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Norman N. Holland

PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPTHS AND "DOVER BEACH"

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND LITERARY ANALYSIS have mingled uneasily ever since 15 October 1897, when Freud simultaneously found in himself and in Hamlet "love of the mother and jealousy of the father." Psychoanalysis, it turned out, could say many interesting things about plays and novels. Unfortunately, it did not do at all well with the analysis of poems. In the symbolistic psychoanalysis of 1915 or so, poems became simply assemblages of the masculine or feminine symbols into which psychoanalysis seemed then to divide the world. Poems, often, were reduced to mere dreams — for old-style psychoanalysis could look only at the content, not the form, of poetry.

Literary critics may fare better with new-style psychoanalysis — indeed, not so new, for one could date it from Anna Freud's *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* in 1936. This later phase of psychoanalysis takes into account defenses or defense mechanisms — that is, ways of dealing with drives or impulses so as to ward off anxiety and to adapt drives to reality in a positive or useful way. A literary critic recognizes this concept of defense as something very like what Kenneth Burke would call a "strategy" or "trope." A psychology that can deal with defenses can deal with poems in terms of form as well as of content, for form is to content in literature as, in life, defense is to impulse. I would also like to suggest that because today's psychoanalysis can look at both literary form and literary content, we can from literary works frame a hypothesis as to the fundamental psychological patterns of drive and defense in a given culture. Such a psychological pattern should in turn tell us why some literary forms succeed in a given culture and others fail.

My test case is Victorian England. I would like to see, first, what an understanding of defenses can add to the conventional explication of a poem. Second, I would like to see what a knowledge of defenses can tell us for literary history — specifically, the literary history of Victorian England. Naturally, then, we should look at a Victorian poem, perhaps *the* Victorian poem.

SEPTEMBER 1965

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DOVER BEACH

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

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

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle 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.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

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"Dover Beach" (according to *The Case for Poetry*) is the most widely reprinted poem in the language. Certainly, it seems like the most widely explicated, once you begin researching it. Let me try to summarize in a few paragraphs what a dozen or so of the most useful explicators and annotators have to say.[1]

First, the date. Arnold wrote a draft of the first three stanzas on notes for *Empedocles on Etna*. He had completed the poem, then, in the summer of 1850 (Tinker) or 1851 (Baum). Depending on which summer you settle for, the poem refers to some rendezvous with Marguerite or to Arnold's seaside honeymoon with Frances.

The reference to Sophocles in the second stanza is somewhat vague, but it seems quite clear that for the final image Arnold had in mind the episode in Book VII of Thucydides where, during the ill-fated Sicilian expedition, the Athenian troops became confused during the night battle at Epipolae. The enemy learned their password, and the Athenians went down to disastrous defeat (Tinker).

The poem itself moves from light to darkness, paralleling its thematic movement as a whole from faith to disillusionment (*Case for Poetry*), or from the wholly literal to the wholly metaphorical, from small abstractions to large ones, from past to present (Johnson, 1961). At the same time, the poem builds on a series of dualisms or contrasts. The most ironic of them is the contrast between the tranquil scene and the restless incertitude of the speaker (Kirby), but the most powerful is that between the land and the sea. The sea, in particular, evokes a rich variety of symbolic values: a sense of time and constant change, of vitality – the waters of baptism and birth – also a sense of blankness,

[1] Since explications necessarily overlap, it is hard to give credit where credit is due, but I will try. To avoid a cumbersome series of footnotes, I will simply give in parentheses after a given statement, what seems to me the most appropriate name or title, referring to the following list of explications: Paull F. Baum, *Ten Studies in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (Durham, N. C., 1958), pp. 85-97. Louis Bonnerot, *Matthew Arnold, Poéte: Essai de biographie psychologique* (Paris, 1947), p. 203. *The Case for Poetry*, eds. Frederick L. Gwynn, Ralph W. Condee, and Arthur O. Lewis, Jr. (Englewood Cliffs, 1954), pp. 17, 19, and "Teacher's Manual," pp. 14-15. Rodney Delasanta, *The Explicator*, XVIII (1959), 7. Elizabeth Drew, *Poetry: A Modern Guide to its Understanding and Enjoyment* (New York, 1959), pp. 221-223. Gerhard Friedrich, "A Teaching Approach to Poetry," *English Journal*, XLIX (1960), 75-81. Frederick L. Gwynn, *Explicator*, VIII (1960), 46. Wendell Stacy Johnson, "Matthew Arnold's Dialogue," *University of Kansas City Review*, XXVII (1960), 109-116. Wendell Stacy Johnson, *The Voices of Matthew Arnold: An Essay in Criticism* (New Haven, 1961), pp. 90-94. J. D. Jump, *Matthew Arnold* (London, 1955), pp. 67-68 and 81. J. P. Kirby, *Explicator*, I (1943), 42. Murray Krieger, " 'Dover Beach' and the Tragic Sense of Eternal Recurrence," *University of Kansas City Review*, XXIII (1956), 73-79. Gene Montague, "Arnold's 'Dover Beach' and 'The Scholar Gypsy,' " *Explicator*, XVIII (1959), 15. Frederick A. Pottle, *Explicator*, II (1944), 45. Norman C. Stageberg, *Explicator*, IX (1951), 34. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry, *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold: A Commentary* (London, 1940), pp. 173-178. I do not know of any psychoanalytic explications except that referred to in n. 7.

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formlessness, and mystery (Johnson, 1961). One could think of the land-sea conflict as one between man and nature or present and past (Krieger) or between the dry, critical mind (note the pun) and a natural, spontaneous, self-sufficient existence represented by the sea (Johnson, 1960). One could even think of the sea as a kind of Providence failing to master the Necessity represented by the eternal note of the pebbles (Delasanta). The sea is stable, as faith is; yet it has its ebb and flow and spray, turbid like human misery. Similarly, the land is itself solid and coherent, but its pebbles and shingles are atomistic and agitated (Gwynn), as though the point of misery and conflict were right at the edge or mingling of land and sea (*Case for Poetry*).

The dualism of the poem shows in its structure as well. Each of the four stanzas divides quite markedly into two parts. In stanzas one, three, and four, the first part is hopeful; the second undercuts illusion with reality (Krieger). In every case, illusion is presented in terms of sight, and reality in terms of sound (Delasanta). Thus, the poem moves back and forth from optimistic images of sight to pessimistic images of sound. We can perhaps think of hearing as "the more contiguous sense," the "more subtle sense" (Krieger), but the sounds that dominate the poem are alarms of battle and grating and withdrawing roars (Gwynn).

The poem builds on this manifold dualism, but at the same time it presses steadily forward, with each stanza referring to the one preceding (Krieger). There is a kind of five-part structure as the poem moves from a setting to a dramatic situation to a transitional passage (the second stanza) to an ethical, philosophical comment (the third stanza); finally, that philosophical comment converts to a seemingly unrelated image with a shock of abruptness and strangeness (Montague).

