LOVE AND RELIGION IN MATTHEW ARNOLD'S POETRY

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In the nineteenth century, under the impacts of science and industrialization, the world disintegrated. Everything fragmented into pieces, with man lost in the middle, trying to turn to each broken piece separately yet unable to grasp them all at once. Facing this disintegration, man was overwhelmed by afflicting problems: the loss of Christian faith, the shock at the rapid growth of technology and urbanization, and, consequently, the pressure of loneliness and uncertainty of direction. Arnold shared all these problems. He felt acutely the collapse of Christian faith from the assaults of science, literal interpretations of the Bible, and utilitarianism. Pervading his poems was a profound sense of isolation and loss. The bonds between man and God, between man and nature, and even between man and man were completely shattered. What's worse, the old social system, with its sense of order and communion, was equally uprooted by industrialization and urbanization, which brought about instead an impersonal and indifferent society. Living in such an adverse milieu, Arnold tried to find a saving and working creed not only for himself but also for his contemporaries. Seeing his efforts, many readers and critics, such as Douglas Bush and Paull Baum, approach Arnold in a reverential way. They regard him as a spokesman of the highly intellectual--a sage and physician of his age--and expect him to prescribe some remedies for the malaises of his time. Among the remedies they have discovered in his poems, love and religion are two of the most frequently discussed. But, is Arnold really confident of the power of love and religion? What is his attitude toward them? Indeed in many of his poems he tries to assert the significance and value of love and religion in confrontation with isolation and disintegration; however, behind his assertive and sagacious mask there exist anxieties and uncertainties, which challenge the conventional view that love and religion can comfort and sustain man in an age of isolation and disintegration. These anxieties and uncertainties about love and religion are what I will tackle in what follows.

The nineteenth century is not only an age of industry and prosperity but also an age of turmoil and confusion. As Charles Dickens observed, "it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us. . . ." (3) Industrialization brought riches and success; however, it also brought exploitation, indifference, and isolation. People rushed into big cities to look for chances, but found that they were only inconspicuous drops in a huge ocean. They felt completely displaced. Before emigrating to big cities, they lived in small rural villages, in which community

had never been challenged and people had a great sense of belonging. But now under the impacts of industrialization and urbanization, communities and families were dissipated. Removed from their roots, people came to live in watertight compartments. They became indifferent to each other, and, instead of the strong sense of community and belonging, what they had was misery and isolation. As Carlyle pointed out in *Past and Present*, "[i]t is not to die, or even to die of hunger that makes a man wretched . . . , but . . . to live miserable . . . , to be heart-worn, weary, yet isolated" (210). In other words, isolation became a wretched human condition:

> Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
> With echoing straits between us thrown,
> Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
> We mortal millions live *alone*.[1]

John Donne says that no man is an island; however, by opening "To Marguerite--Continued" with the affirmative "Yes" Arnold declares that the contrary is exactly the case--men are utterly isolated and alone. Though, judged from its title, the poem seems addressed to Marguerite, we do not need to take it so narrowly; it is rather addressed to all human beings. The poem is thus "a representation of ourselves, and we witness [Arnold's] terror as we would witness our own" (Buckler 66-67). The islands, with the estranging sea between them, symbolize isolated human beings. There is hardly any possibility of blending men's hearts; however, in spite of this bleak outlook, down deep in their hearts men still have a strong yearning for communion and love.

> 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 marges meet again! (ll. 13-18)

Like coral islands, men are separated on the surface, but joined in the deep. As Miller says, "[i]f the world external to man is also a unity hidden behind apparent diversity [and separateness] then it would be possible to reach that unity [again] . . . with self-forgetful intensity" (p. 5), namely, with communion and selfless love.

The yearning for communion and love becomes more intensified in "The Buried Life." Living in an age of disintegration, the more men become isolated from each other and the more the confusion of the outside world gets unbearable, the more we wish for communion and resort to the inner and personal, which will culminate in love between men. Love thus becomes not only a harbor from outside chaos and confusion but also a

means of relocating our self. To expand it further, though men are isolated from each other, once they can form a communion and love relationship with each other, they can see truly into each other's souls. This relationship of communion and love is the microcosm of universal harmony. In other words, if true communion and love can be reestablished, the background of universal love can be recovered, too (Miller 26).

