

# Dover Beach

by Matthew Arnold

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**1. (a) In the poem, 'Dover Beach' does the poet seem disappointed or happy to you? What is the mood of the poem?**

**Answer:** Poems are written with some purpose or the other. Sometimes they are written for amusement while at other times they are written to convey a deeper meaning. In "Dover Beach", Matthew Arnold has made some arguments and disagreements in the whole poem. The major argument here deals with the notion of challenging the past and its effect on the future. The poem begins with a solemn upbeat in tone or mood, as the poem advances its tone and mood both get more mundane, grave, and lack hope. As the poem progresses after the first stanza, the second and third stanzas become more pessimistic. The crux of the argument is based on the idea that happiness is always changing and is a fragile part of humanity. The present discussed in the first stanza starts with an upbeat tone, but by the end of the poem, the hopeful and positive mood turns sad and negative. The poet's disappointment arises due to the changing situations around. Arnold correlates the sea with the pessimistically evolving ideals of human existence and the arguments throughout this poem. For instance, Arnold writes "The Sea of Faith was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore ..... but now "I only hear its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar." The poet is here trying to stress that the world once used to be faithful and filled with a lot of love in people's heart, hitherto the despicable and wretched things of the world seem louder as the waves of the sea crashing at the sea-shore.

**(b) Why does the poet shift from the third person to the second-person narration in the poem?**

**Answer:** Dover Beach is a multifaceted poem written by Mathew Arnold, an eminent poet of the Victorian Age. This poem is based on the challenges to different kind of philosophy related to human existence, his religious faith, and moral issues. In the poem "Dover Beach," often Arnold himself, is thought to be the narrator most of the time, addressing his wife. This is a dramatic monologue, where there can be a single speaker to one or more silent listeners. As given in a dramatic monologue the narrator is not necessarily the author himself. It can be any young man addressing his wife or any other. But most critics suggest that the speaker is the poet himself as the views expressed in the poem matches some of Arnold's own beliefs.

As discussed above the narrator may be the poet or an ordinary narrator. Let's take it as the poet himself as given in this question above, the poet uses consecutively first, second, and third-person narration in the poem. The poem presents the shifting narration by the poet, which starts from third-person and shifts to the second person, when he addresses his beloved, in Line 6. Then he shifts to first-person narration when he includes his beloved

and the reader as co-observers, as in Line 18. He also uses the first-person point of view to declare that at least one observation is his alone, and not necessarily that of his coobservers. The poet has opted to use first, second, and third-person narration to captivate the reader in an entertaining way.

**(c) Is the world completely good or completely bad? Is it possible to paint all humans in one colour of character?**

**Answer:** "Dover Beach" is a poem with a complete portrayal of the society. Through in this poem, Mathew Arnold has tried to make a great representation of the Victorian Period as a whole, the tone and mood of the then society. It was a time when science and evolutionary theories were rising with immense pressure on religion, as a threat to its existence. Technology was taking away peace and faith both out of life. Through in this poem, Arnold thought that poetry may replace the importance of religion and rise as a new spiritual source in the tiring society. The melancholy tone of this poem is a wonderful treat by Mathew Arnold, the poet.

This inspired a lot of writers to take on a melancholy tone in their works. While reasoning Arnold's somber tone, it looks like he is coming to terms with the way the world works, feeling depressed and sad. "Dover Beach" is such a perfect portrait of the Victorian era but the poet seems lost and lonely in his situation, unable to converse with the human being next to him. The poem starts off with a hopeful tone but by the end of the poem, in its last stanza it unveils the harshness of the world and the poet's discontent with the way things were shifting at this point.