The first stanza gives us a scene so richly laden in values as to make us feel a kind of total satisfaction or utter completeness. Then, at the word "only" the scene lapses into the harsh sound and message of the pebbles (Krieger). Yet even in the first line, the word "to-night" hints at the transitory quality of this fullness and satisfaction (Friedrich), as do in the third and fourth lines the appearance and disappearance of the light from the French coast. The French lights, though, contrast with the stable cliffs of England which "stand,/Glimmering and vast" and so balance the French ebb and flow with permanency. The magnificent "Begin, and cease, and then again begin" also acts out in its rhythm the inexorable quality of the struggle (Krieger). The first stanza closes with the musical words "cadence" and "note," a humanistic overtone which bridges to Sophocles (Gwynn). But the first stanza also ends

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with the "grating roar," a harsh sound that shatters the calm of the opening and sends the poet more drastically off to the Ægæan (Drew).

The shift from the first stanza to the second represents a shift from the here and now to the everywhere and always (Krieger); the eternal note of sadness and the battle between sea and land merge past and present, we and they. The third stanza returns to the sea as complete and self-sufficient, then breaks at the "but" into a disillusionment expressed as sound (Krieger). The light fades as faith did (Stageberg) and leads us into the last half of the stanza whose falling rhythm and open vowels pour us relentlessly over into the final stanza (Jump).

That last stanza states the theme explicitly for the first time (Kirby), the contrast between seeming perfection and real chaos (Krieger), between the world as an illusion of beauty (Pottle) and the harsh reality of life (Drew). The last three lines give us a startlingly new image (Baum), harsh and surprising (Jump), one wholly metaphorical as against the otherwise wholly realistic setting of the poem (Johnson, 1961). Once we get over the shock of the image, though, we can see that it is not discontinuous, but progresses logically from what has gone before: the "darkling plain" continues the earlier contrast between the land and the sea (Kirby) and extends and enlarges the earlier image of the "naked shingles" (Kirby, Drew). The rhyme-word "light" halfway in the stanza and the subsequent "flight" and "night" take us back to the opening rhymes "to-night" and "light" (Kirby), giving us a sense of closure and completeness. Similarly, the first three stanzas mixed lines of five feet and less and used rhymes in an unpredictable way, though one that gave us a vague sense of recurrence. The last stanza, though, is rigorously rhymed *abba cddcc* with the break at the break in thought; and only the opening and closing lines have irregular lengths – the body of the stanza consists of seven five-foot lines (Krieger). Even so, within this heavy regularity, consonants clash to fill out in sound the sense of the final battle image (Drew).

The poem ends, thus, as it began, in duality. A sense of twoness runs through the various attempts by the explicators to state the idea that informs and pervades the poem: "the poet's melancholy awareness of the terrible incompatibility between illusion and reality" (Delasanta); "the repetitive inclusiveness of the human condition and its purposeless gyrations," "the tragic sense of eternal recurrence" (Krieger); "the sea-rhythm of the world in general and also of the poet's soul which finds itself mysteriously in accord with that cosmic pulse" (Bonnerot).

In general, the poem moves back and forth between here and there, past and present, land and sea, love and battle, but more impor-

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tantly between sweet sight and disillusioning sound, between appearance and reality. What informs the poem, then, is an attempt to re-create in a personal relationship the sweet sight of stability and permanence which the harsh sound of the actual ebb and flow of reality negates.

Now, with all these explicatory riches, what can psychoanalysis add to a reading of the poem? Like all explications, these treat the poem as an objective fact, which it is – in part. The part we prize, though, is our subjective experience of the poem, the interaction of the poem with what we bring to the poem – our own habits of mind, character, past experience, and present feelings that act with the poem "out there" to make a total experience "in here." Psychoanalysis is that science that tries to speak objectively about subjective states; and, by the same token, the psychoanalytic critic tries to talk objectively about his subjective experience of the poem.

To me, "Dover Beach" is a tremendously peaceful and gently melancholy poem. And that is somewhat surprising, since, after all, it is a poem at least partly about disillusionment, loss of faith, despair – why should such a poem seem peaceful or satisfying? In effect I am asking the same question Aristotle (and indeed, Arnold himself) asked about tragedy: how is it that the most painful experiences can be felt as pleasurable in works of art?[2] A psychoanalyst would answer: "Because art imitates life." That is, we approach life through a series of interacting impulses and defenses, and a work of art offers us a ready-made interaction of impulses and defenses. When we take in Arnold's poem,

[2] "Though the objects themselves may be painful to see," notes Aristotle, "we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art. . . . The explanation is to be found in a further fact: to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it: the reason of the delight is that one is at the same time learning – gathering the meaning of things." And Arnold: "In presence of the most tragic circumstances, represented in a work of Art, the feeling of enjoyment, as is well known, may still subsist: the representation of the most utter calamity, of the liveliest anguish is not sufficient to destroy it. . . . What . . . are the situations, from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived? They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous" (Preface to *Poems*, 1853).

Neither Aristotle nor Arnold had a psychology adequate to the problem, but the insights of both are sound, as far as they go. Translated into modern terms, they are saying that painful events can give pleasure in tragedy because the work of art provides defensive ways of escaping the pain and turning it into meaningful pleasure. Aristotle, typically Greek, stresses intellectualization as a defense. Arnold, typically Victorian, stresses action. I, typically twentieth-century, would say you have to analyze the defenses and adaptations of particular tragedies, tragedy by tragedy, before generalizing.

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experience it, we take in the drives the poem expresses. We also take in the poem's way of dealing with those drives, satisfying them and giving pleasure. And, further, the work of art typically transmutes patterns of impulse and defense into moral and intellectual meaning, a wholeness and completeness that our impulses and defenses do not have in everyday life.

Let us, then, talk about "Dover Beach" as a subjective experience. The poem gives me a tremendous feeling of pacification, tranquility, soothing peace.[3] Why? Because, I think, the poem offers such a heavy, massive set of defenses. We begin with the exquisite description of the seascape in which everything is vast, tranquil, calm – any disturbance in that calmness, such as the word "to-night" in the first line, the appearance and disappearance of the light from France, is immediately balanced and corrected. Only after this strong reassurance does Arnold give us a stronger disturbance, the eternal note of sadness – and, immediately, he flees in space and time to Sophocles and the Ægæan; he turns the disturbing thought into literature – and far-off, ancient literature at that. And thus defended, he can permit the disturbance to come back again: "we/Find also in the sound a thought," but even as he returns to the here and now, he defends again. He turns the feeling of disturbance into an intellectual, symbolic, metaphorical statement, in a line that never fails to jar me by its severely schematic and allegorical quality: "The Sea of Faith." Defended again, he can again return to the disturbing sound, and in the most pathetic lines of the poem he lets it roll off the edge of the earth in long, slow vowels. In the last stanza, he brings in the major defense of the poem, "Ah, love, let us be true/To one another." He offers us as a defense a retreat into a personal relationship of constancy with another person; and so defended, he can give us the final, terrible image of the ignorant armies that clash by night. In short, the poem gives me – and others, too – this tremendous feeling of tranquillity because I am over-protected; because Arnold has offered me strong defenses against the disturbance the poem deals with – even before he reveals the disturbance itself in the final lines.