Paull F. Baum in his study of "The Buried Life" thinks that the poem celebrates restraint and repression. He even believes the poem shows us that "there should be within us . . . a restraining force to keep us to ourselves" (99). But "The Buried Life," on the contrary, is a poem against restraint and repression. It attacks the social order founded upon pretense, which will bring about disintegration of the self. Furthermore, it asserts the importance of communion and *true* love[2] in stirring the modern heart to the awareness of the true self and to the sense of complete living in this world of pretense and confusion.

The complexity of "The Buried Life" starts from the difficulty of communication and full understanding:

> Light flows our war of mocking words, and yet,
> Behold, with tears mine eyes are wet!
> I feel a nameless sadness o'er me roll.
> Yes, yes, we know that we can jest. . . .
> But there's a something in this breast,
> To which thy light words bring no rest. (ll. 1-7)

Anne B. Simpson assumes that these opening lines describe a scene of quarrel between the speaker and his lover.[3] Indeed, it seems so literally, but I don't think it necessary for us to buy so literal and narrow an assumption. Isn't it possible for us to regard the poem as a dialogue between the poet and his heart? Moreover, granted that the poem begins with a quarrel, it expands into a profound discussion of a general human condition, that is, the isolation of human beings and the yearning for true love as a means of self-discovery. We feel isolated, for we are always mocking each other; however, there is some yearning in our heart to which neither our light-heartedness nor pretense can pacify. As T. S. Eliot says in *The Waste Land*, we have never had "a moment's surrender" (66). We are always wearing masks, for we do not dare to love or show our real self to others. Consequently, communion and real understanding between people become impossible. Even love is "too weak / To unlock the heart," (ll. 12-13), for love is no longer sincere or true. And as we are trying all the time to protect and conceal ourselves, even lovers cannot reveal to each other what they really feel. This makes the speaker so agonized that he cannot but wonder, "But we, my love! . . . must we too be dumb?" (ll. 24-25)

Unfortunately, this is exactly the case. We are all living and moving in disguise. We daren't give our heart to others because we are afraid of being "met / With blank indifference, or with blame reproved" (ll. 18-19). We turn inward more and more until we get utterly isolated from the outside world; however, sooner or later we will find that in isolating ourselves from others, we become alien not only to others but also to ourselves. What we get is not possession of our self, but the final loss of it. We come to realize that "[w]hat happens is a progressive evacuation of the soul, a progressive appearance of the true emptiness of consciousness" (Miller 33-34). In a word, we are unable to be our real self because we have never liberated the "nameless feelings that course through our breast" (l. 62), for these feelings can "answer questions beyond the reason, rescue the individual from the noisy world, and plumb deep into our true, buried self" (Bush 55). Therefore, the poet asserts it is only through true feelings and true love that we can manage to recover our buried self.

> Only . .
>
> When a beloved hand is laid in ours, . . .
>
> When our world-deafened ear
>
> Is by the tones of a loved voice caressed-- . . .
>
> And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again
>
> The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain. (ll. 77-86)

By discarding our masks that have set gaps between people and by surrendering ourselves to love, we will be able to retrieve our buried self. This self is a true "self--personal, yet universal," and to recover it is to repossess "the 'general life,' the soul of the world, the All" (Miller 33), for to possess it is to become "aware of [our] life's flow / And hear its winding murmur . . . [and see] where it glides" (ll. 88-90).

While mores and pretense coldly set things against one another and put a void between them, love is a warm flow in which things lose their sharp edges and the heart loses its separateness. Thus, when our repressed love is liberated and we are united through it, the recovery of our self becomes possible because there is a chance of seeing the truth about human motivation within another and this vision will also yield the truth within ourselves (Simpson 283). In this way, by sincere and intense love man's insight will be illumined:

> And then he thinks he knows
>
> The hills where his life rose
>
> And the sea where it goes. (ll. 96-98)

Through mutual love we seem to be able to see in others' eyes the reflection of not only others but also ourselves. But are there always sympathy and identity between men to

form consensus and similarity? If not, even through the help of love yet still lacking in consensus and similarity, it is still doubtful whether we can really see ourselves in others because differences are still possible.

