



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2019; 5(2): 334-335  
[www.allresearchjournal.com](http://www.allresearchjournal.com)  
Received: 12-12-2018  
Accepted: 18-01-2019

**Govindappa S**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of English,  
Maharani Women's Arts,  
commerce and Management  
college, Sheshadri road,  
Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

## **Dover beach: A critical appreciation and stylistic analysis**

**Govindappa S**

### **Abstract**

Dover Beach, by Mathew Arnold, is a dramatic monologue lamenting the loss of true Christian faith in England during the mid 1800 as science captured the minds of the public. The poem, expresses a crisis of faith with the speaker acknowledging the diminished stand of Christianity. It represents the clash between science and religion. This poem opens on a beautiful naturalistic scene. The poet (speaker) stands on the cliff of the Dover Beach. He is gazing out at the majesty of the beauty of nature. The descriptions of sea and the sound of the pebble on the beach are lyrically beautiful.

**Keywords:** Monologue, Sophocles, faith, sadness, form and structure, tone and Moode, pessimism, enjambment

### **Introduction**

'Dover Beach' was probably composed in 1851, although it was published only in 1865 in the volume entitled 'New Poems'. The poem reveals Arnold's sensitive, scholarly temper and brooding melancholy at the contemplation of life. The title does not suggest the contents of the poem. The poem is not so much on Dover Beach. Dover Beach is a pretext for the poet to reflect on the predicament of man. Contrasting it with the way man was when he suffered no loss of faith. The poem in four stanzas of unequal length is a good example of the poet's definition of poetry as a criticism of life.

### **Critical Appreciation of the poem**

Dover is a sea-port town on the English coast, facing the French coast not many miles away. There has always been a regular ferry service between Dover and Calais on the French coast, Dover is famous also for its white cliffs overhanging the sea.

The poet is observing Dover beach on a moonlight night with a companion, presumably his wife. The poet says the sea is calm that night, it is flood-tide, the light of the moon falls beautifully on the Straits of Dover. On the French coast, the light shines momentarily and is gone; the white cliffs of Dover, overhanging the calm bay, glimmer in the moonlight. The poet asks his companion to join him at the window and enjoy the pleasing night-air.

The only sound to break the silence comes from the beach, where the long line of the foam of the waves meets the land pale under the light of the moon. From there comes the harsh roar of pebbles drawn away from the shore by the waves, and, on their return, flung high up the same shore. The sound begins, stops, resumes, with a slow, quivering measured movement, and strikes an eternal note of sadness.

Sophocles, the Greek tragic dramatist, heard the same sound long time ago on the Aegean sea, and it reminded him of the disturbed coming and going of human misery. The poet feels that he and others, who live by the northern sea far away from the Aegean, hearing the sound made by the sea, thinking the same thought.

The poet thinks that Faith was once like the Sea in full flood, inspiring all in the world. It went round the world just as the sea encompassed earth's shore, and rested like the folds held in the clasp of a bright girdle. But now that Faith had withdrawn from mankind, leaving all in doubt and despair. It reminded the poet of the waves withdrawing with a melancholy sound in the night-wind, leaving the shore and the pebbles naked and bare.

The poet, in such a situation of universal loss of Faith, tells his love (his wife) that the only thing they can do is to be true and faithful to one another.

**Correspondence Author:**

**Govindappa S**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of English,  
Maharani Women's Arts,  
commerce and Management  
college, Sheshadri road,  
Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

The world in which they live, appears to be unreal like a land of dreams, so full of variety, beauty, newness, but actually having nothing of joy or love or knowledge or certainly or peace. And so, all of them are like battling soldiers on a dark plain, with the entire place thick with confused alarm of fight and fight as the armies battle in the darkness hopelessly ignorant of whom they are fighting and why they are fighting, (that is, people everywhere are living purposeless lives).

“Dover Beach” by Mathew Arnold is a lyrical poem renowned for its emotional depth, philosophical contemplation, and intricate stylistic elements. The poem deals with themes of loss of faith, human misery, and the need for love in an uncertain world. Below is a stylistic analysis of the poem.