Further, that disturbance itself is never very clearly presented. It is described obliquely, by negatives. For example, the sea is calm "to-night" – and the "to-night" acts as a qualification: there are other nights

[3] I realize that others find in the poem, not this sense of peace, but an ultimate feeling of failure and despair as, for example, in the explications of Delasanta and Krieger (though Bonnerot finds the pacification). Even so, if I can discover by analyzing my own reaction the drives the poem stirs up in me and the defenses the poem presents for dealing with those drives, then I can understand the different reactions of others for whom those defenses are less congenial or adequate.

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when the sea is not calm, but we do not see them. The window in line six comes as something of a surprise – it is as though the poet were reaching back for his companion even as he reaches out to take in the seascape, a special form of the dualism that pervades the poem. But the disturbance is dim and oblique. We do not see the room or the person addressed, only the window facing away from them. The "grating roar" of the pebbles is humanized and softened into music: "cadence" and "note." "The turbid ebb and flow of human misery" seems metaphorized, distanced, more than a little vague. The world, we are told, seems like but is not a land of dreams, but what it is we are not told. We are told that faith is gone; and, while most critics seem to assume Arnold's "Faith" means religious faith, that, it seems to me, is only one of its meanings. The word "Faith" is not explained until the last stanza and is then only explained by what is missing: the ability to clothe the world with joy and love and light, to find in the world certitude, peace, and help for pain. But the poem does not tell us what the world is like without these things, except, metaphorically, in the image of the ignorant armies. In other words, the poem offers us not only massive defenses, but also a specific line of defense: we do not see the disturbance itself; we only see what it is not.

There is a second specific line of defense. This poem sees and hears intensely; it gives us pleasure through what we see and hear, but at the same time the seeing and hearing operate defensively. Often, in life, to see and hear one thing intensely may serve to avoid seeing and hearing something else.[4] In this poem, we look at and listen to the sea, the shingle, to Sophocles – what are we not looking at? What is being hidden from us that we are curious about, that we would like to see? I trust you will not think me irreverent if I remind you that this a poem

[4] Arnold's own psyche is no part of the present paper. It is interesting, though, to note how often the theme of seeing or being seen occurs in Arnold's writings. He praises, for example, one "Who saw life steadily and saw it whole" ("To a Friend"). He spoke through Empedocles of "Gods we cannot see," and in "Self-Deception" of a parental "Power beyond our seeing." As suggested in the text, Arnold often looked intensely at one thing as a way of not seeing something else.

At the same time, though, this kind of intense seeing and hearing can operate defensively in another way. To say I am seeing can be a way of saying I am not being seen, and in Arnold's poetry the motif of not being seen or heard crops out repeatedly. Callicles, for example, must not be seen by Empedocles as the philosopher is about to jump into the burning crater. Neither Sohrab nor Merope recognizes (i.e., sees) his son. One can fairly guess, I think, at the poet's escaping the eyes of his parents, "He, who sees us through and through" ("A Farewell"), or a Mother Nature watching her struggling child ("Morality"). "I praise," he writes, "the life which slips away / Out of the light and mutely" ("Early Death and Fame"), such as the scholar-gypsy or Obermann. Thus, in "Dover Beach," Arnold treats the world, not as seeing himself and his love, but as indifferent, not caring, not offering help for pain: as "*ignorant* armies." One is reminded of the children in "Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse," "secret from the eyes of all," watching distant soldiers march to war.

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at least partly about a pair of lovers together at night. I cannot speak for everyone, but as for myself, I am curious as to what they are up to. The poem, however, tells me very little, for only six of its thirty-seven lines deal directly with the girl; and three of those six are so general they could refer to all mankind.

This is another case in which the poem shows us something indirectly, defensively, by showing us what it is not. The poet treats the particular here-and-now relationship between himself and the girl as the always-and-everywhere condition of all mankind. He defines the girl as a substitute for the world: let us be true to one another for the world proved false. He defines his wished-for relationship with the girl indirectly, obliquely, negatively, by stating what his relationship with the world at large is not.

What, then, is this world which the girl must replace? As the explicators point out, it is a world rather sharply divided into two aspects roughly corresponding to illusion and reality or, in the terms of the poem itself, the sight of a bright, calm seascape representing a world with faith, and the sound of agitated pebbles, one without faith.

The theme of sound reminds us of the importance of the sounds of the poem itself, and particularly the rhyme and rhythm so beautifully worked into the sense at three points: line twelve, "Begin, and cease, and then again begin"; the long withdrawal of the last four lines of stanza three; finally, the clotted consonants that accompany the image of the ignorant armies. It is worth noting that these points where the sound becomes particularly strong are all points of disillusionment in the poem. In general, strong rhyme seems linked in the poem to passages of expectation or trust or acceptance; strong rhythm seems linked to a sense of reality and solidity. Thus, the rhymes are strong in stanza two, the intellectual acceptance of disillusionment, and in stanza four, the emotional acceptance. Rhythm is strong at the opening of the poem with its great feeling of regularity, solidity, thereness.

In the first three stanzas of this poem of division and dualism, rhyme and rhythm tend to be divorced from each other. At points where we are strongly aware of the rhythm, the rhyme tends to disappear from consciousness or even from the poem. Conversely, at points of very regular rhyme, as in stanza two, the rhythm becomes irregular and tends to disintegrate. This sound pattern seems to be a part of the general defensive strategy of the poem – to divide the world and deal with it in parts, to show us things by showing us what they are not. Similarly, Arnold divides each of the lines from two to six halfway – and this, again, is part of the general strategy of division in the poem, but also,

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as all through the poem, a way of dealing with the world of the poem as he deals with the world described by the poem: dividing it in two to deal with it in parts. Finally, at the close of the poem, not only rhythm, but also rhyme becomes strong; there is a strengthening of defensive form as the poem comes to its moment of greatest stress and distress in content. Rhyme, rhythm, and sense all come together at the close to make us experience in ourselves the poem's final rhymed acceptance of a disturbing reality expressed as rhythmic sound.

Rhythmic sound itself seems to be the disillusioning influence which the poem struggles to accept. Obviously, we need to ask what the emotional significance of that rhythm is. Consider, for a moment, the two senses, sight and hearing. Why do we speak of "feasting" one's eyes or "devouring" with a look? Why do we speak of "the voice" of conscience or of God as "the word"?

"Dover Beach" taps our earliest experience of our two major senses. Sight, the child comes to first. As early as the third month of life, a baby can recognize a human face as such. By the fourth or fifth month, he can distinguish the face of the person who feeds and fondles him from other faces. Sight becomes linked in our minds to being fed, to a nurturing mother. Thus, for example, in "Dover Beach," the strong sight images of the first five lines lead into a demand that a woman come, a taste image ("sweet"), and even, if we identify kinaesthetically with the poet, an inhaling of that sweet night air. In infancy, sight becomes associated with a taking in, specifically a taking in from a mother in whom we have faith, whom we expect to give us joy, love, light, certitude, peace, help for pain. Our first disillusionment in life comes as that nurturing figure fails to stand calm, full, fair, vast, tranquil, always there, but instead retreats, withdraws, ebbs and flows. And the poem makes us hear this withdrawal.

