

1867

DOVER BEACH

Matthew Arnold

Arnold, Matthew (1822-1888) - British Victorian poet, critic, and Oxford Professor. A deep sense of isolation and doubt permeates Arnold's work. He writes with sadness of the growing impersonality of the industrial age, and of the loss of meaning, faith, and man's connection with nature. Dover Beach (1867) As the "Sea of Faith" retreats in the night wind, the poet expresses his belief in personal love and faith as the remaining hope of modern man. Opening line: The sea is calm to-night,...

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 Aegaeon, 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.

THE END