and were fast becoming the most important segment of the electorate and of the society.

The squalor, poverty, disease and hopelessness of the lower strata of the society clashed very inharmoniously, in Arnold's thoughts, with the materialism and complacency of the middle class and with the indifference and the excesses of the upper class. (In his *Culture and Anarchy*, he terms the upper and middle classes 'Barbarians' and 'Philistines' respectively, and advocates the socio-economic and cultural development of the lower classes, whom he terms the 'Populace'.) As a consequence, he could not entirely rejoice in the technological and socio-economic advancement that the society was undergoing. In one of his letters, he talks of a wave of moral, intellectual and social vulgarity breaking over the British nation. One may be reminded of *Dover Beach* at this idea.

Arnold had by this time, published some more of his verse. In 1852, he published *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*. In the next year *Poems* was published with a preface where Arnold talks of the role of the poet as a guardian of sorts of the morality and education of their readership. In 1857, Arnold becomes professor of poetry at Oxford and during the ten years that he remains in this post, he publishes quite a few books on literary criticism. In 1861, his childhood friend, Arthur Hugh Clough dies and the grief-stricken Arnold composes the poem *Thyrsis*.

In 1865, Arnold publishes *Essays in Criticism* and resigns from his post of professor of poetry two years later, giving poetry up and concentrating on social criticism instead. He publishes *Culture and Anarchy* in 1869 and for the next four years he publishes treatises like *Friendship's Garland* and *Literature and Dogma*. He returns, however, to literary criticism with the essay *Wordsworth* in 1879. Between 1883 and 1886, he tours America twice, delivering lectures.

In 1886 he gives up his post as Inspector of Schools due to his failing health and dies of a heart attack two years later, on 15th April, 1888, at sixty-five years of age.

2.2.2. Features of Arnold's Poetry

In a letter to his friend Clough, Arnold writes about Keats (and about Browning and Tennyson) that they were, in spite of being poetically gifted, consumed by a desire to produce movement and fullness and therefore were able to obtain only a “confused multitudinousness” in their poetry. This reveals something about Arnold's own poetic creed as much it expresses his views on those of these other poets. In Arnold's views, these poets were guilty of unalloyed subjectivity and allusiveness in their poetry and therefore, of moving away from the moral responsibilities of a poet towards their readership. Arnold confesses, elsewhere, of having been sometimes tempted by such a desire. However, he resolved to ground his poetry in a poet's moral responsibility towards the society.

In Arnold's views, therefore, something may be termed as poetry only when it is able to provide ‘enjoyment’ to the readers; by ‘enjoyment’ Arnold meant the act of deriving aesthetic pleasure. This was not possible, according to Arnold, if the poet could not depict suffering to have found “vent in action”. Such an action should be such a one that appeals to the “primary human affections”; in other words, those actions which transcend space and time and can be termed universal. Arnold here refers to actions of epic height. Thus, only that could be termed poetry which attempts to ennoble the reader's mind by depicting actions of the greatest sublimity. Arnold himself attempted works of epic height like *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853) and *Balder Dead* (1855).

However, Arnold is at his truest and perhaps at his best when he does not consciously strive to achieve sublimity but spontaneously attains a lyrical intensity through an honest depiction of the dilemma he was in. He was torn between, as says

Isobel Armstrong, “the ethical, stabilizing poetry of joy he wished to create” and his anxieties and doubts which were seeking expression through his poems. Arnold’s anxieties stemmed from an awareness of the dwindling of faith and a resultant feeling of psychological isolation. The reason for the loss of faith in God and religion was, in Arnold’s eyes, a diseased condition of the mind burdened with material desires and concerns. In *The Scholar Gipsy*, he urges the eponymous Oxonian to quit the company of his (Arnold’s) contemporary society with the following words:

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
Before this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
Its heads o’ertax’d, its palsied hearts, was rife—
Fly hence, our contact fear!

Although Arnold sounds disillusioned here, and elsewhere in his poetry, yet he is no pessimist. In *Dover Beach*, he tells (supposedly) his wife:

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,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

Having faith in one another seems to be the antidote to the problem of “modern life”.

