

An analysis of dover beach essay sample



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BUSTER**

Faith is a strong force. It drives people everyday from normal living, to radical acts. Matthew Arnold describes faith through symbolism in his poem Dover Beach. Mankind had faith at one point, full and glorious and proud. Just like a cliff though, the water can erode the mountainside little by little. Arnold begins the poem with his description of the white cliffs on the coast of France and England; both facing each other, one now without the light of the moon and the other glimmering and reflecting upon the Strait.

If you were to listen to the ocean from a window, you would be able to hear the roar of not only the crashing tide, but of the black pebbles that the waves bring back and forth. The next sestet is a reference to Sophocles' play Antigone: " Happy are they whose life has not tasted evils. But for those whose house has been shaken by God, no mass of ruin fails to creep upon their families. " (711). The sestet speaks of how Sophocles heard the sound of the groaning and roaring sea, and how it reminded him of humans when we are in misery.

The next octet of the poem finally mentions faith. It is symbolic here. Arnold speaks of the " Sea of Faith" and how it was once full and ever surrounding. Yet, now the Sea of Faith, which resembles mankind's faith as a whole, is dwindling slowly with each and ever wave crash. " But now I only hear its melancholy, long withdrawing roar, Retreating to the breath of the night wind..." (Arnold 24-27). Mankind had faith at one point, but it retreated slowly like long winded sigh. The last part of the poem is the narrator of the poem speaking to no one in particular.

He may be wooing a young lady, or quite possibly just comforting himself. He speaks saying that despite the world and its lack of joy, and peace, and of the better things, that they (the narrator whomever he is speaking to) should love true. In the last three lines of the poem: “ and we are here as on a darkling plain, Swept with confused alarms of struggling and flight, Where ignorant armies clash by night. ” , the narrator speaks of being together on a plain that is growing dark while the confusion all around ensues.

This confusion and the clashing of ignorant armies could have very well been the new ideologies that existed at the time of this poems conception. There were plenty of new movements going on, such as the idea of evolution and natural selection. This poem was published in 1867. Only a few years earlier, “ The Origin of Species” was written by Charles Darwin. There was much debate between scholars and the church. This ideology debate could very well have been the “ clash of ignorant armies” that Arnold was speaking of.

Arnold could very well have also been alluding to an actual war that was about to break out. The reason that Arnold is alluding so much to faith in this poem is because he had sought out to establish the essential truth of Christianity. (Poetry. org) This poem has clearly been about the growing loss of faith in Christianity as a result of the increasing amount of -ism’s. Whether it be socialism, materialism, Darwinism, anarchism, existentialism, etc... All in all, the theme of this poem was not meant to be an optimistic one.

It was deceiving in the first twelve lines; then the narrator’s pessimistic point of view comes into play. Whether the poem had been about a man calling a young lady to come to her window and see that the world around him was

crumbling and that they should love each other before it all ends... or a lonely individual speaking of his determination to stay true to himself despite the world turning around him; the main idea of this poem was that the world was somehow losing faith. The faith of human-kind was eroding like the side of a cliff.