

# Dover beach, matthew arnold essay



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In *Dover Beach*, Matthew Arnold describes an evening he spent with his lover. The picturesque sights and sounds around him remind him of the pathetic state of man. Arnold was agnostic at the time he wrote the poem and his despair and disillusionment towards religion is highlighted through the poem. He shows the reader how the coming of Scientific reasoning brought about through Imperialism, Darwinism and the Industrial Revolution has affected the religious beliefs of people like himself making them doubt the religious faith that was once embedded in their lifestyle and protected them from the uncertainties of life.

Arnold starts by describing his surroundings, on the surface everything appears fine, the 'sea is calm' and the 'moon lies fair' but after deeper observation he notices the 'turbid ebb and flow of human misery' and hears the 'eternal note of sadness.' He uses the 'sea of faith' as a metaphor to show how man has lost his faith in God and religion. Arnold had his faith shaken by scientific beliefs. A man without his faith is no better than a beach that lies exposed, naked and vulnerable after the tide has retreated, or as insignificant as pebbles or gravel left on the shore once the sea has withdrawn, stripping him of the comfort and solace that faith in religion and god can alone provide him with. This thereby emphasizes on the insignificance of man without the sea of faith.

Arnold begins on a nostalgic note by talking about how the 'Sea of Faith / Was once at its full, and round the earth's shore / Lay like folds of a bright girdle furled.' The sea of faith encircling the earth's shore could also probably be at its full, as at the time England was expanding to the farthest horizon and across many islands, spreading its religious ideals as well. Arnold also

describes how his ancestors were better off than him and his contemporaries, who had been robbed of their faith as a result of new advances in science, particularly the theory of Evolution that made people doubt what was written in the Bible. This made people lose faith in religion and become nihilistic and agnostic.

Despite the materialistic progress Victorian people were becoming mundane and atheistic . Their religious faith was declining and they couldn't count on anybody, even those who were close to them. People always questioned what was previously believed by their ancestors and looked on everything with suspicious eyes. The scientific ideas, religious uncertainty and skepticism shoal Arnold's own beliefs. The icy breath of the ' night wind' the symbolized science extinguished the warm flame that religion provided man with and the ' sea of faith', the illusion that concealed the realities of human misery had withdrawn exposing the ' naked shingles of the world' leaving it stripped and bleak.

Thus Arnold uses the image of the sea a a metaphor in this poem and deals with the natural scene and the moral application of the metaphor when it matures and becomes very important as the poem progresses.