Third Chapter

Ambivalence
"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
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."—Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold.

In the nineteenth century history of British Literature, the ‘Romantic Age’ was succeeded by the ‘Victorian Age’. For much of this century the term Victorian, which literally describes things and events in the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), conveyed connotations of "prudish," "repressed," and "old fashioned." Although such associations have some basis in fact, they do not adequately indicate the nature of this complex, paradoxical age that was a second English Renaissance. A history of the Victorian Age records a period of economic expansion and rapid change. Like Elizabethan England, Victorian England saw great expansion of wealth, power, and culture. In science and technology, the Victorians invented the modern idea of invention -- the notion that one can create solutions to problems, that man can create new means of bettering himself and his environment. Great Britain was one of the first countries of the world to industrialize, to establish markets and to reinvest the profits in further manufacturing developments. Britain became the center of the new philosophy of Free Trade, of new technology and of continuing industrial inventions. The country became the workshop of the world, and from the 1870s onwards had become the world’s banker. In a period of little more than sixty years of Queen Victoria’s reign, the major invention of steam power was exploited for fast railways and ships, for printing presses, for industrial looms and agricultural machinery. An efficient postal service was developed, the telephone invented and communications improved. The age was characterized by optimism and a sense that everything would continue to expand and improve. The initiatives and enterprise of modern capitalism produced a confidence, belief in progress, and an achievement unmatched before or
since in the history of the English nation. The hope of progress brought with it a ravenous desire for monetary gain rather than the love of truth, which was the magnetic force that spurred on its activity. Beneath the public optimism and positivism, however, the nineteenth century was also a century of paradoxes and uncertainties. The optimism was followed by uncertainty, self-questioning, cynicism, pessimism, ambivalence and even despair.

Writing of the 1840's J.A.Froude declared :-

"It was an era of new ideas, of swift if silent spiritual revolution. Reform in Parliament was the general hope for the introduction of a new and better order of things. The Church had broken away from her old anchorage....Among the middle class there was the Evangelical Revival. The Catholic revival at Oxford convulsed the university and had set half the educated men and women speculating on the authority of the priesthood as the essential meaning of Christianity.....Physical science, now that it was creating railroads, bridging the Atlantic and giving proof of capacity which could no longer be sneered at, was forming a philosophy of the earth and its inhabitants, agitating and inconvenient to orthodoxy but difficult to deal with. Benthamism had taken possession of dominions which religion had hitherto claimed as her own, was interpreting morality in a way of its own, and directing political action."

As Froude states, in the sphere of religion, the Victorians experienced a great age of doubt, the first that called into question institutional Christianity on such a large scale. Above all, religion occupied a place in the public consciousness, a centrality in the intellectual life of the age, which it had not had a century before and did not retain in the twentieth century.

There was a crisis of intellectual faith, which had a deceptive appearance of suddenness, which may be dated in the mid-nineteenth century. Then in 1859

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appeared Darwin's 'Origin of Species,' the most famous and one of the most important of the challenges to faith, which questioned both the literal accuracy of the first chapters of Genesis and the argument from design for the existence of God. In 1860 appeared a book entitled 'Essays and Reviews,' six of whose seven authors were clergymen of the 'Church of England,' which brought to Britain the techniques and startling hypotheses of German biblical criticism. In 1862 the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was denied by no less than a bishop, John William Colenso. In 1864 and 1865 the courts decided that nothing could be done about these subversives within the Church, and in 1869 one of the Essayists and Reviewers became a bishop. Naturalistic, non-miraculous lives of Jesus appeared: Renan's Vie de Jésus in 1863, J. R. Seeley's Ecce Homo in 1865. Meanwhile the scientists pressed their challenge: in 1863 Huxley's Man's Place in Nature and Lyell's Antiquity of Man, and finally in 1871 Darwin's Descent of Man, stripped away the uniqueness of mankind. To retain a traditional Bible-centered faith in the 1870's, an educated man had either to deny the findings of biblical criticism and natural science, supported by an increasing mass of evidence, or else to re-create that faith on a new basis which few were able to construct.

Because this crisis was brought on and highlighted by challenges external to orthodox faith -- because the normal posture of the churches during the crisis was one of denial and resistance in the face of the triumphant advance of science and criticism -- it is natural to see these events in terms of the inevitable progress of the human mind and the advancement of science. This is the traditional approach to the subject, captured in the phrase, 'the warfare of science with theology.' This approach presupposes a clear and direct confrontation between geological, biological, and historical science on the one hand and religion on the other.

The age was also torn between the two opposing forces; Utilitarianism on the one hand and Evangelicalism on the other, which were theoretically so hostile yet at times there was a partial junction and combination of these forces, reflecting the fundamental paradox of English society of this period. Elie Halevy, a distinguished historian of this period says, "Utilitarianism was predominantly intellectual and secular; Evangelicalism was emotional and pietistic; but both were individualistic. If
there was one thing which essentially defined the Victorians, it was their emphasis on individual liberty."\textsuperscript{129} This individualism of Victorian society was termed ‘doing as one likes’, by Mathew Arnold, a title that he applied to one section of his work ‘Culture and Anarchy’.

In ideology, politics, and society, the Victorians created astonishing innovation and change: democracy, feminism, unionization of workers, socialism, Marxism, and other modern movements took form. In fact, this age of Darwin, Marx, and Freud appears to be not only the first that experienced modern problems but also the first that attempted modern solutions. Victorian, in other words, can be taken to mean parent of the modern -- and like most powerful parents, it provoked a powerful reaction against itself. The Victorian age was not one, not single, simple, or unified, only in part because Victoria’s reign lasted so long that it comprised several periods. Above all, it was an age of paradox and power. The Catholicism of the Oxford movement, the Evangelical movement, the spread of the Broad Church, and the rise of Utilitarianism, socialism, Darwinism and scientific agnosticism, were all in their own ways characteristically Victorian; as were the prophetic writings of Carlyle and Ruskin, the criticism of Arnold, and the empirical prose of Darwin and Huxley.

It is no doubt that the scientific note of the Victorian Age revolutionized the physical environment but we are concerned with the fact that the advancement in science transformed man’s outlook upon life and affected every channel of intellectual activity. And it has done this by fostering a spirit of restlessness; for by increasing material progress, it commercialized modern life.

Ruskin at a later date flung out sarcastically that the compelling desire of the day was, “Wherever we are, to go somewhere else; whatever we have, to get something more.”\textsuperscript{130} Thus these changes in the social history of Victorian England were also reflected in the literature of the time. The effects of geological and biological discovery shook to its depths the old cosmogony; and the general spiritual unrest is reflected most remarkably in Mid-Victorian poetry. Just as the poetry of the


\textsuperscript{130} Arthur, Compton-Rickett: \textit{A History of English Literature}, Thomas Nelson and sons Ltd, pg.no.406
Romantics that was inspired by the French revolution and industrial revolution made the Romantic poets to emphasize on the self, imagination and faith, these changes in theology, geology and science elicited varied responses in the Victorian poets. The questioning note in Clough, the pessimism and wistful melancholy of Mathew Arnold, all testify to the skeptical tendencies evoked by scientific research. It however, did not kill poetry but stifled it at times, created an ambivalent mood and speculative thought. The scientific temper at times also intruded on the poetic imagination, but also exerted an influence upon poets like Tennyson and Browning, though occasionally this influence was inimical to art, but on the whole evoked very markedly some of the most remarkable qualities in these great Victorians. As the Victorians lived in an age in which there was so much emphasis on use and purpose, the poets were constantly concerned with the fundamentals of their vocation, questions as to the role of imagination and the function of art.

