Dover Beach

By Matthew Arnold
Matthew Arnold

- Matthew Arnold (24 December 1822 – 15 April 1888)
- British poet and cultural critic who worked as an inspector of schools.
- He was the son of Thomas Arnold, the famed headmaster of Rugby School, and brother to both Tom Arnold, literary professor, and William Delafield Arnold, novelist and colonial administrator.
- Matthew Arnold has been characterized as a sage writer, a type of writer who chastises and instructs the reader on contemporary social issues
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-blanchèd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

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

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

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

• The underlying theme of the poem is the hollowness of human lives, how everything looks beautiful at face value but is far from it in reality.

• The superficial calm prevailing in the world is brought out.
Points for discussion

• Unequal lengths of lines
• Sophocles was a Greek tragedian (Oedipus complex in Freudian theory comes from there)
• The “different” rhythm to the poem (2nd stanza) the poet insists on completing his sentences
• The comparison with Sophocles by the Aegean Sea
• “Come to the window..”-Dramatic Monologue
Points for discussion (contd.)

• The Contrast present in every stanza
• A reference to the French revolution—false dawn with Napoleon winning but then resorting to dictatorship
• The beginning to the poem is somewhat pleasant and hence deceptive
• The comparison to the armies fighting by night in the fourth stanza, stands for indistinguishability between friend and foe
Points for discussion (contd.)

• The Sea of Faith receding refers to the changing world where religion is losing its importance

• “Naked Shingles” refers to the unprotected masses

• The repetition of “nor” - stress on negativity
Thank you

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