Our important experience with hearing comes later than seeing. Not until we begin to understand words does hearing begin to convey as much to us as sight does, and it seems to be in the nature of things that a good deal of what the one or two year old child hears is – "Don't." We experience sound as a distancing from a parent, often a corrective, not something we anticipate and expect, but something we must willy-nilly put up with, since we cannot shut our ears as we can our eyes. In "Dover Beach," then, what the poet wishes for from the world, but knows will not come, is the kind of fidelity, "Faith," or gratification a child associates with the sight of his mother, but the sound the poet hears routs his expectations. And the poem, by associating sight with the world as we wish and hope it would be, and sound as a corrector of

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that wish, finds in us a responsive note, for this has been part of our experience, too.

But what, specifically, does the harsh sound of grating pebbles bring to our minds, particularly as Arnold describes it in the poem? For one thing, as the explicators show, the point of misery and conflict seems to come right at the joining or mingling of land and sea. For another, the disturbance seems to lie in its very periodicity, its rhythm. Where the opening seascape is very solidly there, calm, full, tranquil – "the cliffs of England *stand*" (and the internal rhyme demands heavy stress) – the disturbance is an ebb and flow, a withdrawing, a retreat, a being drawn back and flung up; the waves "Begin, and cease, and then again begin." And slowly, what was simply a harsh, rhythmical sound gains other overtones. The "bright girdle" is withdrawn and we are left with "naked shingles." The world does not "lie before us like a land of dreams." Rather, the "Begin, and cease, and then again begin" has become a naked clash by night. There is a well-nigh universal sexual symbolism in this heard-but-not-seen naked fighting by night. The poem is evoking in me, at least, and perhaps in many readers, primitive feelings about "things that go bump in the night" – disturbing, frightening, but exciting at the same time, like a horror movie. This is one way Arnold's poem turns our experience of disillusionment or despair into a satisfying one, namely, through the covert gratification we get from this final image. A psychoanalyst would recognize a "primal scene fantasy." Arnold is talking about hearing a sexual "clash by night," just as children fantasy sex as fight.[5] At the same time, the image operates defensively as well. This poem tells about a pair of lovers in a sexual situation; as elsewhere in the poem, the image deflects our attention from that sexual situation and sublimates it into a distant, literary, and moral experience, a darkling plain from Thucydides.

The conventional explicators have found some logic underlying that final startling image: a logical development from brightness to darkness, from the pebble beach to the darkling plain. Ordinary explication, however, offers little basis for the armies, while psychological explication offers considerable. The poem begins with a world which is very solidly there, a world which is seen, a world which is invested with a faith like a child's trust in the sight of his nurturing mother. The poem moves into sound, to the later, harsher sense, and with it to the sounds of withdrawal and retreat. Thus, the sound of the ocean shifts from the

[5] In the discussion following the reading of this paper, it was suggested to me that the sexual symbolism is even more exact than stated in the text. The "darkling plain" may suggest to us, unconsciously, the nuptial bed, the "struggle" a man's activity and the "flight" a woman's passivity in the sexual situation.

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rhythm of waves to the more permanent, even geological withdrawal of the "Sea of Faith." The feeling is one of permanent decay, a sense of harsh reality akin to a child's growing knowledge that his mother does not exist for him alone, that she has a life of her own and wishes of her own which cause her to go away from him and come back, to retreat and withdraw. The final image brings in a still stronger feeling of rhythmic withdrawal, a feeling like that of a child's excited but frightened vague awareness of the naked, nighttime rhythmic sound of that other, separate adult life. It does not lie there like a land of dreams – rather, it is violent and brutal; the bright girdle is withdrawn and bodies clash by night. Roughly, we could say that the lovely appearances seen in the poem – the moonlight, the cliffs of England, the stillness – correspond to a faith in a mother. The harsh sounds of withdrawal heard in the poem correspond to the disillusioning knowledge of one's mother's relationship with father, the latter expressed perhaps as Sophocles or Thucydides (Arnold's father did edit Thucydides). In the manner of a dream, the two individuals hidden in the poem, a father and mother, are disguised as two multitudes, two "armies"; and they, usually all-seeing, all-wise, become in the violent moment of passion, "ignorant."

But we still have not answered the question, How does the poem turn this disturbing awareness of withdrawal into a pleasurable experience? So far, we have talked only about the defenses the poem uses: the flight to Sophocles, symbolic disguise, intellectualization, most important, division, keeping a sharp difference between the seen appearance and the heard reality. But such defenses can only prevent unpleasure — how can the poem give us pleasure and create a rounded experience?

The pleasure lies in that aspect of the poem that the commentators almost without exception ignore (thus proving the strength and success of Arnold's defensive maneuvers). Let me remind you again that this is a poem that talks about a man and a woman in love and alone together. Yet how oddly and how brilliantly the poem handles this problem of stationing its speaker! For the first five lines we have only the vaguest inkling of where he is: looking at a seascape near Dover. Then, in line six, we suddenly learn, first, that he is indoors, second, that there is someone with him, someone whom he wishes to take in what he is taking in. Yet the poem does nothing more with this sudden placing. Instead, the curiosity it arouses, the faint feeling of disturbance, is displaced onto the sound heard in the lines after line six – another way of making us feel the sound as disturbing, and as complicating the scene.

The next two stanzas do little more with the problem of stationing. Stanza two places the speaker in space – by showing us where he

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is not, the Ægæan; then, it places him by "a distant northern sea." The "we" of line eighteen has all the ambiguities of the editorial we – it could be the poet as a public speaker, the poet and his companion, or the poet and all his contemporaries. Stanza three places the poet in time, again, negatively: not "once" when the sea of faith was full, but "now" – again, something a bit vague and something we already know. Then, suddenly, line twenty-nine tells us something new again – that he is in love with his companion. Their relationship thus emerges from the rest of the poem like shadowy figures materializing,[6] until, at last, only two lines from the close, the poem firmly stations the poet and his love: "And we are here." Even here, though, there is some blurring, for the "we" could be the editorial we of stanza two as well as the we of you-and-I. And, further, we are no sooner "here" than we are there, metaphorically flown to the darkling plain swept by ignorant armies.

In short, the stationing of the poet and his love involves a good deal of shifting and ambiguity. As always in this poem, the poem is telling us what things are obliquely, by telling us what they are not. The ambiguity about where the poet and his love are suggests that we look to see where they are in another sense – and there, indeed, we can locate them quite precisely: they are right there in lines six, nine, eighteen, twenty-four, twenty-nine, and thirty-five. They occur precisely at the points of division in the poem where it moves from sight to sound, from appearance to reality, or, in stanza two, from a far-off, literary Sophocles to the here and now of "we" by the northern sea. To put it another way, the lovers come between the two kinds of experience the poem creates. This is the importance of the phrase, "And we are here," which makes us feel the closure and completeness of the poem. Read over the last lines with variant phrasings to see the importance of that clause:

> . . . nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And the world is, as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

[6] This, too, is a recurring theme in Arnold's writing – a sense of the true state of affairs emerging like a human figure. Thus, the 1853 Preface to *Poems* speaks of a myth in the Greek spectator's mind "traced in its bare outlines . . . as a group of statuary, faintly seen, at the end of a long and dark vista: then came the Poet, embodying outlines. . . . the light deepened upon the group; more and more it revealed itself to the riveted gaze of the spectator: until at last, when the final words were spoken, it stood before him in broad sunlight, a model of immortal beauty." Similarly, at the opening of the 1869 Preface to *Essays in Criticism*, he describes Truth as a "mysterious Goddess" who, even if approached obliquely, can only be seen in outline, while, "He who will do nothing but fight impetuously towards her . . . is inevitably destined to run his head into the folds of the black robe in which she is wrapped." I am reminded of Empedocles' rushing into the crater.