The important writing of the Victorian period is also to a large extent the product of a double awareness. This was a literature addressed with great immediacy to the needs of the age, to the particular temper of mind, which had grown up within a society seeking adjustment to the conditions of modern life. And to the degree that the problems, which beset the world of a century ago, retain their urgency and still await solution, the ideas of the Victorian writers remain relevant and interesting to the twentieth century. Thus, there was a conflict, demonstrable within the work of the writers themselves, between the public conscience of the man of letters who comes forward as the literary spokesman of his world, and the private conscience of the artist who conceives that his highest allegiance and loyalty must be to his own aesthetic sensibilities. So, nearly all the eminent Victorian writers were often at odds with their age and that in their best work the poets habitually appealed not to, but against the prevailing mores and conventions of that age. The reader who comes to the Victorians without bias must be struck again and again by the underlying tone of unrest which pervades so much that it is generally taken as typical of the period. So, it becomes increasingly difficult to think of the great Victorians as solitary and unassimilated figures within their century as they allowed themselves to be deeply involved in their times. Their writings inspired by a whole-hearted hostility to the
progress of industrial culture, located the centers of authority not in the existing social order but within the resources of individual being.

In criticizing or analyzing and appreciating Victorian poetry it is necessary to keep this ambivalence in mind; and this is especially true for Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold, the poets who touched their period at the greatest number of points. The history of nineteenth century English poetry records a gradual, but radical shift in the relationship of the artist to his public with the three poets just mentioned occupying a position at dead center of the forces that were in opposition. A divorce between the artist and society first became conspicuous as an element of the Romantic Movement; but even though they had to endure abuse or neglect, the Romantics did not in any sense think of themselves as abdicating the poet's traditional right to speak for his age. Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Keats were all, it is true, keenly sensitive to their generation's reluctance to pay attention to what they were saying, but they accepted isolation as a necessary consequence of their revolutionary program. They declared open warfare on the prejudices that would dispossess them and continued to assert that the poet's vision is chiefly of intellectual and spiritual truth. Before the end of the century, however, the conflict thus resolutely engaged had been lost, and the artist had come to accept as a foregone conclusion his inefficacy as of his contemporaries. In compensation, he now espoused the aesthetic creed which goes by the name of art for art's sake, and with Pater and then Wilde as his apologists and Rossetti and Swinburne as his models, embraced his alienation from all but a coterie of initiates persuaded like himself to value the forms of art above its message.

Between the Romantics and the Pre-Raphaelites lie Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold, leading the poetic chorus of the great Victorian noonday. And by virtue of this midway position between the two extremes represented by the schools of poetry, which came before and after, their work brings into sharp focus the choice which has been forced on the modern artist. In the common view, these mid-Victorian poets, either unable or unwilling to maintain the spirit of rebellious self-sufficiency that sustained their Romantic forbears, and they achieved rapport with their audience by compromising with the middle-class morality of the time, and in so doing deliberately sacrificed artistic validity. It is contended by some thinkers that they so flagrantly
betrayed their creative impulse to such an extent that, it provoked a reaction in the following generation, whereby the pendulum swung back towards the belief that art is and must be its own justification irrespective of ulterior motive. But this version of the poetic situation in the nineteenth century gravely misrepresents the real meaning of an endeavor on which Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold were alike engaged. For each of them was ultimately seeking to define the sphere within which the modern poet may exercise his faculty, while holding in balance the claims of his private, aristocratic insights and of the tendencies existing in a society progressively vulgarized by the materialism of the nineteenth century. Thus it came about that the double awareness, which so generally characterized the Victorian literary mind, grew almost into a perpetual state of consciousness in these poets through their efforts to work out a new aesthetic position for the artist.

As artists did these poets celebrate the changes brought about by industrialism or did they make a plea for stability? Which section of people did they address themselves to? What specific problems did they write about? In asking these questions we can understand how poetry too was part of the various intellectual debates that riddled the age. And these three poets Tennyson, Browning and Arnold through their poems reflect the intellectual concerns and changes of their times which has been discussed above, though my discussion of these individual poets is by no means exhaustive. The literary careers of Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold present a number of striking parallels, which, since their poetic endowments were so divergent, can only be explained in terms of influences impinging on them from the outside. In the early manner of each there is an introspective, even a cloistral element, which was later, subdued in an obvious attempt to connect with contemporary currents of thought.

Of the three, Tennyson succeeded most quickly in conforming to the Victorian ideal of the poet as popular bard; his reward was the laureateship as Wordsworth's successor. He is one of the most popular Victorian poets. Tennyson, was the third son of a rural parson, therefore his natural allegiance was to the traditional, conservative gentry whose wealth and ownership of land determined status. But, his situation was complicated by the fact that his family was deprived of both money and social
standing, due to unfortunate circumstances. So, Tennyson was inclined to develop a kind of identification with middle-class notions of progressivism, though he did retain sympathy for conservative values rooted in a traditional social order. In 1828, he went to Cambridge where he was inducted into an intimate circle of intellectual friends. He became a member of an exclusive group called the Cambridge Apostles. The main objective of this group was to construct or be a part of a larger program of regenerating the society, not through political change or revolution, but through a transformation of the mind of the people. They felt that the instrument that should be wielded for this metamorphosis is poetry. A letter written by a member John Kemble, in 1829, of this group, reveals the true nature of their intellectual activities:

"One duty I still feel I have to perform......it is my last but my greatest: when I think of it I am full of hope, and to it all my thoughts and feelings turn: It is to lend my hand to do the great work of regenerating England, not by Political institutions! not by extrinsic and conventional forms! By a higher and holier work, by breathing into her the vigorous feeling of a Poet, and a Religious man, by pouring out the dull and stagnant blood which circulates in her veins, to replenish them with a youthful stream, fresh from the heart...." 131

Thus for poets like Tennyson and others, poetry was to play an important part in their political agenda. To them art revealed an aristocracy of taste, but the method of spreading it in society was the middle class democratic mode. To these intellectuals, institutional reform was too mechanistic and superficial. Therefore, they resorted to poetry which was to them a cultural agent of change that sought to rejuvenate the consciousness without making efforts to change the structure of things.

So, gradually poetry began to play an important part in the forward march of humanity as denoted in the lines below:

"Poets can influence the associations of unnumbered minds; they can command the sympathies of unnumbered hearts; they can disseminate principles; they can give these principles power over men's imagination; they can excite in a good cause the

sustained enthusiasm that is sure to conquer; they can act with a force, the extent of which is difficult to calculate, upon feelings and character, and consequently upon national happiness.  

At the same time, poetry dealt with the reform of the mind; it allowed the mind to break free from the shackles of outworn customs and laws. Poetry stayed away from active politics about in doing so it was deeply entrenched in the middle class ethos of the time. It saw itself as participating in political change by its very act of occupying a marginal space, away from the real business of monetary gains and progress. This is nowhere more explicit than in Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shalott', in which he explores states of mind and employs myths of the mind to do so. By employing these myths Tennyson saw himself as working towards an aesthetic yet political regeneration of society. At the same time, it made his poems sensitive, personal and remote from the everyday concerns of life, a sort of artistic pursuit that earned him the position of a marginal poet. Tennyson, was aware of the contradiction of his position. He also used very mechanistic imagery in built in industrialism to endorse the value of progress. He embodied in his poem the deep rooted, contradictory desire for change as well as stability that was characteristic of the Victorian age.

It is this contradiction in-built in the role of poetry that he dramatizes in 'The Lady of Shalott'. The poem (of which Tennyson wrote two versions: one in 1833, of twenty verses, the other in 1842 of nineteen verses) is commonly believed to have been loosely based upon a story from Thomas Malory's Le Morte de Arthur concerning Elaine of Astolat, a maiden who falls in love with Lancelot, but dies of grief when he cannot reciprocate her love. However, Tennyson himself said that the poem was based on a thirteenth-century Italian novelette entitled Donna di Scalotta, which focuses on the lady's death and her reception at Camelot rather than her isolation in the tower and her decision to participate in the living world, two subjects not mentioned in "Donna di Scalotta".