It seems the speaker of "The Buried Life" advocates reviving our buried life and recovering our self through true and intense love. As I have mentioned earlier, he tries to assert the importance of communion and true love in stirring the modern heart to the sense of complete living in this confusing world. However, this is only the speaker's assertion; we readers are not sure whether it is possible for true and intense love to exist in the modern world because there is no indication that it is realized in the poem. Even the speaker himself admits, "*but* this is *rare*" (l. 77). This admission severely undercuts what he asserts in the poem. "But" denotes contrast, and in this context is, of course, a contrast to what the speaker asserts. It not only betrays the speaker's concession that true and intense love can exist only in rare moments but also reflects Arnold's own uncertainty and anxiety about intense love. Arnold is often troubled by his inability to surrender himself to intense love: "I have had that desire of fullness without respect of the means . . . , [but] I doubt whether I shall ever have heat and radiance enough to pierce the clouds that are massed round me."[4] In "Isolation: To Marguerite" he says to his heart:

> Farewell!--and thou, thou lonely heart,
>
> Which never yet . . . didst depart
>
> From thy remote and sphered course
>
> To haunt the place where passions reign. (ll. 13-17)

This self-analysis strongly suggests Arnold's anxiety about his capacity for true and intense love. Love is not completely impossible, but at best it can exist only rarely.

Even granted that true and intense love does exist sometimes, can it really enlighten man? I am here thinking again of the last three lines of the poem.

> And then he *thinks* he knows
>
> The hills where his life rose
>
> And the sea where it goes. (ll. 96-98)

Man thinks he understands the origin and meaning of life; however, it is only what *he thinks* . "Think" is a concession to doubt. By saying "he *thinks*" the speaker betrays that he is not confident of the power of love--whether it can really enable us to retrieve our real self and know the origin of life. This strongly suggests uncertainty and even doubt on the part of the speaker. Such uncertainty is shown more clearly in Arnold's famous poem, "Dover Beach."

To many readers, "Dover Beach" is a sagacious poem. Scarcely anyone can leave the poem without "The eternal note of sadness" (l. 14) and "let us be true / To one

another" (l. 28) echoing in his mind. These readers are deeply impressed by the dignity and seriousness of the poem. They regard the need of love in confronting the disintegration of the world as the main message Arnold wishes to convey through the poem. This message, however, is worth much of our discussion.

The opening of "Dover Beach" impresses us with calmness and serenity.

> The sea is calm tonight.
> The tide is full, the moon lies fair
> Upon the straits. . . . (ll. 1-3)

This seems a tranquil and beautiful scene. The dominant tone is that of serenity. In such an atmosphere, the poet asks his lover to "Come to the window, sweet is the night air!" (l. 6). But against this seeming calmness and serenity, immediately we meet the ominous "Only":

> Only, from the long line of spray
> Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
> Listen! You hear the grating roar
> Of pebbles. . . (ll. 7-10)

"Only" here means "but,"[5] and it suggests a great contrast to the superficial peace in the first five lines. Fain points out that the description of scenery in the poem "renders a dichotomy of sight and sound, in which sight . . . symbolizes illusion, or semblance, and sound symbolizes reality" (41). And in this poem we do find sounds more real and lasting than sights because as sights fade into the background, sounds keep on going and make the poet aware of the discord which so far he has overlooked. He now comes to realize that actually the sea is not calm, for there is a "long line of spray." He also becomes aware that the moon does not shine beautifully on the straits; on the contrary, it blanches the land with a ghostly pallor. What's more important, the bay is far from being tranquil because if one listens carefully, he can hear the grating roar of pebbles

> Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
> With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
> The eternal note of sadness in. (ll. 12-14)

About fifty years earlier, Wordsworth, walking on the opposite shore in France, evoked a similar scene in his sonnet: "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free" (285). He, too, turned from sight to sound and called to the girl beside him:

> Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
> And doth with his eternal motion make
> A sound like thunder--everlastingly. (285)

What Wordsworth heard was the awakening of the transcendental Being; however, what Arnold hears is something drastically different--the "eternal note of sadness." Arnold, thus, moves "not from natural beauty to transcendent Being, but from illusion of natural beauty to the tragic fact of human experience" (Culler 40), which implies among other things man's inner state of confusion and his loss of Christian faith.