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> . . . nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And I am here, as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

The poem needs the finality both of being *here* and of being *we*, for this is the poem's ultimate defense.

Stanza one opened with sight, taken as reassuring, constant, full, and closed with sound sensed as a kind of corruption penetrating the fair sight. Stanzas two and three fled this conflict both in time and space, and fled it in another way through the poet's universalizing of his feelings, spreading them over all time, all space, all peoples. And yet this defense leaves him disillusioned, and he turns at the opening of stanza four to the girl as a way of dealing with the problem.

He begins by saying, "Ah, love, let us be true/To one another"; and "true" is the key word. He wants to re-create in his relationship with her the lost sense of faith; he wants her to be "true," not to withdraw as the earlier sight had done. "True" also suggests that the relationship of the two, the poet and his love, will not be like the relationship of the two halves of the world as he sees them. The lovers will not corrupt or contradict one another as the two halves of the world do – rather, they will be "true/To one another."

The last stanza then moves into a series of lists that act out the poet's feeling toward the world that has failed him, that though it seems

> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.

The lists give us a feeling of inclusiveness, of taking it all in, but the lists are negative, "neither," "nor," "nor" – so that it is precisely the inclusiveness that is rejected; precisely the fact that the world negates all the things the poet wants to take in that leads to the rejection of the world. Here is the first half of the poem's strategy: to try to take in joy, love, light, certitude, peace, help for pain; but, upon finding some one part of the world that negates these things, to reject all the world. A psychoanalyst would speak here of denial: the poet must deny whatever conflicts with his wish to be given joy, love, light, and the rest. In the key line, "And we are here," the poet turns back to the girl. "We are here," solidly, constantly, as the seascape was in stanza one; and we are quite distinctly separate from what conflicts with that solid, constant trust – the ignorant armies. They are quite distinctly not "we"; and they are distanced from "we" by "as," that is, by metaphor and literary reference.

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The fact that "we are here" stands between the first half of the stanza and the second, preventing the second half from penetrating the first. Paradoxically, as Theodore Morrison pointed out many years ago, the poem uses love precisely to prevent the disillusionment involved in a knowledge of sexuality.[7]

The strategy of the poem thus consists of four stages. First, the poet gives us a world felt as constant, nurturing, evoking faith. Second, he discovers a disillusioning sound. Third, he rejects the whole thing to get rid of that disillusioning sound. Fourth, he retreats from his global wishes and tries to re-create the earlier idyllic state in miniature, in a personal relationship. The poem defends by denial; it gets rid of the disillusioning sound by putting it metaphorically away from the poet. Then the poem gives pleasure by re-creating an adult world in terms of a child's wishes for constancy, trust, and faith in his parents.[8]

Notice, too, how the poet makes us experience for ourselves the experience the poem describes. He gives us, first, the somewhat vague seascape, evoking in us both a wish to take in more, and a feeling of trust and security. Then he surprises us with the presence of another. We feel a disturbing influence, which the poem tells us is a sound. So it is – the sudden speaking voice of "Come to the window," and we want to know more, to take in more. Instead, the second and third stanzas try to intellectualize and distance the disturbing influence but fail and come back to it, thus building up tension in us. The fourth stanza abandons these earlier attempts to deal with the problem. First, it suddenly retreats from the external world to the smaller world of the lovers; second, it shifts in metaphor from the Dover seascape to the ignorant armies. The fourth stanza gives us the vague hope, "Let us be true"; and, as at the beginning of the poem, we feel trust, security, but also a desire to take in more. But now we learn that the danger, the moving back and

[7] "Dover Beach Revisited: A New Fable for Critics," *Harper's Magazine,* CLXXX (1940). "The ordinary degree of aggressiveness, the normal joy of conquest and possession, seemed to be wholly absent from him. The love he asked for was essentially a protective love, sisterly or motherly; in its unavoidable ingredient of passion he felt a constant danger, which repelled and unsettled him" (see pp. 240-241). Professor Morrison offers his insight in the whimsical spirit of a *Pooh Perplex,* but it seems to me sound nevertheless. This essay, by the way, contains the only other psychoanalytic explication of the poem I know.

[8] Like the theme of sight, the form of rejecting or giving up one thing so as to gain another (often a mollified version of the first) occurs over and over again in Arnold's writings. Among the poems that take this form are: "To a Republican Friend, 1848" (both poems), "Religious Isolation," "In Utrumque Paratus," "Absence," "Self-Dependence," "A Summer Night," "The Buried Life," "The Scholar-Gipsy," "Thyrsis," "Rugby Chapel"; and among the prose, "On Translating Homer," "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," the rejection of Philistinism, anarchy, Hebraism, and so on. "I am fragments," Arnold wrote to "K," and the trope seems to represent a basic defense for him. "Dover Beach" is quintessential Arnold as well as quintessential Victorian.

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forth, is elsewhere; we take a metaphorical flight in time and space to the plain of Epipolae. The efforts at flight that failed in stanzas two and three succeed in stanza four because "we are here." The phrase is almost parental; and thus, by the very acceptance of disillusionment, the poem gratifies us, because it does, ultimately, let us take in what we wished to take in: it lets us see two "true" lovers together with a glimpse of a "clash by night" elsewhere.

The poem makes us experience the experience described by the poem, and we can see it does in the various explications. We have spoken of the poem as a re-creating of the child's trust that he will be nurtured, that he will be able to take in and be taken into some comforting environment. Krieger speaks of the poem as "the repetitive *inclusiveness* of the human situation." We have spoken of the poem as an attempt to re-create the world as it once was, in childhood. Krieger speaks of repetitiveness and "the tragic sense of *eternal recurrence*." We have spoken of the disturbing note in the poem as the sense of ebb and flow that cuts down a child's faith that the nurturing world will always be there. Bonnerot speaks of "the sea-rhythm of the world in general and also of the poet's soul which finds itself mysteriously in accord with that cosmic pulse,"[9] while Delasanta speaks of "terrible incompatibility" – the two sides of a child's trust.

In short, a psychological understanding of the poem as an interaction of impulses and defenses complements conventional explication because it reveals the emotional underpinnings to our objective understanding of the poem. It enables us to speak objectively about our subjective experience of the poem, even when those subjective experiences vary sharply. But what can this kind of awareness of the poem as impulse and defense contribute to literary history?