The Lady of Tennyson's poem lives in a tower on the island of Shalott, in a river near Camelot. She is under a curse: if she looks directly at Camelot, some unknown doom will befall her. Thus she watches the world through a mirror, and weaves what she sees in a magic web. The shadowy glimpses of life beyond the tower tempt her to look, although she knows that to do so will bring the curse to its unknown end. One day, however, seeing Lancelot in her mirror, she realises more than ever how sick she is of her life, of seeing the world only through shadows and reflections.

"On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He Jasshed into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot."^{133}(lines 101-108).

She finally succumbs to temptation and looks directly out when Sir Lancelot rides past the tower singing, and as she looks towards Camelot:

"Out flew the web and floated wide-
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott."^{134}(lines 114-117)

She leaves her tower, finds a boat upon which she writes her name, and floats down the river to Camelot, chanting a mournful song, dying as she sings. She arrives frozen to death, and among the knights and ladies who see her is Lancelot:

"Who is this? And what is here?"
And in the lighted palace near

^{133} Dr.Suroopa Mukherjee, edited by, Victorian Poets: Tennyson, Browning and Rossetti, pg.no.61.
^{134} Ibid.pg.no.61.
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they crossed themselves for fear,
All the Knights at Camelot;
But Lancelot mused a little space
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott."135 (lines 163-171)

The poem tackles a major aesthetic theory of the Victorian age, namely, the autonomy of art. This theory has been defined by M.H. Abrams in his book ‘The Mirror and the Lamp’ as follows: “a poem is an object itself, a self-contained universe of discourse, of which we cannot demand that it be true to nature, but only, that it be true to itself".136 The Lady of Shalott resolves the question between art and life conditions, respectively symbolized in the worlds of Shalott and ‘many towered Camelot’. It is usually argued that the poem resolves this question, by the recognition that life is antipathetic to the possibility of an ongoing artistic production, because at the end of the poem the Lady of Shalott has to pay with her life when she attempts to leave the enclosed world of Shalott as seen in the above lines. According to one reading of this poem, the poem is trying to endorse the view that an artist must practise detachment, observing life in the ‘magic mirror’ of the imagination. One reading of this poem implies that Tennyson in fact proves that art’s autonomy is the ideological weapon used to keep art separate from the complex, social political web created in an industrial society. Tennyson’s biographer Leonée Ormonde finds the Arthurian material is “introduced as a valid setting for the study of the artist and the dangers of personal isolation”. Some consider “The Lady of Shalott” to be representative of the dilemma that faces artists, writers, and musicians: to create work about and celebrating the world, or to enjoy the world by simply living in it. This mythic poem embodies the way ordinary human needs destroy the artist, but in contrast in his other poem, “The Palace of Art”, which shares the same climactic structure, he makes the contrary point that isolating oneself from society also brings destruction.

135 Ibid, pg. no.62-63.
Both poems, which present the problematic relation of the artist to society, reflect the political turmoil of the year in which they were written -- 1832, the time of the first Reform Bill and the fierce debates about the relation and responsibility of classes. Tennyson, like so many Victorian artists and writers who felt a need to preserve aesthetic distance while making statements about their own age, dramatizes his sense of the artist's problematic relation to his society in mythic, narratives, which he sets in other places and other times. “The Palace of Art” and “The Lady of Shalott” show Tennyson making a first attempt to find the proper relation of the Victorian author to his audience. Thus he succeeded also in creating a morally relevant poetry of vision and conversion.

Though, much of his verse was based on classical or mythological themes, in Tennyson the Victorian poet's sense of a division between the needs of self and of society appears in his quest to find a public use. First, for the kind of poetry that gave him pleasure and, second, for intensely personal experiences as in the poem, ‘In Memoriam’ that was written to commemorate his best friend Arthur Hallam, a fellow poet and classmate at Trinity College, Cambridge, who tragically died from a cerebral hemorrhage. One of Tennyson's most famous works is Idylls of the King (1885), a series of narrative poems based entirely on King Arthur and the Arthurian tales, as thematically suggested by Sir Thomas Malory's earlier tales on the legendary king. The work was dedicated to Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria.

‘In Memoriam’ is a key work of Tennyson as its publication in 1850 appropriately marks a central point in nineteenth century sensibilities, and the note of doubt and despair in the poem matches with the tone of the times perfectly, in the year in which the first of the great Romantics, William Wordsworth, died. Its melancholy tone as seen in the lines below, became a keynote of late Victorian sentiment and taste:

“I hold it true, 'whate'er befal;
I feel it when I sorrow most
'Tis is better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.”

It is worth noting that the poem was published around the period when the idea of evolution, though not yet acceptable to most biologists, was in the air. In 1844, Robert Chambers, an amateur, published anonymously a book called ‘Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation’, which maintained that each species had not been specially created by God but had evolved according to general laws. This rather unscientific work was written in a reverent spirit. It was received, however, with a storm of theological criticism, which anticipated the more famous debate later excited by Darwin. The book was criticized by scientists no less strongly than by clergymen, but many sensitive laymen were curiously attracted by the idea of evolution. The storm over Vestiges of Creation was a sign of the uneasiness of the times, the unsettlement of minds produced by the scientific picture of impersonal nature functioning without direct divine interposition, a picture difficult to accept, yet increasingly difficult to resist. The poet Tennyson was one of the fascinated readers of Vestiges of Creation, and ‘In Memoriam’ shows both its influence and the problems it posed:

"Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere

Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,

And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the world's great altar-stairs
That slope through darkness up to God.

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all.
And faintly trust the larger hope.  

The lines above demonstrate very clearly how the scientific ideas of the age affected him, thereby influencing his religious outlook. In fact one can say that as a poet Tennyson was quite keenly exercised by religious problems and he was also quite sensitive to scientific thought, but his attitude was an attitude of compromise; he propounded a via media between the materialistic science of his day and dogmatic Christianity. His solution for the soul searching and the incertitude's of the time was a religion that was undogmatic and unorthodox, but at the bottom was intuitional. He was hardly weighed down by historic Christianity as it was with Coleridge. He is reported to have said on one occasion to a friend “there’s something that watches over us, and our individuality endures; that’s my faith, and that’s all my faith.” And this is the sum and substance of his faith as expressed in his poetry. In some sections of the poem, Tennyson sought to reconcile traditional faith with the new ideas of evolutionary science; but in others faith and reason are opposing forces. In fact, this compromised attitude quintessentially captures the dominant ambivalent note of the Victorian age. His concession to science in the poem, and his careful and concise statement of the purely scientific position, interested and attracted the scientist; his sympathetic presentiment of the doubter’s position, especially the line, “there lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds,” captivated the religious waverer; while the triumph of faith at the close of the poem delighted the theologian; especially when Tennyson facing the biologists’ and the geologists’ Nature which cares “for nothing, all shall go”, ultimately deserted the scientific area of human experience and asserted the infallibility of intuition, emotion and faith in these lines that:

138 Ibid. pg. no.910.
140 Ibid. pg. no.417.
141 Ibid. pg. no.15.
"A warmth within the breast would melt

The freezing reason's colder part,

And like a man in wrath the heart

Stood up and answered "I have felt".\(^{142}\) (cxxiv, lines 13-16)

The orthodox men of the Victorian times recognized the effort in the poem to save faith from the grip of conquering materialism. Infact, the philosophy of 'In Memoriam' sums up Tennyson's religious position. It is not a philosophy of faith so much as a philosophy of hope; after all he could only trust that, "somehow good will be the final goal of ill".\(^{143}\)

So, we can observe that the 'In Memoriam', also stands as a monument of the Victorian mind at ambivalence, unable to deny the results of science, yet hopefully placing its faith in 'the truths that never can be proved.' As Arthur Pollard says: "This poem is the supreme embodiment of the Victorian consciousness, embracing love and sorrow, faith and doubt, intellect and emotion, and love of nature and love of God".\(^{144}\)

In this poem not only do we see the stunned grief of Tennyson at the sudden death of his friend Hallam, when he says:

"My Arthur, whom I shall not see

Till all my widowed race be run;

Dear as the mother to the son,

More than my brothers are to me",\(^ {145}\) (ix, lines 17-20).

but also "the questioning of death and human purpose; the assault on faith by geological enquiry at a time when faith was needed more than ever...the recovery of

\(^{142}\) Ibid.pg.no.974.