Arnold’s dilemma is evident not only in his treatment of subject, but also in his language. The poem *The Scholar Gipsy* he ends thus:

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!
—As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
Lifting the cool-hair’d creepers stealthily,
The fringes of a southward-facing brow
Among the Ægæan Isles;
And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,

Green, bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in brine—
And knew the intruders on his ancient home,

The young light-hearted masters of the waves—
And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more sail;
And day and night held on indignantly
O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
To where the Atlantic raves
Outside the western straits; and unbent sails
There, where down cloudy cliffs, through sheets of foam,
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come;
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

The poet uses an extended simile to urge the scholar gipsy to distance himself from the company of “modern” people. Such a studied sort of conclusion hampers, somewhat, the lyricism which is an essential feature of this poem. Arnold’s language seems to have a sort of stately elegance that is *very apparently* the result of careful skill.

Arnold, a very acute social observer, strives, in his poetry to bring to light the doubts and anxieties of his countrymen that lay hidden beneath their material prosperity and complacency. Arnold believed where there was poverty and ignorance degrading one part of the society, there could not be any true advancement; and what was being termed as advancement was actually contributing to a general loss of faith and alienation for, as has been mentioned earlier, it was concerned exclusively with material wellbeing.

2.2.3. Dover Beach

The text of the poem:

*The sea is calm tonight.
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 sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
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.*

*Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, 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 furled.
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,
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.*

Notes:

Stanza 1:

line 3: straits: refers to the Strait of Dover which is the narrowest part of the English Channel, a waterbody that separates England from France.

line 7: long line of spray: refers to the mass of water dispersed as droplets for some distance all *along* the shoreline when a wave strikes the shore.

line 8: moon-blached land: refers to the white colour of the chalk cliffs of Dover; the expression compares the paleness of the cliffs to that of the moon. It could also be said that the white chalk cliffs of Dover seemed to the poet as having been further whitened by moonlight.

line 9: grating roar: refers to the loud rasping sound that is produced when a sea wave pulls back from the shore dragging sand and pebbles along.

line 11: strand: beach

line 13: cadence: the rhythmic flow of music.

Stanza 2:

line 1: Sophocles: an ancient Greek tragedian.

line 2: Aegean: the Aegean Sea, that is, the part of the Mediterranean Sea that is located between the mainlands of Greece and Turkey.

line 3: turbid: (here) turbulent.

line 6: northern sea: refers to the North Sea, of which the English Channel is a part.

Stanza 3:

line 1: Sea of Faith: a metaphorical comparison of faith to the sea.

line 3: girdle: anything that encircles; like a sash worn around the waist.

line 3: furled: rolled or gathered together.

line 7: drear: dreary, bleak.

line 8: shingles: large, smooth pebbles usually found on beaches.

Stanza 4:

line 4: various: (here) varied in character; multifaceted.

line 6: certitude: the state of being certain or assured.

line 7: darkling: (in the) dark.

line 8: alarms: certain musical sounds used in the battlefield to call soldiers to arms.

line 9: Where ignorant armies clash by night: the line refers perhaps to an ancient Greek historian Thucydides' account of the battle of Epipolae that took place in 413 B.C. during the Peloponnesian War, when the Athenians attacked the Syracuseans near Sicily. Thucydides, in his account, says that although there was a full moon, the Athenians were finding it difficult to distinguish between friends and opponents and were often mistaking fellow Athenians for Syracuseans and hitting out at them. It may be worthwhile to note that Arnold's father had translated Thucydides and that, the story of the battle of Epipolae was familiar to the boys at Rugby during Matthew Arnold's time there.

2.2.3 a) Context:

Arnold had got married in June 1851 and had spent a week long honeymoon in Alverston in Hampshire, on the last day of which he is supposed to have visited Dover with his bride. In September that year a second visit was made to Dover from where the couple travelled to Paris in France, and it may be that *Dover Beach* was composed sometime during or immediately afterwards these visits to Dover. The draft of the poem *Dover Beach* appears among the notes that Arnold had been making for his poem *Empedocles on Etna* which was published in 1852.