A preliminary question, though, must be: What do we mean by literary history? Once literary history moves beyond the mere chronicling of names and dates, as in a reference book, we ask, I think, that it

[9] Bonnerot offers a curious confirmation of the reading here suggested, that the sea in "Dover Beach" evokes feelings like those toward a nurturing mother. Immediately after the statement cited, he quotes (free associates to?) the following from *God and the Bible*: "Only when one is young and headstrong can one thus prefer bravado to experience, can one stand by the Sea of Time, and instead of listening to the solemn and rhythmical beat of its waves, choose to fill the air with one's own whoopings to start the echo." It is not too difficult to hear under Arnold's "whoopings" something like a child's anguished howls to prevent his mother's withdrawal or bring her back ("start the echo") or replace the void she leaves ("fill the air"). There is further confirmation in Arnold's letter to Clough of 29 Sept. 1848, where he describes himself as "one who looks upon water as the Mediator between the inanimate and man." See H. F. Lowry, ed., *The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough* (London, 1932), p. 92.

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be an attempt to understand literary events historically, that is, as having causes or meaningful relations to other events in time. Typically, though, when literary history moves from chronicle to history, it shades off into the history of ideas. Literary history, as such, ceases to be a separate discipline. The reason this happens, I think, is that we are accustomed to look at the content of literature when we are looking at literature historically. But content is not what is literary in literature — form is; the kind and quality of expression is. In psychoanalytic terms, form and mode of expression are defenses; and, therefore, to write literary history which is not merely a branch of the history of ideas, literary history which deals with what is literary in literature, we shall have to write about the defenses a particular culture uses. We shall have to think more like a cultural anthropologist than an intellectual historian.

Many critics have said "Dover Beach" is the representative, the quintessential Victorian poem, or, in Krieger's gentle pun, a "highly Victorian" poem. Mostly, however, the critics have said this because they see the poem as primarily about doubt and loss of faith — major themes in Victorian ideas. But "Dover Beach" is an emotional experience, not just an intellectual one. Further, to see the poem as only about doubt is not to see the form of the poem, for Arnold sets his doubt and despair against a sexual situation: this is a poem that tells about two lovers alone at night.[10]

We have seen that "Dover Beach" defends against that situation and adapts it to moral and intellectual pleasure by employing three strategies. First, it avoids looking directly at the lovers by intensely looking at and listening to something else, the sea, the shingle, Sophocles, and so on. Second, the poem places its "you" and "I" between illusion and reality so as to keep up a division or dualism, to prevent certain things from mingling or penetrating. The feeling is that if the negative sound touches the positive sight, one must reject them both. One must either accept the world wholly or reject it wholly. Both these defenses the psychoanalyst would call forms of denial: denying the existence of forbidden things by seeing only what they are not; denying compromise or imperfection. Then, third, the poem tries to re-create in the relationship with the lover a simplified, more childish, but more satisfying version of an adult love for another person or the world as a whole.

[10] Thus, I think, Walter Houghton comes closer to the theme of doubt when he reminds us: "For the Victorians, the disagreeable facts were primarily those of sex, and the terrifying truth the state of religion" (*The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* [New Haven, 1957], pp. 413-414). In this section of my paper, I am relying very heavily on Professor Houghton's book. My feeling goes beyond mere indebtedness to sheer gratitude that such an encyclopedic and perceptive book exists.

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In short, the psychoanalytic study of this quintessentially Victorian poem cues us to a particular hypothesis as to what makes it so "Victorian": a certain pattern of defenses, namely, the use of denial to recreate an adult world to meet a child's demand for perfection. Now, we need to ask, To what extent is this pattern characteristically Victorian? If it is characteristic, where did it come from? How did it sustain itself? And how is it expressed in literary forms?

Obviously, we cannot answer all these questions in a mere essay, but we can begin. We can begin with the way the Victorian style itself began – with the rejection of the Regency and all the four Georges, the rejection of eighteenth-century club-life and other levities, the rejection of the aristocracy, and the rejection of Byronism and the excesses of Romanticism.[11] Psychologically, such a massive rejection of the past is, at some level of a man's being, a rejection of his parents, his forebears in a physical as well as an intellectual or historical sense. It is no accident, I think, that this age that so rejected immediate parenthood should also have been so preoccupied with the problem of evolution, parenthood distanced to a prehistoric past. Kenneth Burke suggests the characteristic mental habit of the nineteenth century was translating "essence" into "origin" so that the statement, "This is the essence of the situation," becomes "This is how it began."[12] And this strategy, too, I take it, is a way of looking for lost origins – parenthood – in areas safely distanced from real origins.

When the Victorians rejected their immediate past, what did they replace it with? Just as they stuffed and over-stuffed their rooms with furniture, they felt they were creating a new world themselves – and not without reason. "Your railroad," Thackeray could write, "starts the new era." "We are of the age of steam." "It was only yesterday, but what a gulf between now and then!" In a very real sense, the newly powerful middle class could claim to have created itself, psychologically, to have been its own parents or, in Clough's phrase, by its very success to have achieved "This keen supplanting of nearest kin."

But when we look to see how the Victorians thought of parents, we find that, if the Victorians were their own parents, they were a

[11] Houghton, pp. 45-53, 109, 300, and 342. Lionel Trilling, "The Fate of Pleasure: Wordsworth to Dostoevsky," in Northrop Frye, ed., *Romanticism Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute* (New York, 1963), pp. 73-106, particularly pp. 73-90 and 97-101. Professor Trilling's paper develops brilliantly the idea that Victorian moral and spiritual energy should be regarded as an effort to mask over – indeed, attack – pleasures erotic and gentlemanly. My own essay might well be regarded as the attempt to extend Professor Trilling's hypothesis to a particular poem and to literary forms.

[12] Cited by Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Tangled Bank* (New York, 1962), p. 366.

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rather special kind of parent. Mother becomes Patmore's *Angel in the House,* or, as Tennyson's Prince describes her,

> No angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
> In angel instincts, breathing Paradise,
> Interpreter between the gods and men . . .

As for the gods, we recognize the Victorian father: a man thought of primarily in terms of force and power and authority, a king or hero on Carlyle's model, a captain of industry, almost an Old Testament God. What such parents lack, of course, is adult sexuality, which is replaced by a kind of industrial force or household contentment.

We see the same denial in Victorian hero-worship, particularly of heroes who combined features of a father and a son: wild, primitive figures, but of impeccable moral stature. The favorite was the Galahad story, and it tells us the Victorian secret: the denial of sexuality leads to physical strength or, to put it another way, the Victorians looked at a man's strength as a way of not seeing a man's sexuality. Symbols for the denial are the baptismal images that recur in Victorian writing, of water or cleansing of the soiled self, as in *The Water Babies* or Kingsley's whole advice for life – "hard work and cold water."[13]

What I am suggesting is that the Victorians in general, like Arnold in "Rugby Chapel," sought parents such as a child would wish, parents devoid of sexuality. What the Victorians rejected in their social parents, the eighteenth century, the Regency, they rejected in their actual parents: levity, libertinism, gentlemanly pleasures, sexuality. As Thackeray complained in the preface to *Pendennis,* his readers would not accept a virile man or a realistic woman. When the Victorians created their own new world, became parents themselves, they became parents on this infantile model. Thus, we find Beatrice Webb's father, though he was a railway tycoon, kneeling down morning and night to repeat the prayer he learned at his mother's lap – "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child." Perhaps it is true of any age baffled by the complexities of rapid change that it regresses, tries to come to grips with its world in more primitive, childish terms; but the Victorians do seem to have done so more than most.

