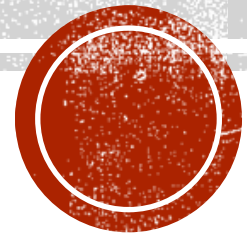


# DOVER BEACH

By Matthew Arnold



# FIRST STANZA

- Arnold begins this poem by giving a description of the setting in which it is taking place. It is Dover, on the coast of England. The sea is said to be calm, there is beach on the water at full tide. The moon is “upon the straits” (a strait is a narrow passage of water such as the English Channel onto which Dover Beach abuts).
- The speaker is able to see across the Channel to the French side of the water. The lights on the far coast are visibly gleaming, and then they disappear and the “cliffs of England” are standing by themselves “vast” and “glimmering” in the bay. The light that shines then vanishes representing to this speaker, and to Arnold himself, the vanishing faith of the English people.
- No one around him seems to see the enormity of what is happening, the night is quiet. There is a calm the speaker refers to as “tranquil.” But as the reader will come to see, many things may seem one way but actually exist as the opposite.
- Now the speaker turns to another person that is in the scene with him, and asks that this unnamed person comes to the window and breathe in the “sweet...night-air!”
- The second half of this stanza is spent on describing the sounds of the water that the speaker is viewing. They roll over one another creating, “the grating roar.” this eternal repetitions, seem sad to the narrator. As if the returning sea is bringing with it, “The eternal note of sadness in.”



# SECOND STANZA

- The second stanza is much shorter and relates the world in which the two characters are in to the larger picture of history. The speaker states that “long ago” Sophocles also heard this sound on the Ægean sea as the tides came in. It too brought to his mind the feelings of “human misery” and how these emotions “ebb and flow.” Sophocles, who penned the play *Antigone*, is one of the best known dramatic writers of Ancient Greece.
- Arnold is hoping to bring to the reader’s attention the universal experience of misery, that all throughout time have lived with. This short stanza ends with a return to the present as the narrator states that “we” too are finding these same emotions in the sound.



# THIRD STANZA

- In the third stanza of the poem it becomes clear that Arnold is in fact speaking about the diminishing faith of his countrymen and women. He describes, “The Sea of Faith” once covered all of the “round earth’s shore” and held everyone together like a girdle. Now though, this time as passed. No longer is the populous united by a common Christian faith in God by, as Arnold sees it, spread apart by new sciences and conflicting opinions.
- The comparison that he has been crafting between the drawing away, and coming in of the sea is now made clear as his speaker says there is no longer any return. The sea is only receding now, “melancholy,” and “long.”
- It is retreating from England and from the rest of the lands of the earth and leaving the people exposed.



# FORTH STA'H

- At the beginning of the fourth stanza it becomes clear that the companion who is looking out over the water with the speaker is most likely a lover or romantic partner.
- He speaks now directly to her, and perhaps, to all those true believers in God that are still out there. He asks that they remain true to one another in this “land of dreams.” The world is no longer what it was, it is more like a dream than the reality he is used to. It is a land that appears to be full of various beautiful, new and joyous things but that is not the case. This new world is in fact without “joy...love...[or] light...certitude... [or] peace,” or finally, help for those in pain. It is not what it appears to be.
- The poem concludes with a pessimistic outlook on the state of the planet. As the people are suffering around the world on “a darkling plain,” confused and fighting for things they don’t understand, real suffering is going on and faith is slipping away.