\(^ {144}\) Ibid.pg.10.

\(^ {145}\) Christopher Ricks, The Poems of Tennyson, edited, Longman and Green Company Ltd. , London & Harlow,1969,pg.no.873.
the vision of God by intuitive certainty, and, with it, the rescue of meaning in human life and earthly history”. 146

While reading Tennyson’s poems one observes that his emotion is recollected in regret, rather than in Wordsworth’s tranquility. His melancholy is the first sign of a darkening vision in poetry after the Romantics. Victorian poetry moves progressively closer to despair during the century, coming by the time of Hopkins, to a sense of gloom which anticipates much of the desperation of the early twentieth century. His sense of loss, doubt and anxiety gives his work a tone of melancholy, which contrasts quite sharply with much Romantic optimism, commitment and wit. His dramatic monologues, such as Ulysses and Tithonus also convey a characteristic melancholy, with a foretaste of Arnold’s ‘long withdrawing roar’ in ‘The Dover Beach’ as reflected in the lines below:

“The woods decay. the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burden to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.” 147 (Tithonus, 1833; published 1960).

In his poem “Ulysses’ also there is a note of ambivalence, as sometimes there is a note of optimism and sometimes of despair. Ulysses is melancholy about the state of his home and wishes to return to the open sea, so he describes, “how dull it is to pause, to make an end” 148 and how he wishes for excitement, adventure, and “new things.” While it is unclear whether or not Ulysses leaves his home once again, it is certain that he wishes to. He resents that his family has grown without him; as for his kingdom, he has faith in his son and believes him to be ready for the burden of power and responsibilities that come with ruling a kingdom.

The adventurous Ulysses is depressed at the thought of having to remain at home and never again experiencing an exciting and dangerous journey like the one

147 Ronald Carter and John McRae: The Routledge History of Literature in English; London and New York, pg.no.320.
148 Christopher Ricks, The Poems of Tennyson, edited, Longman and Green Company Ltd., London & Harlow, 1969, pg.no.566
that brought him home. He loves going to battle, it gives him a sense of worth and something to do- "And drunk delight of battle with my peers. "\(^{149}\) (line 16) He wants to go back out and fight, but there are no more wars, and his soul feels younger than his body. "We are not now that strength which in old days Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are-
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will. "\(^{150}\) (lines 66-69 ) However, the last line ends in a very optimistic note showing a stronger, fighting spirit in the face of challenges:

"To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."\(^{151}\) (line 70)

Thus, throughout the entire Victorian period Tennyson stood at the summit of poetry in England. For nearly half a century Tennyson was not only a man and a poet: "he was a voice, the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, their griefs and their triumphs. In the wonderful variety of his verse he suggests all the qualities of England's greatest poets. The dreaminess of Spenser, the majesty of Milton, the natural simplicity of Wordsworth, the fantasy of Blake and Coleridge, the melody of Keats and Shelley, the narrative vigor of Scott and Byron, - all these striking qualities are evident on successive pages of Tennyson's poetry .... In reflecting the restless spirit of the progressive age Tennyson is as remarkable as Pope was in voicing the artificiality of the early eighteenth century. As a poet, therefore, he expresses not so much a personal as well as a national spirit; he is probably the most representative literary man of the Victorian era."\(^{152}\)

Tennyson's contemporary Robert Browning's poems were characterized by an astonishing vigor and hope that he is very often accused of blind and bouncing optimism, but his was in fact a hard won faith, that was based on his perception of the uses of adversity. Three major subjects dominated Browning's poetry: the worlds of love and of art, and the problems of religious faith and doubt. His first poem 'Pauline'

\(^{149}\) Ibid.pg.no.565
\(^{150}\) Ibid.pg.no.566
\(^{151}\) Ibid.pg.no.566.
\(^{152}\) Harry Blamires: A Short History of English Literature,pg.no.458.
was written in 1832, when the English nation was busy reforming its Parliament. It is a poem about sins of religious doubt. It describes the growth and ramifications of such doubt; it ends with an announcement to Shelley that a victory has been won over the forces of spiritual despair:

"Sun-treader, I believe in God and truth
And love; and as one just escaped from death
Would bind himself in bands of friends to feel
He lives indeed, so, I would lean on thee!" (lines 1020-1021)

Though, Pauline is a romantic poem, it betrays elements which we have come to think of as Victorian. One such element is the terribly earnest anxiety that he feels when he begins to doubt traditional Christianity. He describes his early awareness of the presence of God, even though he would later doubt His existence. ‘A need, a trust, a yearning after God’ had been constant. He gives an account of his delight in the ‘wisest ancient books’, and then hints at deeds that spotted him with ‘cunning, envy, and falsehood’. He moves on to his early attempts at his verse and his dedication to human liberty by which ‘men were to be as Gods and earth as heaven’. But, his dreams were but delusions. At the end of this collapse of moral values, the poet thinks of his soul as a temple where:

"......incense rolls
Around the altar, only God is gone
And some dark spirit sitteth in his seat." (lines 470-474)

The dark spirit is eventually exorcized by the renewal of human love for Pauline and the recognition that his ‘hunger’ for God is evidence of God’s existence. Browning’s most forcible condemnations of rationalism of the Victorian age come in those poems, which deal with the problems of religious belief. In ‘Christmas-Eve’ and ‘Easter-Day’, published in the same year as ‘In Memoriam’ when Darwin’s theory

154 Ibid.pg.no.19.
had sunk the Victorians in a great dilemma, the poet had worked out the grounds of his own highly individualistic faith. He declared in ‘Easter Day’ that,

“The intuition burned away,
All darkness from my spirit too.”

but in that poem and more strenuously elsewhere he raised some of the difficult problems with which faith had to contend in the 19th century. His faith mainly sprang from a purely intuitive conviction of the necessity for a loving God. His poems ‘Saul’ and ‘Rabbi Ben Ezra’ give full expression to this religious optimism; as the speaker of the poem, ‘Rabbi Ben Ezra’ begins by telling his audience to trust in God and not be afraid of anything. The speaker is an older man who is more content now that he is in his senior years. He feels wiser and more knowledgeable because of his age. He tells the audience that they should not be concerned with anything that happens to them, for everything is the will of God and God has his reasons. By doing this, however, the speaker finds a contradiction that he must look into:

“For thence, -- a paradox
Which confronts while it mocks, --
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
What I aspired to be,
And was not, confronts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
To man, propose this test--
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?.”

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155 Easter day in www.victorianweb.org/authors/browning.
156 Rabbi Ben Ezra in www.victorianweb.org/authors/browning.
'Karshish' stands for the scientific mentality wholly at a loss to cope with the mystery of Lazarus' resurrection. In the superficial view 'Caliban' appears to belong among Browning's primitives; actually he is man materialized to the point where he can only construct God in his own capricious and spiteful image. The historical or literary guise under which these issues are presented suggests the skilful operation of Browning's critical intent. The poet was not really interested in the historical process, as Carlyle or Ruskin tried to be; nor did he have Tennyson's genius for reanimating myth. Karshish, Cleon, and Caliban are representative Victorians in fancy dress. Thus, through, many of his poems Browning brings the charge of spiritual sterility directly home to Victorian society.