In this wish to re-create one's parents on the model of a child's wishes, we find an answer to what is to me the most puzzling problem of Victorian life: Why was it a stable society? After all, the Victorians tried to put down wit, levity, leisure, acceptance, and passivity, along with sex. It was a stately, solemn, perhaps dreary kind of culture. And

[13] Jerome Buckley, *The Victorian Temper* (Cambridge, 1951), pp. 98-105.

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yet it lasted fifty or so years. People must have found some sort of compensating pleasure in it. They found, I think, the granting of one of the strongest and deepest wishes of childhood, a wish that persists with great strength into adult life, namely, the desire to maintain the fantasy that one's parents be sexually pure.

Thus, obliquely, "Dover Beach" has led us to at least a hypothesis about the major Victorian modes of defense. In the terms of intellectual history, Walter Houghton describes them as "a process of deliberately ignoring whatever was unpleasant and pretending it did not exist." In psychoanalytic terms, these defenses are avoidance, denial, suppression, repression – all those defensive strategies summed up in Mr. Podsnap's formulaic, "I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!"

But these defenses have a positive side as well as the merely negative one. They lead to the Victorian effort to remodel the world, to earnestness, enthusiasm, the belief in the basic goodness of human nature, dogmatism, rigidity, an emphasis on doing (Arnold's "Hebraism"), the gospel of intellectual, moral, and social work, the drive and duty to succeed. All are ways of emulating a father conceived of as non-sexual industrial or moral drive; or of gratifying a mother conceived in terms of Ruskin's "Goddess of Getting-on," or what Arnold called "Mrs. Gooch's Golden Rule," her counsel to her son: "My dear Dan . . . you should look forward to being some day manager of that concern!" As for intellectual life, we find generally what Mill described as a "rather more demonstrative attitude of belief" than people thought necessary "when their personal conviction was more complete." We see the Victorian never-ending quest for truth, as though one were constantly trying to find some truth other than the one you have denied and left behind you. At the same time, we find an unwillingness to draw ultimate conclusions, to come to a stopping place lest the intellectual quest end. Thus, too, we find poems like "The Scholar-Gipsy" or Tennyson's "Ulysses" praising aspiration, movement, energy, force without aim or end, for if one came to an end, one might have to sit down and think about what was left behind[14] – "The Buried Life," Arnold called it;

> our own only true, deep-buried selves,
> Being one with which we are one with the whole world.

For those with eyes less open than Arnold's, the buried life be-

[14] "For the Victorians, intense activity was both a rational method of attacking the anxieties of the time, and an irrational method of escaping them" (Houghton, p. 262). See also Kristian Smidt, "The Intellectual Quest of the Victorian Poets," *English Studies*, XL (1959), 90-102.

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came the dark underside of Victorian optimism: the fear that what was denied might return, and the optimism founded on denial be upset. There might be a revolution from below, from the masses. There might come corruption from abroad, the pernicious writings of, say, Balzac or Flaubert, or even the local product, the "fleshly school of poetry." Abstract thought and contemplation are dangerous. Knowledge and love are antithetical, as in Browning's *Paracelsus*. Levity becomes the light treatment of evil. Leisure is thought of as the occasion of all evil. The devil finds work for idle hands – and we can guess at the fear of what idle hands might be doing. These are the anxieties, doubts, and pessimisms that gnaw underneath the superstructure of Victorian optimism, things that a Carlyle or even an Arnold would try to put down by force, George Eliot by a cult of obedience, or Macaulay by a trust in progress.

Doubt and despair followed by a commitment to work backed up by religious or philosophic principle – this is, of course, what Jerome Buckley (ch. v) has called "the pattern of Victorian conversion," and it is well known. What I am suggesting is a psychological paradigm for this Victorian life-style. We could put it this way: I reject my actual forebears (the eighteenth century and its attitudes). I create the world anew. I thus become my own parent, but – and this is the important point – I become a parent such as a child would wish. I deny the adult emotions, sexuality, but also easiness, indifference, the enjoyment of leisure, the tolerance of uncertainty. Instead, I work, I am enthusiastic, I am earnest. And the last steps carry out the first two. I deny the adult emotions and so continue the rejection of what went before. I busy myself and so I create the world anew. The system closes upon itself and becomes the stable, though uneasy, style of the long Victorian calm. It is uneasy because the whole circle rests on a denial that leaves a weak point at which Swinburne and Pater and Meredith and Hardy and Wilde will penetrate the system and break it down.

But what does this say about literary history? Obviously, much of the content of Victorian poetry expresses either the frantic affirmations or the covert doubts of Victorian culture. This is the content, however. What about defenses understood as giving rise to forms and modes of expression? "Dover Beach" cues us to look for three defenses. First, concentrating on one thing as a way of not seeing something else. Second, a tendency to try to keep things from mingling, to divide experience into total acceptance or total rejection, to avoid compromise or the acceptance of imperfection. Third, the re-creation of an adult world according

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to a child's wish for perfection, specifically, that his parents be sexually pure. If our hypothesis is correct, these defenses must give rise to at least some of the forms and styles of Victorian literature.

And so, it seems to me, they do. Many critics have pointed to a kind of divided allegiance in Victorian poetry: the poet as a public, social spokesman, but with a buried self; a pervasive dichotomy between social and moral subjects and personal ones. In psychoanalytic terms, we recognize one of the "Dover Beach" defenses, concentrating on one thing so as not to see another, or, as E. D. H. Johnson puts it, "The expressed content has a dark companion."[15] The same defense shows in the way the Victorian poet relies on a natural scene. "Arnold," notes Truss, "typically grafted an idea to a landscape, and he tried to make the landscape do his talking for him." Trilling's phrasing is kinder when he speaks of "Arnold's bold dramatic way of using great objects, often great geographical or topographical objects, in relation to which the subjective states of the poem organize themselves and seem themselves to acquire an objective actuality."[16] The massive landscape takes our attention away from the poet.

Another popular form of the period distances the same way: the dramatic monologue affirms an external reality at the expense of the poet's subjective state (though as Kristian Smidt has shown, the distancing often collapses into an "oblique" or "diagonal" point of view in which the poet blurs into his spokesman — the denial breaks down).[17] Along with the dramatic monologue, we find in criticism a tendency to look at the events described by a work of art rather than at the work of art itself, to treat Shakespearean characters as real people, for example. This, too, enables the Victorian to concentrate on one thing as a way of not seeing something else — his own emotional reaction.

If "Dover Beach" is quintessentially Victorian, we should be able to find in Victorian forms generally the second of its defenses, namely, dividing the world into black and white, yea and nay. Thus, when the Victorian style began, poetic imagery shifted away from the growth and profusion of the Romantics, uniting with the world, to images of polarity and tension, dividing oneself from the world or dividing the world itself, as Arnold does in "Dover Beach" (Johnson, 1961, p. 2).

[15] E. D. H. Johnson, *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry* (Princeton, 1952), p. 217.