In the second stanza the poem moves further from natural scenery to intellectual analogue:

> 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. (ll. 15-20)

Joining the present and the past in one long chain of suffering, the poet imagines Sophocles hearing a similar cadence of waves washing against the Aegean shore and making a similar impression on him: Sophocles, too, felt sadness over the "ebb and flow / Of human misery." However, though the sea speaks eternally of sadness, it speaks to different people and different epochs in different ways. As A. Dwight Culler indicates, what, to Sophocles in the classical age, spoke of the alternations of human lot, to Arnold now living in the waning of Christianity, speaks of the withdrawal of the Sea of Faith (40):

> 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. (21-25)

Comparing the Sea of Faith to a furled girdle that used to surround the human shores of the world, nurturing and sustaining men, the poet re-creates in the reader the sense of joyful fullness in the early of human history. Now, however, the Sea retreats "down the vast edges drear / And naked shingles of the world," confirming the withdrawal of Christian faith which used to sustain men in their lives.

Facing the loss of faith, the poet can only resort to love because supposedly it can at least hold people together and give them some consolation.

> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! for the world, . . . seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams. (ll. 29-31)

The world lying outside there seems a mirage. It can offer us neither certainty, nor peace, nor any help for suffering. When the outside world becomes more and more unbearable and religion is no longer available to sustain us, we tend to turn more and more inward, and perhaps the only alternative of religion is love because if there is nothing for us to believe in, at least, we, lovers, can trust each other. In this way, love becomes our only anchorage. Therefore, the poet implores his lover that they should "be true / To one another" so that they may escape from the confusing world into their own private world and enjoy the only consolation still possible: the consolation that, at least, they are faithful to each other.

"Dover Beach" is mainly made up of what the poet addresses to his lover. He hopes that they can be true to each other. But the problem is: Will his lover be faithful to him as he expects, or does she pay attention to what he says? Anthony Hecht's "The Dover Bitch: A Criticism of Life" may be a cynical parody of Arnold's poem, but it reminds us that the lady's possible response and attitude are also indispensable to our study of "Dover Beach." Many critics, such as Paull F. Baum and E. K. Chambers, assume that the lady in the poem is Mrs. Arnold (Baum 86), but there is no convincing evidence. Even though it may be Mrs. Arnold, the poem depicts no special sympathy or mutual understanding between them--she might even do not care about what the poet says--, nor is there any guarantee that she will follow what he exhorts. If so, how can the poet be certain of her being true to him? Hence, even love can't be resorted to as a means of consolation and sustenance.

Another problem more disturbing is: Is the lady really there in the room with the poet, or is the poet merely imagining what happens? If the latter is the case,[6] then, what the poet imagines about love may just be an illusion, which, of course, cannot really console and sustain him and which betrays not only his intense yearning for love but also his great anxiety about it.

Besides, even if the lady is really there in the scene, does love necessarily exist between her and the poet, or, to put it more broadly, between people in general? Even the poet himself says the world is a place that has "neither joy, nor love." It may be too presumptuous for us to assert from the poet's statement that love really does not exist, but at least the statement implies that the poet is skeptical of its existence. Furthermore, if, as mentioned above, isolation is a human condition, is mutual love always possible between men? Is there anything that can make men go out of their closed compartments to give and receive love? Even if love sometimes exists between men, can it comfort and sustain us in the modern wasteland? At the end of the poem, we are not in a land of dreams, but in a real world that has "neither joy . . . , nor light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for

pain" (ll. 33-34). In such a world of barrenness and uncertainty, even if love does exist, what kind of love is it? Can it nurture and sustain us? These questions do not encourage optimistic answers, for

> . . . we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night. (ll. 35-37)

A. Dwight Culler underscores the full horror informing this final image: it is taken from "Thucydides' famous account of the night-battle of Epipolae, a scene which Dr. Arnold apparently made a commonplace among his pupils as a symbol of the intellectual confusion of the modern age" (41), a confusion that causes not only cultural anarchy but also political and social turmoil. This is a dark image of human misery: we really are in a dark wasteland that exactly has "neither joy . . . nor light / Nor certitude. . . ." Inhabiting such a world, we cannot but doubt that love is sufficient to comfort and sustain us.

