Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

*Dover Beach*

The sea is calm to-night.

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[[1]](#footnote-1) stand;

*5* 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-blanched land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar

*10* 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.

*15* Sophocles[[2]](#footnote-2) long ago

Heard it on the Aegean[[3]](#footnote-3), and it brought

Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow

Of human misery; we

Find also in the sound a thought,

*20* 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 furled.

But now I only hear

*25* Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles [[4]](#footnote-4)of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true

*30* 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;

*35* And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

* What do you think is the poem’s central point? How do the speaker’s descriptions of the ocean work toward making that point?
* What is the cause of the sadness in line 14? What is the speaker’s response to the ebbing “Sea of Faith”? Is there anything to replace his sense of loss?
* Who do you think the speaker is addressing, if anyone? Present evidence that he is alone, speaking in apostrophe, or that he is speaking to another (silent) person.
1. The Dover Cliffs are famously high, dangerous, and white. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ancient Greek dramatist, wrote tragedies [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The sea between Greece and Turkey [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Shingles” is another word for pebbles, which can line the shore like sand. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)