His most characteristic ideas are traceable to certain psychological assumptions incorporated in the three substantial poems with which he inaugurated his career. These are: Pauline (1833), Paracelsus (1835), and Sordello (1840; although not published until three years after Strafford, Sordello was begun on the completion of Pauline in 1833.) These works are in a sense variations on a single theme: the evolution of the creative impulse in artists beset by uncertainty as to the genuineness of their inspiration and the best uses that can be made of their talents. In Pauline these problems are formulated in terms of a conflict between reason and instinct. This poem also revolves around questions of faith as discussed earlier. The poem introduces a youthful poet restive under the yoke of received opinion:

"How should this earth's life prove my only sphere?  
Can I so narrow sense but that in life  
Soul still exceeds it?  
In their elements  
My love outsoars my reason..." 157 (lines 595-598)

To the voice of common sense, recommending subordination of this tendency to the ways of the world, the speaker protests:

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"There's some vile juggle with my reason here;  
I feel I but explain to my own loss  
These impulses: they live no less the same.  
Liberty! What though I despair? my blood  
Rose never at a slave's name proud as now.  
0 sympathies, obscured by sophistries!-  
Why else have I sought refuge in myself,  
But from the woes I saw and could not stay?"\textsuperscript{158} (lines 681-688)

As an assertion of the reality of the human emotions, in opposition to the devious processes of reasoning, Pauline establishes a point of view, which dominates all Browning's subsequent thinking. It should be noted, furthermore, that the poet finds his faith in man's instinctual nature on private insights not capable of demonstration by rational means. So, for example, he maintains that the appeal of Christianity derives from the formidable challenge, which Christ offers to philosophic inquiry:

"Is it not in my nature to adore,  
And e'en for all my reason do I not  
Feel him, and thank him, and pray to him-now?  
Can I forego the trust that he loves me?  
Do I not feel a love which only ONE ...  
0 thou pale form, so dimly seen, deep-eye!  
I have denied thee calmly-do I not  
Pant when I read of thy consummate power,  
And burn to see thy calm pure truths out-flash  
The brightest gleams of earth's philosophy?"\textsuperscript{159} (lines 833-842)

Pauline contains two additional passages in which the poet calls on his experience of the arts to prove the validity of intuitional experience. The first of these

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid. pg. no.25.  
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid. pg. no.29.
is the well-known evocation of a painting of Andromeda. The second, deriving from music, is still more explicit. The speaker addresses his imagined mistress as follows:

"Be still to me
A help to music's mystery which mind fails
To fathom, its solution, no mere clue!
0 reason's pedantry, life's rule prescribed!"^{160} (lines 929-932)

The poet's decision, taken immediately hereafter, to shake off self-consciousness is dictated not so much by social awareness as by an intimation of nobler heights of imaginative being than he has yet attained:

"I'll look within no more,
I have too trusted my own lawless wants,
Too trusted my vain self, vague intuition-
Draining soul's wine alone in the still night..."^{161} (lines 937-940)

In his poem devoted to the pseudo-legendary figure of Paracelsus, Browning first attacks the problem of communication, while still insisting on the primacy of the intuitions over the rational intellect. Paracelsus is a study of intellectual pride and its humbling. The philosopher, conscious of his mission to arouse society with new revealings, places entire confidence in his individual powers, and thereby rejects both the guidance of tradition and the support of love, as personified by Festus and Michal. Festus repeatedly warns him of the danger of trying to do without human sympathy:

"How can that course be safe which from the first

Produces carelessness to human love?";^{162} (lines 619 & 620)

and again:

"But do not cut yourself from human weal!"^{163} (line 660)

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^{160} Ibid.pg.no.32.
^{161} Ibid.pg.no.32.
^{162} Ibid.pg.no.55.
^{163} Ibid.pg.no.56.
Paracelsus, however, sets off alone on his wanderings, strong in the conviction that he is sufficient unto himself and that ultimate truth has its seat in the depths of his inner consciousness.

Paracelsus, receives suggestions however, he refuses to pay heed so the poet brings home the message that his difficulties are of his own making, the result of a deficiency in the loving wisdom of the heart; but the philosopher reasserts the supremacy of the individual:

'Tis in the advance of individual minds
That the slow crowd should ground their expectation
Eventually to follow.  

These lines reflect the Victorian society’s penchant for individualism, which Arnold terms ‘doing as one likes’. At the end of the poem when Paracelsus dies, he dies with a faith not only in God and in man’s future perfection, but also in personal immortality.

In his poem ‘Sordello’ many scholars continue to find a rich storehouse in the study of Browning’s mind and art, while some respected critics have termed it the key poem of the Victorian period. “It contains many characteristically Victorian themes: the hunger after God, anxiety about the state of the individual soul, the growing awareness of the multiplicity of experience coupled with a desire to know wholeness and the alienation of the artist from the society.”

Sordello scornfully cuts himself off from mankind in his decision to prove his superiority through the medium of poetry:

"........ never again
Sordello could in his sight remain
One of he many, one with hopes and cares

\(^{164}\) Ibid.pg.no.101.
\(^{165}\) Roy E.Gridley: Browning, Routledge and Kegan Paul in association with Blackie, India, 1972.pg.no.36
And interests nowise distinct from theirs.....

Never again for him and the crowd

A common law......The divorce

Is clear: why needs Sordello square his course

By any known example? "166 (book II,lines 367-379)

Through, these lines Browning shows how Sordello separates himself not only from the common ways of men but from artistic tradition. This action allows Browning the poet to dramatize his conceptions of the poetic process

In the poem, which followed Sordello, Pippa Passes, Pippa's refrain,

"God's in his heaven

All's right with the world". 167 (lines 228-229).

is often cited as exemplifying Victorian optimism. This sentiment, however, is clearly meant to characterize the girl's naïveté and childlike faith, and not the milieu in which she lives. The poem is an indirect and oblique commentary on the cultural crisis of his time and place. For Pippa's world is given over to the tyranny of church and state, to corrupt officialdom, to envy and malice and wanton cruelty, to adultery and blackmail and murder. The society, which environs the girl from the silk mills of Asolo, makes a mockery of lawful love, patriotism, the familial relationships, and art. As she wanders the streets on her annual holiday, she brushes shoulders with pimps, prostitutes, debauched students, informers, hired assassins, and parasites of every variety. Her immunity to worldly debauchery lies in her very unworldliness. She is a child of nature, unlettered, inexperienced, guileless, endowed only with a happy disposition, innocence, and the wisdom of her intuitions. Like Aprile and Eglamor, with whom her kinship is evident, her only means of self-expression is lyric song. It is through the impact of these songs, so alien to the habits of mind of her auditors, that the theme of the poem comes out. They are heard by "Asolo's Four Happiest

167 Ibid pg.no.327.
Ones" at critical moments in their lives; and they wholly alter the direction of the lives in question by forcing a choice on the hearers. Pippa's passing awakens the conscience of individuals hitherto enslaved by self-interest, and provokes conduct contrary to the courses of action mapped out by the conscious will. In each case the ultimate decision negates personal inclination and so discredits the materialistic values endorsed by society. So, once again his poem in questioning the conscience of the materialistic Victorian society remains relevant in our present times. One division of the poem poses the problem of intellectual assent to established institutions and involves a concept of power: a second poses the problem of emotional assent to conventional morality and involves a concept of love; and third poses the problem of aesthetic assent to artistic traditions and involves a concept of the creative impulse. All three themes occur in Pippa Passes, which thus marks out the principal issues with which Browning was henceforth to be concerned.