2.2.3 b) Summary:

The poem opens with a description of the chalk cliffs of Dover and the sea beyond, under a moonlit sky. The poet (who is probably standing at a window facing the sea) informs that the sea was calm, although in full tide, and that a light gleamed on the French coast momentarily and went out, adding to the peaceful solitude of the scene. He then beckons someone to come to the window and enjoy the tranquil atmosphere. He says the night air was sweet and tranquil, the only sound that could be heard being that of the waves continuously lashing against the shore and then withdrawing, and the poet urges his companion to listen to it. The stanza closes with

the poet observing that the rhythmic sound of the pebbles being dragged along with the withdrawing waves brings in the “eternal” note of sadness.

In the second stanza the poet says that the note of sadness had also been heard by Sophocles on the coast of the Aegean Sea and that it had reminded him of human misery. Although the Aegean Sea and the North Sea are greatly distant from one another, the sound of the pebbles in the latter sea too is capable of evoking a thought (and a similar one, as is revealed in the next stanza) in the minds of the poet and his companion.

The poet explains the thought in the third stanza. He compares faith to the sea and says that the sea of faith had once encircled the world like a bright girdle but now all that can be heard is a grating sound that gets fainter and fainter still as that sea gradually withdraws away from the world, leaving only the dreary beach and the ‘naked’ shingles behind.

In the concluding stanza, the poet addresses his companion as “love” (which leads to the assumption that he was perhaps addressing his bride) and suggests that they should be true to one another for the world, in reality, was not a land of dreams but a joyless, loveless, restless, selfish place devoid of light. The poem closes with the idea that living in the world was analogous to being on a dark plain where confused armies, who know not whether their opponents are friends or foes, clash with one another by night.

2.2.3 c) Analysis:

The poet opens the poem with the description of a tranquil, moonlit scene and concludes with a plea to his wife to be true to him while he is true to her for the world was not such a happy place as it seemed to be: in this poem one may find the theme of love intertwined with the idea of the Victorian problem of loss of faith. The poem has a melancholy and yet a calm tone which shows that the poet is resigned to the loss of faith that had been troubling him and consequently he does not lament it and it does not become the sole object of focus in the poem.

The first stanza closes with the poet feeling the “eternal” sadness by the rasping sound made by the withdrawing waves and the gravel on the beach. That the poet tries to say this sadness was not peculiarly his own, but represented the misery of the human condition itself is evident in the second stanza where, in a rather Keatsian fashion⁴, he says that the same sound had been heard by Sophocles too (although

millennia ago and miles away on the coast of the Aegean Sea) and it had reminded him of “the turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery”. The North Sea too, although it was away from the Aegean, the poet says, was capable of evoking similar thoughts.

Sophocles was one of three great tragedians of ancient Greece whose works have come down to us and the fact that the poet is convinced that he too must have been reminded of human misery by the sound implies that the profound tragic vision that Sophocles had is shared by the poet as well. This further implies that the “sadness” that the poet talks about is not that which is peculiar to any particular time or any particular race, but, as has been mentioned earlier, an essential feature of the human condition itself.

Arnold, in next stanza goes on to explain what exactly was the cause of this sadness. Faith is first compared to a sea and is then further compared to a girdle that encircled the world. The poet could hear that sea of faith receding away from it with a melancholy grating sound which, as the sea moved further away, could be heard only faintly (and it sounded like a gust of night wind). As the sea moved away it left behind the dreary edges of the beach of the world and the naked pebbles; that is to say, as faith receded away, it was replaced by doubt, uncertainty and confusion that made life dreary and bleak. The word “naked” here evokes an image of loneliness and vulnerability.