Matthew Arnold is aware of the philosophical changes rising in the western society. He has experienced the crumbling of old establishments where people were losing their faith in God with the development of science and technology. Arnold has made great effort to carve out the complete picture of the then world's goodness and evil. The first stanza begins with a candid portrayal of the sea and with the effects of light on it. Though there is momentary excitement it concludes that the moonstruck sea induces sadness. A perfect ray of melancholy flows into the second stanza too. In the third stanza, the idea of religion is introduced. The reader now enjoys the contrast between the low tide of faith, and the high tide of the evolution of science and technology. In vacuum, the speaker suggests that only well-woven love between individuals can withstand the negative forces in the world in the fourth stanza. This kind of love can bring meaning to an otherwise confused and confusing world. By the end, it can be summed up that "Dover Beach" is a perfect picture of the Victorian Society, its cause, sufferings, and its achievements. Arnold's work portrays all shades of human character in a poem with the help of his changing moods and tone, stanza-wise. We may conclude that this world is and will always be a mix of good and bad, as each supports the other to make the world move.

**2. (a) Analyse the poem 'Dover Beach' and discuss how the loss of faith (during his times) affects the poet and his thought?**

**Answer:** The lines from the poem, 'Dover Beach' give a bitter expression of the poet, Matthew Arnold's loss of faith and his growing pessimism. The world seemed to be unbelievably unreal, without anything real to believe in or to relate to. It has grand variety, beauty, and freshness. But in spite of all this, there is a big void due to the absence of the primary elements of life. There is no love nor joy, nor light, nor peace. There is no certainty in it. Therefore, he compares men struggling in the world with armies struggling on a plain at night. There is a sound of confused alarms and struggles, but the soldiers are ignorant as to they are fighting for and why.

'Dover Beach' is one of Arnold's typical poems. It expresses frequently the lack of faith and certitude which was the principal vice during the Victorian age. The poem opens with a calm, bright moonlit sea which reflects the serene, peaceful, receptive mood of the poet. He calls upon his companion to share the sweetness and peacefulness of the night air and even as he does so, he is conscious of the grating roar' a harsh sound which disturbs the peace, the calm and the sweet music. The first stanza ends on a 'note of eternal sadness', that the slow music of the waves disturbs the calmness of mind and spirit as much as the calm bay. In the poet's opinion, all restlessness and disturbances are due to the absence of faith.

**(b) How does the celebration of nature's beauty and the lamenting for absence of faith come together in the poem?**

**Answer:** In the poem, the poet brings the narrative to a point where the reader is stuck between the celebration of beauty and lament for humanity. The time and background of the poet needs to be considered to understand this. Ironically, the tumult of nature, on the ocean, is nothing compared to the tumult of this new way of life. It is this latter tumult that frightens the speaker and makes him beg his lover to stay true to him. He worries that the chaos of the modern world will be too great and that she will be shocked to discover that even in the presence of great beauty like that outside their window, mankind is gearing up for destruction. Behind the appearance of faith is the new order, and he hopes that they might use this moment to be together despite such uncertainty.

The poem signifies a certain type of poetic experience, in which the poet focuses on a single moment in order to discover profound depths. Here, the moment is the serenity the speaker feels in studying the landscape, and the contradictory fear that serenity then leads him to feel. To accomplish that end, the poem uses a lot of imagery and sensory information.

**(c) Discuss the visual and aural imagery in the poem, 'Dover Beach'?**

**Answer:** In the poem 'Dover Beach,' the poet, Matthew Arnold has made a wonderful use of visual and aural imagery to bring out the emotions that churn in him. This makes him successfully create the visuals and sounds in the mind of the reader. The poem begins with visual depictions, describing the calm sea, the fair moon, and the lights in France across the

Channel. "The cliffs of England stand, glimmering and vast" not only describes the scene but establishes how small the two humans detailed in the poem are in the face of nature. The poem begins with a simple statement: "the sea is calm tonight". At this early moment, this is as yet nothing but a statement, waiting for the rest of the work to give it meaning. The statement bodes of the significance the sea is going to play as an image in the poem. The first part of the stanza seems to reflect on the sea's calmness. But by the fourth line, already, something has changed. An ephemeral contrast to the timeless sea is introduced: "on the French coast the light gleams and is gone". Lonely imagery builds the "cliffs... glimmering and vast", the "tranquil bay." In ninth line, another voice is added to the melody which is literally a sound. "Listen!" the line starts and goes on to add to the still, silent imagery that came before it—a voice, a presence, a roar—and movement, movement of waves which until now have not been described as moving. How are they moving? Out and in, returning ever, a cycle unending. This imagery will appear again and again in the poem. The last two lines of the stanzas start to add the feeling more pointedly, now that the mood has been set: the waves have a "tremulous cadence slow" that brings "the eternal note of sadness in."

