



DOVER BEACH

The sea is calm tonight.
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
It's 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.

Matthew Arnold
(1822 – 88)

Suggested by Brian Mather

Matthew Arnold, one of the great figures of the Victorian age, was the son of the famous Rugby School headmaster, Thomas Arnold. He worked as a School Inspector for 35 years, while writing several volumes of poetry. In later life he turned to essay writing, and established himself as a leading critic. He sharply criticised the provincialism of English culture, and argued for a more European outlook. He wrote a series of reports about education, which urged that England should learn from European models.

Dover Beach, his best-known poem, was published in 1867, and part of it dates from his honeymoon, for which he sailed from Dover to France and the Continent.