"Dover Beach" begins with a description of the loss of Christian faith and the disintegration of the world, culminates with the poet's earnest plea for love, yet ends with great uncertainty and anxiety about love. Traditional Christian faith is lost, nor can love really sustain or satisfy Arnold. It seems there is no exit for man. He seems to stand at crossroads; whichever way he takes, he is doomed to despair. But, will Arnold accept this human lot acquiescently? Still he is unwilling to surrender. As we may see later, he is not completely disappointed at religion yet, for to him religion is "morality touched with emotion,"[7] which, Arnold hopes, may not only serve as a stay against confusion but also lead man to the good (Miller 28). Thus, in "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" we see Arnold trying to find a way out by searching for a new religious faith--a new faith that may give him consolation and sustenance as Carthusianism may give the monks.

Like "Dover Beach," "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" contrasts a Greek and a modern in their loss of faith, but here the loss of Christian faith is explored in more detail. Though Carthusianism is an old religion, it is new to Arnold, and his visit to the monastery after his loss of Christian faith is highly suggestive of his search for a new religious faith, for, as he says, "what we *seek* is here" (l. 25).

The poem begins with a scenic description,

> The autumnal evening darkens round,
> The wind is up, and drives the rain;
> While, hark! far down, with strangled sound
> Doth the Dead Guier's stream complain. (ll. 7-10)

The flow of the Guiers Mort causes turmoil not only in the river but also in the poet's mind. Its roaring heard from the top of mountains is associated with the chaos down in

the human society represented by the plain. This is an archetypal landscape in Arnold's poetry, in which the ascent to a mountain top marks a transcendence of the conflicts of the plain--the attainment of a state of enclosure, immune to the confusion of human society below.

The poet's first glimpse inside the monastery is of the silent courts and the humid corridors where in the deepening night the monks brush by in white. The calmness and coldness of the place seem to bring peace to the poet's mind. The monks concentrate themselves on the culture of the "fragrant herbs" (l. 56) and work cheerfully under the sun, which not only nourishes their herbs but also symbolically nurtures their mind. They, being disciplined yet "cheerful" (l. 60), have their sense of belonging in the monastery; however, to what does Arnold belong?

The search for something to belong to from now on dominates the development of the poem. The poet says that perhaps he should not come to the monastery because

> . . . rigorous teachers seized my youth,
> And purged its faith, and trimmed its fire,
> Showed me the high, white star of Truth. (ll. 67-69)

By insisting upon testing Christianity in the light of fact and reason, the poet's teachers undermine his faith. Here Arnold makes himself a spokesman of an age that has lost its Christian faith under the influence of such "rigorous teachers." But religion is not to be tested against the claims of science; it is to be felt and believed in. This is the dilemma the poet expresses in his apology to his "rigorous teachers":

> Forgive, masters of the mind! . . .
> I come not here to be your foe!
> I seek these anchorites, not in ruth,
> To curse and to deny your truth. (ll. 73-78)

Despite the almost irresistible influence of his former education, the poet, while visiting the monastery, cannot help feeling sadness over the loss of Christian faith. He stands there

> . . . as, on some far northern strand,
> Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
> In pity and mournful awe might stand
> Before some fallen Runic stone. (ll. 80-84)

Standing before the monument inscribed in Teutonic runes which emblematizes the Nordic religion that has become extinct, the Greek is reminded by the relic that his own religion is also gone. The poet, now standing before the monastery of an old religion, which is somewhat similar to an antique monument, likewise cannot help grieving that

his religion, too, is gone. So "both were faiths, and both are gone" (l. 84), and the poet is left

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born,
> With nowhere yet to rest my head,
> Like these, on earth I wait forlorn. (ll. 85-88)