There is an undercurrent of social comment all through Victorian poetry, although the novel was the main vehicle of social criticism. And there were many thinkers who expressed their views through essays apart from verse so as to reach a wider audience, and Mathew Arnold was one among them. His writings, characterized many of the Victorian beliefs with regard to religious faith and morality. In 1869, the book called *Culture and Anarchy* was written, which may be termed his central work in criticism other than literary, containing, as it does, the quintessence of what he had already written, and of much that he was again to write, upon English life and character. Its importance lies in its difference from Carlyle, Mill, and the Victorian philosophers. Arnold starts from social observation rather than philosophical reflection, and stresses the importance of 'seeing things as they are.' He best understood the 'main movement' of his own time, and therefore, he presents the least distorting mirror of the age. Though Arnold is commonly thought of as the apostle of Culture and of Poetry, but to him religion was the highest form of culture and of poetry. In 'Culture and Anarchy', he says that the highest art, the art of Pheidas, of Dante, or of Michelangelo, is an art which by its height, depth and gravity possesses religiousness. Poetry passes into religion on its highest level, and religion must pass into poetry in order to penetrate and transform that 'poor inattentive
and immoral creature, man'. This idea reflects the corner stone of Arnold's work. In fact his life long quest was the full perfection of humanity. Culture, seen as striving towards an ideal of human perfection, is regarded as the opposing spirit to barbarism, philistinism, and the consequent anarchy. Therefore, Arnold asserted that "Our society distributes itself into Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace......The pursuit of perfection, then, is the pursuit of sweetness and light....Philistine gives the notion of something particularly stiff-necked and perverse in the resistance to light and its children; and therein it specially suits our middle-class." 168 So, ten years after Darwin's affirmation of man's animal origins, Arnold's affirmation of culture as raising humanity above the level of Barbarians takes on a particular consonance. A new vision of what culture, art, and society mean will emerge as the century moves to its close. In 'Culture and Anarchy' Arnold also proposed the ideal of culture as a solution to the evils of industrialism,

"The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concerns us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically." 169 He felt that the old world was dead and stifled by the French and Industrial Revolutions, and "in the vast, sprawling democracy which had succeeded he could see no center of control, no sense of direction, little in fact but the worship of Mammon and machinery, supported by a faith in the virtue of 'doing-as-one-likes', and a complacent belief in material progress." 170 Therefore he set to resolve the problems of making order emerge from the chaos that was prevalent in England. "Things in England being what they are", he wrote soon after the book 'Culture and Anarchy' was published, "I am glad to work indirectly by literature rather than by politics". 171 He was convinced of the

168 Ronald Carter and John McRae: The Routledge History of Literature in English, pg.no.331.
169 E.D.H.Johnson, 'The Role of the Artist', in Levine, ibid.pg.no.176
constructive and 'beneficent function' of literature and speaks of the tremendous work, it has to do in the middle region between religion and science: "I do hope that what influence I have may be of use in the troubled times which I see before us as a healing and reconciling influence".  

He agonizes that the modern civilization has become mechanical and external, and tends constantly to become so. The, Culture, like religion, "places human perfection in an internal condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality"; not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, is the character of perfection as culture conceives it: and here, too, it coincides with religion". He argues that "faith in machinery is a great danger: faith in coal, railways, wealth, and increasing population, as if these were precious ends in themselves; faith, too, in our freedom to say and to do just as we like: But culture indefatigably tries, not to make what each raw person may like, the rule by which he fashions himself: but to draw ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that".

One significant development in his poetry was that he shared with great clarity his own inner feelings. "My poems (wrote Mathew Arnold to his mother in 1869) represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last century, and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is, and interested in the literary productions which reflect it". Not only his poems, but also all his works have this representative character. One important theme that runs through the poetry of Matthew Arnold is the issue of faith and the sense of isolation that man can feel without faith. This theme is evident in poems such as "Dover Beach".

The poems of Matthew Arnold always seem to portray two contrasting worlds, one of optimism and one of pessimism, with the sense of gloom and despondency being more marked. In most of his poems the disappointing world is the

172 Ibid. pg no.41
174 Ibid. pg no.17.
175 Ibid. pg no.261.
real world, the actual world. In 'Quiet Work' he complains that 'a thousand discords ring', expressing 'man's fitful uproar'. In its historical context, this can be seen as a commentary on political events of the time - the February Revolution in France, the Chartist movement in England, and the effects of the rapid industrialization of Britain. He disliked these noisy protests and was very disappointed by them. He longed for a world without 'toil' or 'vain turmoil' and by comparing these two worlds he sought to make people notice the failings of the world they lived in.

This can be seen clearly in 'Dover Beach'. Again, Arnold criticizes the age in which he lives. Phrases such as 'a darkling plain' and 'Ignorant armies clash by night' show the depressing reality, and the 'grating roar' of the sea 'gives the reader a sense of 'the misery which occurs and reoccurs in human history'.

One of the main things that Arnold wanted to say is that this real world is unstable. We can say so from the following:

"for the world which seems,
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful so new"176 (lines 30-32).

In this poem, he can see clearly the real world, in which people lose their goals and their trust and cannot find peace and conviction. Thus, one of the two worlds in all of his poems is disappointing. This is a reflection on the unstable age in which he lived. Arnold had little hope for the real world, and hoped instead for another world, an imaginary, heavenly world.

There is of course an optimistic side to Arnold's poetry, which shows the ambivalent phase in which he lived. In 'Quiet Work' he longs for the world of 'nature', with its tranquility and peace and its glorious tasks. This was how he wanted the world to be. He also believed that nature could teach people to find the way forward. In 'Dover Beach' hope manifests itself as love. This poem was written in 1851, when Arnold married and his heart was full of hope –

"Ah, love, let us be true

is the positive affirmation of the poem, the firm ground of trust which the poet stands
on in this ‘darkling plain’ of the world. Their dream of a better world is seen in the
relationship Arnold seeks with the woman he loved.

There is certainly darkness and misery in Arnold’s poetry. However, his
anxiety about the real world causes him to seek for a more stable, more ideal world.
At the same time, as portraying the uncertainties of life with honesty and directness,
he also expresses hope, and his words revolve around the moment when a better
world is created through love.

A close analysis of the Dover Beach reflects that it brings together all the
major concerns of mid-Victorian writing. Set in a room overlooking the Straits of
Dover, it describes love, faith, and desolation, bringing together classical and modern
allusions, to conclude with a vision of the world more completely negative than any
in the previous two centuries. Thus, there was an eternal note of sadness that became
a part of Victorian literature. Arnold was no pessimist, however: ‘love, let us be true
to one another’ is the saving emotion in Dover Beach. In fact, though his poems are
imbued with the disillusionment of mid-nineteenth century, there is always a ray of
hope for humanity as seen in the Dover Beach that is a culmination of his poetic
work.

Dover Beach- An Analysis:-Refer to Appendix pg.nos.176-177, for the poem.

Theme of the poem:

The poem “Dover Beach” written by Matthew Arnold has a memorable theme:
the crisis of faith in the mid-Victorian world, which was generated by German
biblical scholarship of the ‘Higher Criticism’ and the unsettling revolution of
Darwinism (although the poem was apparently written in 1851, 8 years before the
publication of the ‘Origin of Species’).

In the first six lines, Arnold evokes the moonlit seascape of the English Channel,
tranquil and sweet, and the reassuring ‘cliffs of England’ of the Straits Of Dover.
"Only," opening the seventh line, begins the transition, unfolding through the “tremulous cadence” of the waves to the “eternal note of sadness”\textsuperscript{178}. So, one cannot fail to note that the poem revolves around the idea of human misery. Nature especially the sea is employed in order to draw a comparison between the flights of nature and the human misery. A close reading of this poem elicits ambivalent emotions. The strongest that one can find is a sense of melancholy, sadness, alienation and isolation, which in turn is the most obvious theme; along with these emotions comes a sense of beauty. In the industrialized age of Arnold, people no longer were able to look upon nature for inspiration; the unpopulated country of Wordsworth's time was no longer accessible to a centralized people. The increased pace of life and urban crowding obviated the Romantic's luxury of reflection in natural solitude. While the poet observes nature in Dover Beach, the experience is metaphorically useful, but not an end unto itself, nor does it bring any comfort. Rather, Arnold uses the futility that he sees in the ocean's tides to illustrate the fruitlessness of human endeavor. Again a close observation of lines 13-14 of the poem, which reads thus:

"With tremulous cadence slow, and bring,
The eternal note of sadness in",\textsuperscript{179}

seems like Arnold is finding a reflection between the Sea, and the despair he feels in the world. The rhythm of the tides and the calmness and tranquility of the water bring an escape, but at the same time they serve as a reminder of the miseries, hopelessness and melancholies that one is immersed in, in this mortal life.