The poet, however, has a solution to the problem. He reminds his beloved that the world that seemed varied, beautiful and forever new was not really so, but a place where one could have no happiness, no love, no feeling of assurance and certitude, no help from any quarter if one was in trouble, no peace therefore, and nothing positive. There was no light in the world, as it were, and it was like a plain in darkness where all that one could hear was the confused sound of battle raging on between armies who were, in that darkness, unable to distinguish friend from foe. This darkness, of course, represents the lack of hope that results from a loss of faith, and the selfishness and animosity it generates. The solution, or the antidote was to remain true and faithful to one another.

What must be emphasized yet again is that Arnold, albeit disillusioned and without hope, *accepts* the world, as it was, without any bawling lament, and with a stoic resignation instead. (This kind of a stoicism was perhaps the fruit of his interest in, and study of, the *Bhagavad Gita*.) He merely uses the “turbid ebb and flow/Of

human misery” as a context for making his plea to his newly wedded bride, the plea that they should be true to one another. The opening description does indeed set the mood of the poem: it is not a poem of despair, but a poem of love; albeit love in the times of despair and loss of faith.

It is interesting to recall that the poem was first composed while Arnold was planning his other poem *Empedocles on Etna*, a poem he later criticizes himself for it depicts “suffering [that] finds no vent in action”. In other words, he criticizes that kind of lyricism that results from unabashed soul-searching, but *Dover Beach* seems to be another poem in the same vein. Although, it is not helpless and passive suffering that is depicted here, but a resigned sort of suffering that seeks to alleviate the pain through love.

The poem consists of four stanzas of unequal length and rhyme scheme so as to give the reader the impression of being privy to the poets thoughts as they unfold and take shape.

Attention Learners

After you have read and understood the theme of the poem ‘Dover Beach’, it may interest you to read some other poems by Arnold with similar themes about the loss of faith. You may read his poem ‘Stanzas from the Grand Chartruese’ where he feels a helplessness:

**Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic stone—**

**For both were faiths, and both are gone.
Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born...**

Does this not resound the ‘Long, withdrawing roar’ of the ‘sea of Faith’ in ‘Dover Beach?’

2.2.4. To Marguerite: Continued

The text of the poem:

*Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live alone.
The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.*

*But when the moon their hollows lights,
And they are swept by balms of spring,
And in their glens, on starry nights,
The nightingales divinely sing;
And lovely notes, from shore to shore,
Across the sounds and channels pour—*

*Oh! then a longing like despair
Is to their farthest caverns sent;
For surely once, they feel, we were
Parts of a single continent!
Now round us spreads the watery plain—
Oh might our margins meet again!*

*Who order'd, that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
Who renders vain their deep desire?—
A God, a God their severance ruled!
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea.*

Notes:

Stanza 1:

line 1: sea of life: life is here metaphorically compared to the sea.

line 1: enisled: made into an island; isolated.

line 1: in the sea of life enisled: Arnold here opposes the assertion that Donne has made in his poem *No Man is an Island*:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.

line 2: straits: a narrow strip of water that connects larger water-bodies, like seas, to one another.

line 3: wild: an uninhabited and uncultivated region.

line 5: enclasping: (here) holding as if in a grasp.

Stanza 2:

line 1: hollows: (here) valleys.

line 2: balms: (here) refers to the pleasantly warm breezes of spring that symbolize the comforting and healing qualities of the season.

line 3: glens: valleys.

line 6: sounds: (here) a wide part of a sea that is larger than a strait but smaller in size than an entire sea; the sea.

Stanza 3:

line 6: marges: margins

Stanza 4:

line 4: severance: separation.

line 5: bade: (here) ordered.

line 5: betwixt: between.

line 6: unplumbed: unmeasured with a plumb; vast enough to make itself impossible to be measured; (and by implication) unexplored.

line 6: salt: salty in taste and/ or smell.

line 6: estranging: (possessing the ability of) making one feel alienated.