The poet is in a spiritual vacuum: the world of Christian belief is dead; the future substitute that may sustain him and the coming generations is yet "powerless to be born." Hence, like the monks, he can only wait forlorn; however, whereas the monks are forlorn because the world deride their religious faith and they can only locate their hope in the world beyond, the poet is forlorn because he does not have a faith like theirs and no one shares his anxiety and agony. He feels baffled, desolate, and spiritually deserted because his Christian faith and the sense of community are gone. Facing such a spiritual void, the only thing he can do is to look for some substitute--some new religion that is believable and liveable. Arnold's visit to the monastery is a gesture of his search for the new religion, and Carthusianism represents, though not necessarily is, the religion he looks for, because before he visited the monastery, Arnold had been thinking of writing a poem on such a religious search. He once jotted down these notes: "To . . . the cloister & life liveable," "religious yearning . . . the religious longing never quenched."[8] Religious yearning has always been in Arnold's mind, and here in the monastery he is deeply impressed by the disciplined life and religious piety of the monks. Furthermore, seeing that "Their faith, my tears, the world deride" (l. 89), he must have embraced the monks as an emblem of his sense of exclusion from society and his spiritual nobility. Therefore, he asks to be hidden in their "gloom profound."

> Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,
> Ye solemn seats of holy pain!
> Take me, cowled forms, and fence me round,
> Till I possess my soul again,
> Till free my thoughts before me roll. (ll. 91-95)

In the monastery, the monks can disclose their feelings freely and, thus, stay serene; while, in the mundane world, the poet is "chafed by hourly false control." What makes the monastery therapeutic to him is "the open but silent demonstration of [the monks'] faith . . . that offers him an opportunity to recognize that he has come to a creative environment in which he can authentically disclose [his] private feelings" (Wilkenfeld 415). It is this capacity to cry, this environment to vent his feelings that enables him to possess his self again.

Unfortunately the monks' faith and the poet's sadness are derided by the world.

> For the world cries your faith is now
> But a dead time's exploded dream;
> My melancholy, sciolists say,
> Is a passed mode, an outworn theme. (ll. 97-100)

The sciolists represent those superficial yet over-confident Victorians who do not take life seriously but pretend to know the answers to all questions. They rebuke the poet's melancholy because they believe there is nothing to be sad about. They are always optimistic about the future: they have never "been sad!" (l. 102) But the poet says if they regard his melancholy as "an outworn theme," at least they should be able to take away his restlessness and suffering and replace them with something else, rather than just leave him to fret alone. If the sciolists can't, they should leave him, the "Last of the race of them who grieve" (l. 109), to die with the monks, the "Last of the people who believe" (l. 111). The poet thus appeals to a strong feeling of kinship with the monks; however, what he is actually asking from the sciolists is not to let him die really with the monks, but to leave him in the silence of the monastery as a refuge from the chaotic and hopeless world, for in such a world silent is indeed what we need to be.

> Silent, while years engrave the brow;
> Silent--the best are silent now. (ll. 113-14)

Here the poet seems celebrating silence, because what is the use of complaining?

> Achilles ponders in his tent,
> The kings of modern thought are dumb;
> Silent they are, though not content. (ll. 115-17)

Achilles, after Patroclus dies, refuses to participate in the Trojan War. He thus resembles modern intellectuals who refuse to engage themselves any more in intellectual war--to speak out about their agony and sadness as they confront the confusion of modern life. Thus, like the monks, modern intellectuals seem escapists. Such escapism seems to form the only way out of this chaotic world, yet Arnold renounces it at the end of the poem.

Though the monks get peace from their ascetic regimen of contemplation, fasting, and religious exercises, they live isolatedly from the real world, having no concern about society. Their world, having no contact with the outside world, is only a "living tomb" (l. 72). They are

> Forgotten in a forest glade,
> And secret from the eyes of all.
> Deep, deep the greenwood round them waves,
> Their abbey, and its close of graves! (ll. 171-74)