Moreover, when looking into the poem, even if one chooses not to see the great, white cliffs standing eerily silent in the moonlight, the ancient, icy waves approaching and retreating on the pebbled shore, and even the two figures gazing out of the window at the boundless beauty of the scene; it is difficult to ignore the human theme of being swept about in the undertow of social change because Arnold chiefly focuses on society's anxieties - the grim outcome of the Victorian times and the message was obviously the negative impact of the industrial revolution on the poor, the then present and future generations. He also portrays a number of ideas in the 'Dover

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.pg.no.255.  
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.pg.no.255.
Beach', including the beauty of the coast, his sense of randomness of human existence, reality and one of the key ones being faith.

However, the most crucial idea that Arnold tries to put across in Dover Beach is the question of faith that has deserted the world behind in an abyss of darkness. He understood that faith has been dwindling significantly in the recent past and realized that we have become increasingly despondent due to this, having no choice but to turn to love, as he himself has done, and cling to another in hopes of survival. He explores the change from faith in God to science; as during the Victorian era there was disillusion and a crisis of religious faith resulting from developments, such as the industrial revolution, rise of materialism and amongst others, Darwin's theory of evolution. This dramatic monologue addresses the need for human reassurance in a hostile world. Arnold, a practicing Christian, is mourning the decline of spiritual faith in this poem.

Subject and interpretation of the poem: -

The first stanza opens with the description of a nightly scene at the seaside. The lyrical self calls his addressee to the window, to share the visual beauty of the scene. Then he calls her attention to the aural experience, which is somehow less beautiful. The lyrical self projects his own feelings of melancholy on to the sound of

"the grating roar
Of pebbles, which the waves draw back, and fling
At their return, up the high strand"\(^\text{180}\) (lines 9-11).

This sound causes an emotion of "sadness" in him.

The second stanza introduces the Greek author Sophocles' idea of:

"the turbid ebb and flow of human misery"\(^\text{181}\) (lines,17-18).

\(^{180}\) Ibid.pg.no.255.
\(^{181}\) Ibid.pg.no.255.
A contrast is formed to the scenery of the previous stanza. Sophocles apparently heard the similar sound at the “Aegean” sea (line 16) and thus developed his ideas. Arnold then reconnects this idea to the present. Although there is a distance in time and space as Sophocles had heard it long ago on the Aegean.

In the third stanza, the sea is turned into the “Sea of Faith” (line 21), which is a metaphor for a time (probably the Middle Ages) when religion could still be experienced without the doubt that the modern (Victorian) age brought about through Darwinism, the Industrial revolution, Imperialism, a crisis in religion, etc. Arnold illustrates this by using an image of clothes. When religion was still intact, the world was dressed (“like the folds of a bright girdle furled”\textsuperscript{182} (line. 23). Now that this faith is gone, the world lies there stripped naked and bleak. (“the vast edges drear/ And naked shingles of the world”\textsuperscript{183} (lines. 27-28))

The fourth and final stanza begins with a dramatic pledge by the lyrical self. He asks his love to be “true” (line.29), meaning faithful, to him.

"Ah, love, let us be true
To one another!"\textsuperscript{184} (lines 29-30).

For the beautiful scenery that presents itself to them,

"for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new”\textsuperscript{185} (lines.30-32).

is really not what it seems to be, it is illusory, like a mirage. On the contrary, as he accentuates with a series of denials, this world does not contain any basic human values. These have disappeared, along with the light and religion and left humanity in darkness. “We” (line-35) could just refer to the lyrical self and his love, but it could

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.pg.no.256.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.pg.no.256.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.pg.no.256.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.pg.no.256.
also be interpreted as the lyrical self-addressing humanity. The pleasant scenery turns into a “darkling plain” (line- 35), where only hostile, frightening sounds of fighting armies can be heard:

"And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."\(^{186}\) (lines 35-37).

According to some critics, this refers to a passage in Thucydides, The Battle of Epipolae, where -- in a night encounter -- the two sides could not distinguish friend from foe. (lines 144-145).

Another plausible interpretation of the poem is that the Dover beach contrasts the present and the distant past. A glimpse of time past proves consoling. When Arnold looks out a window onto Dover beach, he hears the “grating roar” caused by the waves of the English Channel as they strike the shoreline at the base of the great chalk cliffs; and he thinks of the “mournful roar” of which Sophocles wrote in Antigone. At the poem's end, he also remembers the chaotic night-battle at Epipolae when Athenian warriors, unable to see, killed friend and enemy alike as mentioned earlier. Time past for Arnold forewarns humanity of its sad destiny. Arnold escapes ancient reminders of “human misery,” “alarm and flight,” by dwelling on present tenderness: a calm sea, sweet night-air, and his beloved by his side. Time past, yoked to time present, reveals how fragile the basis of human happiness is. Arnold ends his lyric, leaving no doubt that our “land of dreams” is a sham. He feels that the imagination acts as the gateway between present and past. At first, the mind fixes on haunting music from nature: like the waves' “tremulous cadence slow.” Next, the mind finds in “the sound a thought” from past literature, when he says:

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" and bring
The eternal note of sadness in’
Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
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\(^{186}\) Ibid.pg.no.257.
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea."^{187}(lines 14-20).

Arnold employs the medium of lyric poetry as it serves more intensely than prose, in fusing present experience and memory of the past and then forging something new from their union. For that reason, such poetry is "occasional": its unique insight rises from an instant of immediate experience and binds that moment permanently to something in long-term memory. Arnold makes explicit the formula by which everyone finds meaningfulness in an experience. Here, when the speaker spots the landscape by seashore, moonlight and sunset off the French coast, and then he says: "Listen! you hear the grating roar."^{188}(line 9) These sights and sounds in retrospect bring to mind something from Sophocles. Then, inexplicably, the experience-memory mixture utters a new thought, that the ebbing tide is to nature what the loss of faith is to humanity, inescapably natural and sad. This revelation, finally, culminates in a resolution. The faithful love of friends can replace that between man and God. Thus the speaker says to his partner,

"Ah, love, let us to be true,
To one another, ..... Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,"^{189}(lines 29-34).

and that only imagination, working on the likes of Sophocles in long-term memory, could prepare us to love truly. Arnold, actually, was holidaying with his new bride in Dover when he evidently had this experience and this resolution. Many critics contend that he kept it a secret for fifteen years, only publishing the poem in 1867, by which time Charles Darwin's Origin of Species had sheared away the myths of Genesis with his theory of the evolution of the human species. In the "Dover Beach," Arnold must have concluded that loving someone truly remained the only alternative to a materialistic and rational world that gives us "neither joy, nor love, nor light, /

^{187} Ibid.pg.no.255.
^{188} Ibid.pg.no.255.
^{189} Ibid.pg.no.256.
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,"\textsuperscript{190} and that only imagination, working on the likes of Sophocles in long-term memory, could prepare us to love truly.

Arnold discriminately uses his words; when he says that the world does not give us "love" he means, in part, that the world lacks imagination and so would be aware of very little of the precious past, which is crystallized in ancient literature like a leaf in amber, knowledge of which is an essential precondition for love. Both the world and the armies that "clash by night" are ignorant. Arnold does not mean that love does not exist, but that it comes only from a partner who, unlike the world, can share the exquisite perception and resolution such as Arnold describes in the "Dover Beach." Knowledge, shaped by the well-educated, cultivated and fertile imagination, leads to understanding, understanding to empathy, and empathy to "true love." Note that he says:

"we / Find also in the sound a thought."\textsuperscript{191}(line 19).

Of course, some critics believe that Arnold may also have implied, by true loving, sexual intercourse only between partners, not fornication or adultery.