[16] Tom J. Truss, "Arnold's 'Shakespeare,' " *Explicator*, XIX (1961), 56. Lionel Trilling, ed., *The Portable Matthew Arnold* (New York, 1949), p. 39. See also Marshall McLuhan, "The Aesthetic Moment in Landscape Poetry," in Alan S. Downer, ed., *English Institute Essays 1951* (New York, 1952), pp. 168-181.

[17] Kristian Smidt, "Point of View in Victorian Poetry," *English Studies*, XXXVIII (1957), 1-12.

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In this sense, the pervasive dichotomy in Victorian poetry between social and moral subjects and personal ones becomes another way of polarizing the external world created from child-like optimism and the darker, more adult emotions within. Arnold, in particular, came increasingly to feel that a natural or general law proscribed the expression of his own deep feelings[18] – for "general law" we can read the pervasive defense of the man and his culture. Again, we find Victorian poetry heavily committed to poetic diction, a kind of fulfillment of Bentham's view of the arts. Poetic diction serves as a way of distinguishing poetry from normal adult speech, an optimizing of ordinary language, reconstructing it in terms of a wish for perfection–a kind of extremely adult baby-talk.

We can see both these "Dover Beach" defenses, for example, in the pre-Raphaelite style. Both the concentration on visual detail and the heavy use of emblem and allegory serve the Victorian denial much as Arnold's viewing of the seascape does. We look intensely at one thing, at one meaning or sight, and so we avoid seeing something else. Heavy symbolism and allegory; a retreat to Greek, Biblical, medieval, or exotic legend; the ample rendering of visual details – these are present to some extent in all Victorian poetry, but these various overstatements in the service of denial fuse in the pre-Raphaelite style to make it, too, quintessentially Victorian.

But poetry, of course, was not the greatest form in the period. The output may have been vast, but the quality was sharply limited, perhaps because poetry as the expression of personal feelings did not suit an age dedicated to the denial of certain key feelings. The "Spasmodic school" suggests the trouble poets got into when they tried to express feelings directly, unshielded by dramatic monologue or landscape. The novel expressed Victorian needs better, notably, the wish to concentrate on one thing as a way of not seeing another. Just as, on the stage, theatrical spectacle and declamatory acting shifted attention away from the lack of realistic emotion in the characters, so the great shift of the English novel from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth is a growing attention to the larger social environment surrounding the central characters. At the same time, the usual Victorian novel offered its readers adult emotions over-simplified and desexualized. The Victorian novel, like Victorian commerce, sought to order the complex adult world by the wishes of a child. As Joseph Schumpeter has shown, in Victorian commerce, the industrialist became paternalistic, a father;

[18] John M. Wallace, "Landscape and 'The General Law': The Poetry of Matthew Arnold," *Boston University Studies in English*, V (1961), 91-106.

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the colonial took on the burdens of his "little brown brother."[19] The larger political and economic world was to be organized in terms of family responsibility. And so the novelist by the form of his novel often suggested – *Bleak House* is the obvious and best example – that the cure for the ills of the adult environment was simply to re-create the family world of a child in the world at large.

The Victorian novel polarized the world into a large environment and a family of central characters, just as Victorian drama polarized its world into elaborate visual spectacle and a star or two. Yet the novel thrived while the drama declined. I think we can understand the decline of the drama as a case in which a genre found itself caught between two Victorian modes of defense. On the one hand, there is the avoidance of one thing by looking at another, giving rise to the interest in visual spectacle and declamatory acting as ways not to see the central characters too realistically. On the other hand, there was the wish to see adult emotions through a child's eyes. Thus, Hazlitt could say of Joanna Baillie, "She treats her grown men as little girls treat their dolls." We can accept what E. M. Forster calls "flat" characters in fiction; we can accept sentimentality, for the novelist can adjust the whole world of the novel to fit his myth, in this case, the re-creation through denial of a world to fit a child's wishes. But sentimentalism is harder to accept when physically set before us on a stage that so insists on physical realities and visual exactness as the Victorian theatre did, indeed as that whole age that invented photography did.

I have not yet mentioned the greatest of all genres in the Victorian period: nonsense, which was the most admirably suited to the Victorian defensive strategy. Lear and Carroll offered a reassuring form of humor, one that did not "treat evil lightly," one that was not "levity, insincerity, and idle babble and play-acting" (to give Carlyle's list of sins). Rather, Lear and Carroll did the truly Victorian thing directly: they explicitly re-created the world of an adult through the eyes of a child.

So far, our hypothesis holds. "Dover Beach" cued us to look in Victorian culture and Victorian literary modes for a pattern of defense:

[19] *Imperialism and Social Classes*, trans. Heinz Norden, ed. Paul M. Sweezy (New York, 1951), pp. 153-159, 169-170, 190-205, and 220-221. Schumpeter's neo-Marxist analysis of the necessity for a family to do something de novo to break the class barrier and his concept of "patrimonialization" strikingly confirm, from the quite alien point of view of economics, the psychoanalytic hypothesis I am advancing about Victorian England.

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the use of denial to re-create an adult world according to what a child wishes adults would be.[20] Allegory, poetic diction, dramatic monologue, landscape poetry, sentimentality in fiction and spectacle in drama, nonsense – all these forms and styles of Victorian literature we have looked at so far tend to confirm our hypothesis. Whether the hypothesis will stand further testing, time will tell. Obviously, one would have to have many, many more analyses of literary works to prove or disprove it finally. The more general point, though, the methodological one, stands. Psychoanalysis can offer the literary historian a hypothesis, at least, and perhaps even a full understanding of the way literary forms act analogously to defenses to meet the psychological needs of a culture.

I think psychoanalysis can add something else: sympathy. For example, in "Dover Beach" Arnold writes as though he actually expected the world to supply joy, love, light, certitude, peace, help for pain, and I – a creature of the twentieth century – am puzzled. My world has been the depression, World War II, Auschwitz, the cold war – frankly, I expect nothing from my world but trouble. In another sense, though, I can think back, experience back, to a time when my world was smaller and consisted of a mother and a father in a small apartment in New York. Then was a time when I, like Arnold, could expect – and get – joy, love, light, help for pain. And, therefore, despite what batterings that sense of basic trust may have taken, I can enter and experience Arnold's quite alien kind of world. I can love Arnold's poem.

In short, what psychoanalysis can bring to literary history is not only hypotheses about the uses of literary forms. It can also bring sympathy, an ability to call back to life in ourselves the feelings of writers and ages long gone. The message psychoanalysis sends the literary historian comes down simply to this: if you wish to write the literary history of Victorian England, do not simply seek the Victorian (like Carroll's snark) with forks and hope or names and dates back there. Look for the Victorian in yourself.

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[20] Obviously, throughout this essay, I have been using the term "Victorian" in a broad, attributive way, as if I were to look at a house or an attitude or a poem and say, "That's quite Victorian." The defensive pattern, then, explicates the word. Equally obviously, though, there are many particular Victorianisms: high and low, early, middle, and late, and so on. One could refine the technique developed in this essay by sketching out the kind of thing denoted by the more specific term "high Victorian" and then trying to analyze that kind of thing as analogous to psychological defenses. If this essay is correct, each specific Victorianism should turn out to be a narrower form of the general pattern of impulse and defense here suggested.

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