2.2.4. a) Context:

To Marguerite: Continued was first published in the collection *Empedocles on Etna* (1852), with the title, *To Marguerite, in Returning a Volume of the Letters of Ortis*. The ‘Letters of Ortis’ refers to a late eighteenth century epistolary novel written in Italian called *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* by Ugo Foscolo. The novel deals with love in times of social unrest: Jacopo Ortis, the titular character, is forced to retreat to a village for having been a patriot. He and a girl called Teresa fall in love with each other only to realize that their love could not reach fruition in marriage as she was engaged to someone else. Despairing and disillusioned, Ortis travels around and engages in philosophical meditations before committing suicide. The theme of the impossibility of finding happiness in love is shared by the present poem and also by the poem *Isolation: To Marguerite* to which *To Marguerite: Continued* was added as a sequel in the 1857 edition of *Empedocles on Etna*.

The identity of ‘Marguerite’ has not been clearly established, although Park Honan, a biographer of Arnold, brings forth the idea that a girl called Mary Claude, with whom Arnold probably fell in love while in his mid-twenties, had inspired these poems as well as his *Switzerland* poems (to which *To Marguerite: Continued* had been added by Arnold in 1853).

2.2.4. b) Summary:

The poem opens with a “yes”, affirming emphatically something that immediately preceded the poetic utterance. The poem then goes on to state that each of us live alone like islands dotting a sea. The stanza closes with the observation that each such ‘island’ is made aware of the boundaries of his or her being by the currents of water that flow around it, grasping it as it were.

The second stanza and the third share a sort of causal connection: the second opens with “But when” and the third continues the idea left unfinished with “Oh! then”. What these two stanzas try to say together is that when moonlight bathes the valleys of these islands, *when* the balmy and soothing breezes of spring blow upon

them and the nightingales, on clear nights when the sky is full of stars, sing with divine beauty in their (the islands') valleys, and the sounds can be heard across the sea and the straits, *then* a longing that feels like a despair is felt to the core of their beings by these islands and they begin to feel they were once united with one another as parts of the same landmass. The islands (and the poet here refers to them as "we") at this point wish to be reunited to one another.

The last stanza opens with a query: who was it that decreed that this longing for reuniting with one another would be suppressed as soon as it was felt, and who was it who thus made their (the islands') desire to unite useless? The poem closes with an answer to this query: it was *a* God who had orchestrated the separation of the islands from each other and it was he who had ordered the vast, alienating sea to lie in between.

2.2.4. c) Analysis:

The poem opens with an affirmation of something that had passed just before: it could have been an acknowledgement of the idea expressed in the novel *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*, a volume of which, as the initial title of the poem suggested, had been returned to 'Marguerite' along with the poem. The "yes" could also have been used to re-emphasize the idea expressed in *Isolation: To Marguerite* and to use this second poem as a further elucidation of that idea and this time, in a universal context. In either case, the "yes" affirms the impossibility of finding fruition and happiness in love.

The poet then goes on to metaphorically describe the human condition as he viewed it: each individual was trapped within their own life and their own selfish being thus making life itself (symbolized by the sea) a separating and alienating factor. The resultant feeling of loneliness has been brilliantly described by the line, "We mortal millions live alone". The stanza closes with two other expressions, equally powerful: "enclaspings" and "endless bounds". The former expression refers to the inescapability of the people trapped within the islands of their own selfish minds obsessed with materialistic concerns. They have been caught in the overwhelming grasp of the quality of life that they had chosen: a gross, materialistic, self-obsessed life that had done away with religion and with faith too, and had thus plunged them into doubt and despair. The next expression is seemingly paradoxical; however a closer look reveals the implication: the boundary of selfishness and mistrust that each individual had restricted the spontaneous feelings of the heart with offered no respite at all to them and was limitlessly oppressive.

The description of vernal nature in its moonlit and melodious beauty hints at the awakening of the desire of love in the mind. This feeling, however, comes coupled with hopeless longing as each “ensiled” individual feels the inability to shake off their solitude and reunite with one another in love thus reforming the community they instinctively feel had once existed in the past, and of which they are constantly reminded by the partial connection that is created when music from one island echoes in another as well (that is, the individuals are aware of each others’ presence and attractiveness, but still cannot unite in mutual love). The line “Now round us spreads the watery plain” evokes a feeling of deep pathos, and makes the fervent wish of the next line sound as being utterly devoid of hope.