Only analogy and metaphor can translate sounds into thoughts. "Dover Beach" advances by three such extended comparisons. Arnold first associates the "grating roar" that accompanies the waves, retreating and returning, casting pebbles on the beach shingles, with what Sophocles thinks of:

"the turbid ebb and flow

Of human misery."\textsuperscript{192}(line 17)

If humanity is the sea, the waves collapsing ashore resemble the wretched, miserable humans whose cries:

"bring

The eternal note of sadness in."\textsuperscript{193}(line 13&14)
Next, Arnold and his companion, the “we” overlooking a “northern sea” far from Sophocles’ southern “Ægean,” devise a different metaphor, one more attune with their lives. If the sea is humanity’s religious faith, then the “earth’s shore” is the irreligious world, ever expanding as the sea’s tide, having turned, and then it retreats. Arnold embeds yet another metaphor within this comparison. The sea resembles the world’s bright belt, once in folds (spread out in waves) and furled (that is, coiled up and bound).

Lastly, Arnold manages a deft transition to a quite different analogy. The Sea of Faith, which “Lay” like a belt around the earth’s land, becomes:

"the world which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams."\(^{194}\) (lines 30-31).

Religious faith becomes a dream. Arnold brings together the two opposites; sea and land joined at their touching edges, in the phrase “naked shingles of the world.” So fused, they become a single “darkling plain.” The “roar,” which in the first two metaphors stands for the sound of the crashing waves, or of the withdrawing tide, becomes:

“confused alarums of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.”\(^{195}\) (lines 36 &37).

Arnold’s three analogies, step by step, transport his beloved from a window overlooking a calm moonlit sea to a dark, war-torn battlefield, from security to immediate danger of death. The transition takes the friend through an argument when he says:

"Ah, love, let us be true
To one another!"\(^{196}\) (line 29),

\(^{193}\) Ibid.pg.no.255.  
^{194} Ibid.pg.no.256.  
^{195} Ibid.pg.no.257.  
^{196} Ibid.pg.no.256.
that at first instance appears positive and affirming. By taking vows of fidelity, the lovers can to some extent offset the loss of religious faith in the world. However, in the lines that follow, "for the world, which seems ...", Arnold uses an argument based on mutual fear. Worse, the allusion to Thucydides allows a reader to infer that the lovers are potentially like warriors on the same side who, because they could not see, have fought against rather than for one another. Having stripped his beloved of the comforts of religious faith, he drops her onto a battlefield of males, warring unintentionally against their own comrades.

The poem's speaker need not be its author, just as the circumstances of its composition do not supply its meaning. As honeymoon love-talk, "Dover Beach" leaves much to be desired, though there are some critics who suggest that this poem is autobiographical in content and origin and therefore they consider that Arnold is speaking to his beloved. However, Ian Lancashire (University of Toronto) says that Arnold said nothing about when or for whom the poem was written at its publication in 1867. Its speaker, the "I" at line 24, could be either male or female. The beloved could be of either sex too. Its content addresses broad religious, social, and political events of its own age as much as personal relationships. Perhaps on the model of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues, "Dover Beach" might express what typical well-educated newlywed couples, the sacrament of marriage still echoing in their memories, might feel in the privacy of their room, far from priests and relatives with unexceptional dogmas. On the other hand, the escalating negativism and subtly veiled threat in the last verse paragraph cannot as easily be explained away as a trifle. Probably, Arnold meant us to recognize the speaker's nervous drift towards suspecting that best lovers might become, accidentally, very bad for each other.

Irony, Imagery, and Illusions in Dover Beach: -

Throughout the poem, Arnold, as an image and a metaphor, uses the sea. At first, it is beautiful to look at in the moonlight (lines.1-8), and then it begins to make hostile sounds ("grating roar" (line. 9); "tremulous cadence" (line.13)) that evoke a general feeling of sadness. In the third stanza, the sea is turned into a metaphoric "Sea of Faith" (line.21) -- a symbol for a time when religion could still be experienced
without the doubts brought about by progress and science (Darwinism). Now, the 'Sea of Faith' and thus the certainty of religion withdraws itself from the human grasp and leaves only darkness behind.

Thus, one can observe that he uses nature imagery in this poem. He begins off calm and soothing.

"The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair."\textsuperscript{197} (1-2).

Quickly though the ocean becomes noisy.

"With tremulous cadence slow, and bring

The eternal note of sadness in"\textsuperscript{198} (lines 13-14).

He feels this sadness has been with humans for a long time, imagining that Sophocles heard it in the ocean also. Arnold realizes that humans are lacking in spirituality though,

"The sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full..."\textsuperscript{199} (lines 21-22).

The ocean affects his thoughts on this lack of faith and he gets into a melancholy mood. He views a rebirth of spirituality as land within the ocean of despair.

"Ah, love, let us be true...To lie before us like a land of dreams..."\textsuperscript{200} (lines 28-30).

He sees humans as baffled and sinking in spiritual aridity very much in need of spiritual help. His poem ends on a note of melancholy and he does not seem to have faith in any kind of an impending spiritual revival. Therefore, he seeks true love from his beloved as a solace, as he has conviction in the permanence of love. Thus, the poet successfully employs nature as a metaphor for human feelings.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.pg.no.254. \textsuperscript{198} Ibid.pg.no.255. \textsuperscript{199} Ibid.pg.no.256. \textsuperscript{200} Ibid.pg.no.256.
In the poem Mathew Arnold deftly also employs a lot of irony, and appeal to the auditory and visual senses, and illusions. The tone in this poem is one of gloom and melancholy, but he shows us how to keep faith and hope in spite of that and how important the virtues of fidelity, integrity and truthfulness are - thus throughout this poem, Arnold mentions all of these traits and ties them all together.

The irony in this poem is the main plot of the poem. A man has taken a woman to a beautiful beach in France. There they look over the cliffs at the beautiful ocean, the moon is full and bright, and the night-air is calm and peaceful. She thinks that she is going to this romantic place to be wooed by this man. Instead he turns to her and talks to her about Sophocles. She, gets perplexed and is unable to divine the real intentions of the man when it dawns on her that the man wanted to convey the message to her to remain a steadfast support of true love to him, as he would always remain faithful and true to her. He conveyed the message that all things in life are transient, and fleeting except for true love, which gives one the hope to live for something and provides the endurance to stand all the tests and trials of time and life.

The poet uses visual and auditory images to mainly create the romantic, fantasy-like place. "The sea is calm, the tide is full" and "Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling," is an example of images that appeal to the visual sense. While "Where the sea meets the moon-blanced land" and "With tremulous cadence slow, and bring..." uses an auditory sense. "Come to the window, sweet is the night air," can apply to both senses. 'Sweet' can mean angelic or precious to qualify to be a visual image, or it can mean almost like a melodious tune.

Illusions are used in this poem as deception for the girl that the man is trying to hold a non-romantic conversation with. A theory by Plato that the entire world is an illusion is being portrayed in this poem.

In the first stanza of the poem, the poem revolves around the speaker and his amour. Adjectives like calm, tranquil, sweet, and eternal, are those which seem to foreshadow a lovely romantic evening. As the poem continues on, the evening is spent talking about anything but love. The final topic of discussion goes much deeper than just love; the conversation becomes more profound as the tone acquires a melancholic twist. They end up talking about how the world is sometimes so
unpredictable and dark. But they have to transcend and renounce such materialistic instincts and always be true and faithful to one another.

Thus, though the “Dover Beach,” by Matthew Arnold, is a love poem, but the issue revolves around something that is of greater gravity and something more serious and disturbing than love. He uses language that appeals to the senses, visual and auditory, it is overflowing with irony, and incredible amounts of illusion. But he still keeps that glimmer of hope in the back of his mind and ties all of this together to write a poem about faithfulness and being true to each other.

So, in this phase we notice the characteristic Victorian note of ambivalence in Tennyson and Browning and despair in Arnold.