This enclosure of graves suggests that their life is not only an isolated life of silence (environmentally and intellectually), but also death in life. But "who can be alone elate, / While the world lies forlorn?" (Arnold 321). Ultimately, the poet cannot be at home here, for at the end of the poem he describes the monastery as a "desert" (l. 210), which refers not only to the barren surroundings of the monastery but also to a sense of desolation. Thus, though the monks enjoy peace in the monastery, the poet cannot really find peace there, nor is he content with their life; otherwise, he will stay there. In reality, their life represents silence and escapism: what they do in the monastery is only self-discipline and self-cultivation which realize just inner perfection, but do not engage the problems of the modern world. This is not what Arnold really wants because "[w]hile admiring the silent suffering of the monks, acknowledging the apparent pointlessness of modern world, and at the same time, yearning for the relief promised by hermetic withdrawal . . . , Arnold continues to search for substantial responses to the world" (Wilkenfeld 415). Arnold's visit to the monastery, therefore, is not really an escape from the world, nor is his wish for silence escapism; rather, they form a kind of strategic retreat. He wants to retreat into silence momentarily only--to think deeply and figure out some better direction not only for himself but also for his contemporaries. This momentary retreat and silence for meditation will bring inner transformation and betterment of the individual, which is the basis for the transformation and reform of the society as a whole. Thus, instead of being a recluse or escapist like the monks, Arnold is actually participating actively in the modern world.

In the meantime, the poet is uncertain about the strength the monks get from their religion, namely, Carthusianism, which may be regarded as a synecdoche of religion as a whole. When the monks are called by the troopers and hunters to action and pleasure, they answer. ". . . but too late ye come / Too late for us your call ye blow / Whose bent was taken long ago" (ll. 196-98). However, though the call comes too late, the monks still cannot help being attracted and distracted, for

> The banners flashing through the trees
> Make their *blood dance* and chain their eyes;
> That bugle music on the breeze
> Arrests them with a charmed *surprise*. (ll. 187-90)

The attraction and distraction shown here strongly imply that the strength the monks get from their religion is not sufficient to help them resist the temptation of larger spheres of experience. Even with their strength, they can only say, "Fenced early in this cloistral round / Of reverie, of shade, of prayer, . . . / How can we flower in foreign air?" (ll. 205-08) They can only enclose themselves for their own inner perfection; however, they do

not know how to face and handle the outside world. In short, Arnold is here skeptical of the sustaining power of religion, represented in the poem by Carthusianism, which he in the beginning of the poem fixes his hope on. What enables him finally to confront and deal with the confusion and chaos of the world is perhaps something else--his intellectual strength and critical insight, which he shows most effectively, however, in his prose.

In Arnold's poetry, we may find at least three groups of people. There are those who set a high value on love for its power to soothe and hold people together, but who use love as a means to harbor themselves against the outside confusion and social obligations; there are those who devote themselves to religion and cultivation of the self, yet who are not concerned about the outside world; but there are also those who set a higher value not only on the strength of will and intellect but also on moral integrity and social obligations, and who cannot bear to surrender only to love or cultivation of the self. Arnold himself is one of the last class. Facing the disintegrating world, he wishes to resort to love and religion, but finds that neither can sustain or satisfy him. At best they can serve only as temporary harbors when he is in grief or despair; however, he comes to realize in the end that he cannot solve anything by escaping from the world into love and religion. He has to get the solutions by walking into and through the world. Thus in his poetry we see him finally renounce love and religion, for they cannot offer either real sustenance or solutions. He has to chart his course anew in order to find a way out of distress and confusion. He finds that it is criticism that enables him to suggest some remedies for the problems of his age. And this is perhaps the main reason that leads him to criticism.

Notes

1. Matthew Arnold, *The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 182. Hereafter, all poetic passages from Arnold's poems are taken from this collection. Line numbers will be put in parentheses after the quotations.
2. I especially emphasize "true" love in contrast to the "mocking" love (l. 1) in the poem, particularly in the first stanza.
3. Besides this assumption, Simpson takes too psychological a study of the poem. For more detail and examples see pages 283-84 of her "Matthew Arnold's 'The Buried Life': The Quest for Union."
4. Quoted by J. Hillis Miller in "Matthew Arnold," p. 28.
5. Baum gives the same interpretation. See *Ten Studies in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold*, p. 87.
6. In "The Dover Switch, Or the New Sexism at 'Dover Beach'" August also points out that the poem's "dramatic situation may be entirely imaginary" (36).
7. Quoted by J. Hillis Miller in "Matthew Arnold," p. 28.
8. Quoted by Paull F. Baum in *Ten Studies in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold*, p. 114.

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