## Long Questions and Answers

### 1. How the sea is used both as a physical presence and as a metaphor in Mathew Arnold's 'Dover Beach'? Write a note on Arnold's use of seascape.

**Answer:** The sea is everywhere in "Dover Beach". It shows up in different places and in different forms. Three seas are referred in the poem 'Dover Beach': Sometimes it's a physical location, something you can actually see, like the English Channel or the Aegean Sea, and sometimes it morphs into a metaphor for the fate of humanity. The Northern Sea is the sea the speaker is looking on at Dover; the Aegean sea, which Sophocles heard centuries ago, and the metaphorical "Sea of Faith". Each of these seas brings to the speaker's mind some specific thoughts about human existence.

In lines 7 and 8, the sea meets the land. It's important to notice how much time Arnold spends making us really see this vision of the coast of England in the moonlight. The phrase "long line of spray" which describes what results when the sea meets the land, introduces action. The sea, later turns into a huge metaphor in this poem, but for now, it's just a pretty spot.

In line 16, the sea is part of a historical allusion. The speaker uses the sea (in this case the Aegean, which is part of the Mediterranean) to connect him to the ancient playwright Sophocles, the Greek tragedy writer and wonder if long ago. In ancient Greece this writer may have sat beside the Aegean Sea and also been reminded of the endless sufferings of man. In this passage, the sound of the rising and falling tide is used as an analogy for the "ebb and flow of human misery" (line 17).

In lines 19-20 Arnold speaks of the sound of the sea, rather than the visual images of the water. The speaker expressing the idea in lines 21-28 that watching the sea has elicited the "Sea of Faith" is a metaphor for the faith in God that comforted mankind in the earlier

period. However, the "Sea of Faith" has receded like the ebb of the waves. Here Arnold employs words like melancholy, withdrawing roar, retreating, drear and naked to convey a sense of loss and despair and he uses the images of the sea which is no longer calm as before neither the night air sweet nor the shoreline glimmering in the moonlight. Now the waves roar and the wind blows down the dark and naked shoreline.

**2. Create a contrast between the initial and final stanzas of the poem on the basis of the mood of the poem. You may use the following reference points.**

- **imagery created in the poem**
- **multiple senses at night's scenery**
- **shift of mood from stanzas**
- **past brings happiness and the present is all about destruction, bring sorrow.**
- **dependence of mood on faith**

**Answer:** Dover Beach (1867) presents the ephemeral human feeling of sadness through the image of the sea. The poem begins with a description of a calm environment and an enjoyable mood. The sea is extremely peaceful in the beginning and is accompanied by the serenity of the environment around the sea. The moon shines brightly upon the land and is the venue of all events. Light shimmering adds beauty at night. One can smell the sweet air, hear the grating roar of pebbles, and see the blanched scenery at Night Sea. The mood shifts from a calm to an eventful and distressing one by including Sophocles and his excellent sense of identifying sorrow. At a point in time, the reader may realize that all the peaceful setting is just the preparation of narrating a descriptive idea or rather the reality, which has worsened overtime. One can call it the calm before the storm. The mood keeps shifting throughout the poem. There is a happy setting when the speaker speaks of the past and all expectations diminish with a time transition to the present.

Mood depends on various factors like environment, theme, perception and mutual attraction. Faith is a major constituent that changes the mood. In the poem, "The Sea of Faith" has a major role, which can be noticed with the comparison of the size of faith with that of a huge water body like the sea. The poem ends in a dark sense as the poet reveals how all beautiful things in the poem is merely an illusion in the present.

The most interesting of all the stanzas in terms of mood are the first and the last stanzas, which are straightforward. The experience of the poem feels like a roller coaster ride, which has several twists and turns but brings the reader back to the ground. The very same place from where the ride took off.