### Form and Structure

**Blank verse:** “Dover Beach” is written in blank verse, meaning it doesn’t follow a strict rhyme scheme, but it uses unrhymed iambic pentameter. This choice allows for a more natural, conversational tone, mirroring the fluctuating emotions of the speaker.

**Irregular stanza length:** the poem consists of four stanzas, each of varying lengths. This irregular mirrors the shifting moods of the speaker, from calm observation to deep melancholy and eventual resolve.

**Enjambment:** Arnold employs frequent enjambment, where one line runs into the next without a pause. This contributes to the fluidity of thought and the rhythmic ebb and flow that mimics the movement of the sea.

### Imagery

**Visual Imagery:** The opening stanza presents serene and vivid descriptions of the sea, with the moonlit water and calm shoreline. The use of such peaceful imagery contrasts sharply with the deeper philosophical themes that follow.

**Example:** “The sea is calm tonight, The tide is full, the moon lies fair / upon the straits.”

**Auditory Imagery:** Sound plays an important role, especially in the description of the “grating roar” of pebbles on the shore, which introduces the theme of human suffering. The auditory aspect creates a sense of disturbance beneath the calm surface, symbolizing the turmoil of human existence.

**Example:** “Listen! You hear the grating roar / of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling.”

### Symbolism

**The sea as a symbol of Faith:** One of the central metaphors in the poem is the sea, symbolizing the ebb and flow of religious faith. Arnold references the “Sea of Faith” directly in the third stanza, lamenting its retreat, which reflects the diminishing influences of religious certainty in the modern world.

**Example:** “The sea of Faith / was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore.”

**Darkness and Confusion:** The “eternal note of sadness” and the “naked shingles of the world” symbolize a world

stripped of meaning and hope, evoking a sense of existential despair.

### Tone and Mood

**Melancholic Tone:** The tone shifts from a peaceful, reflective mood at the beginning to one of deep melancholy as the speaker reflects on the loss of faith and certainty. The imagery of retreating faith and a chaotic world creates a pervasive sense of sorrow and disillusionment.

**Pessimism and yearning:** The speaker expresses a yearning for stability and connection in a world that seems increasingly disordered and devoid of meaning. The closing lines emphasize the need for personal love to compensate for the lack of external meaning.

### Theme and Philosophical Reflection

**Loss of Faith:** The poem’s central theme revolves around the decline of religious faith in the Victorian era, symbolized by the retreating sea. Arnold portrays this loss as a source of profound sadness and existential uncertainty.

**Human Misery:** Arnold suggests that without the guiding certainty of faith, humanity is left in a state of confusion and suffering, symbolized by the “turbid ebb and flow of human misery.”

**Need for Love:** Despite the grim reflections, the final stanza introduces the idea of love as a form of salvation. The speaker urges his companion to cling to personal love in a world that is otherwise devoid of joy and hope.

### Figurative Language

**Simile and Metaphor:** Arnold uses a direct metaphor when he likens the diminishing power of faith to the withdrawing sea. There is also a notable simile when the speaker compares the sound of the waves to “the eternal note of sadness,” a powerful representation of human suffering.

**Personification:** The sea itself is personified, becoming an active force in the poem, as it “draws back” and “flings” pebbles on the shore. This gives the sea agency, reinforcing its symbolic role in the poem as a representation of faith and the forces of nature.

### Conclusion

Matthew Arnold “Dover Beach” is a masterful integration of form, imagery, and emotion. Its stylistic elements - from blank verse to evocative imagery, symbolism, and tone - all work together to express the speaker’s profound reflection on faith, love, and the human condition. The movement from tranquil imagery to existential despair mirrors the broader cultural shifts of the time, making it a timeless meditation on the complexities of modern life.

### References

1. Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold.
2. Practical criticism - Prakash book depot, Raybareily.
3. M C C publication - Bengalurul.
4. Literary criticism - Rama Brothers, New Delhi.
5. English Critical Texts - D.J. Enright and Earnest De Chickera.
6. Ages, Movements and Literary Forms - Dr. Sathish Kumar.