The concluding stanza attacks that aspect of the changing Victorian society that troubled Arnold the most: the loss of faith. He refuses to accept the idea that God could have brought about the alienating attitude of selfishness and doubt, and suggests, with his use of the expression “a God” that it was no more the true faith that people followed but a false faith with a false God (representative, in all probability, of industrialization and the resultant changes in social mores) which was the very travesty of the true faith based on love and trust.

The poem *Isolation: To Marguerite* is in some ways a bitter expression of disappointment and resentment. The poet, not having found his feelings for his beloved reciprocated, visualizes her in utter solitude and isolation. The poem *To Marguerite: Continued* builds upon that idea and looks at the thought from the opposite viewpoint: *because* everybody was mentally isolated from one another, no love could exist.

The poem is composed in iambic tetrametre with the rhyme scheme of ‘ababcc’ that results in each stanza concluding with a couplet which seems to emphasize what has been discussed in that stanza. The rhythm of the poem appears a little stately, however, and perhaps at odds with the poignant lyricism, but nevertheless, it exerts a sort of control on the emotion that prevents the poem from sounding sentimental.

End notes:

1. **Nonconformist** : the Nonconformists were originally those people who were begun to be termed thus Act of Uniformity passed in England and Wales in 1662 for they chose not to follow the Church of England. By the late 19th century, the term included Baptists and Methodists among other groups.

2. **Gothic Revival** : refers to a revival of Medieval or Gothic architecture in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was adopted by other areas of English culture as well.
3. **Jingoistic** : The term originated from a mild form of the oath “by Jesus” (“by Jingo”) that was used in the chorus of a song commonly sung in British pubs and music halls around the time of the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78). The chorus was as follows:

We don't want to fight but by Jingo if we do
We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too
We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true
The Russians shall not have Constantinople.

The term came to denote an aggressive form of foreign policy, and later came to include in its meaning aggressive nationalism too.

4. **in a rather Keatsian fashion** : Although Arnold did not much like Keats' lyricism, an influence of Keats may be traced sometimes in his poetry. In Keats' *Nightingale Ode* the following lines may be found:

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;

2.2.5. Summing up:

- In summing up, it could be said that these two love poems of Arnold poignantly reflect the anxiety and dilemma of the Victorian poetic mind.
- The poems are not those of despair, however.
- While ‘Dover Beach’ talks of faithful love as being the solution to the problem of loss of faith,
- ‘To Marguerite: Continued’ hints that the state of alienation was not intrinsic to people who by nature wish to unite, even after they have grown egocentric enough to get alienated from each other.

2.2.6. Comprehension Exercises:

● **Long Answer Type Questions: 20 marks**

1. Can 'Dover Beach' be called a love poem? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Comment on the use of metaphor in 'To Marguerite: Continued'.
3. What do you think of Matthew Arnold as a Victorian poet? Use your understanding of the two poems 'Dover Beach' and 'To Marguerite: Continued' to substantiate your view.

● **Medium-length Type Questions: 12 marks**

1. Why does the poet want himself and his "love" to be "true" to one another?
2. In 'To Marguerite: Continued' why does the poet say "We mortal millions live *alone*."?
3. Comment on the use of the sea as a metaphor in the poems 'Dover Beach' and 'To Marguerite: Continued'.

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Why does the poet refer to Sophocles in the poem 'Dover Beach'?
2. What does the opening "Yes!" of the poem 'To Marguerite: Continued' signify?
3. In the poem 'To Marguerite: Continued', why does the poet couple longing with despair?

2.2.7. Suggested Reading:

1. Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*. New York/; London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
2. Arnold, Matthew and J. Dover Wilson. *Culture and Anarchy: Landmarks in the History of Education*. Cambridge University Press, 1932. Print.
3. Bristow, Joseph. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.
4. Saintsbury, George. *Matthew Arnold*. William Blackwood and Sons, 1899. Print.