



Victoria University  
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# FINAL ASSIGNMENT

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**1. How has Matthew Arnold represented loss of faith among the people in his poem Dover Beach. Elaborate your answer in the light of the poem.**

**Answer:** "Dover Beach" is a poem written by British poet Matthew Arnold. It was published in 1867 and is one of Arnold's most famous works. The poem describes the speaker's disillusionment with the world and the loss of faith in human values and ideals. The poem also reflects Arnold's own melancholic mood, as he is sitting on the beach in Dover, England, and looking out at the sea. The poem is known for its melancholic and introspective tone, and its themes of loneliness, disappointment, and the search for meaning in life.

"Dover Beach" is a melancholic poem by Matthew Arnold that reflects the loss of faith among the people in the Victorian era. The poem reflects Arnold's own disillusionment with the world and the loss of faith in human values and ideals. The poem is set on the beach in Dover, England, where the speaker is looking out at the sea, and is characterized by its melancholic tone and themes of loneliness, disappointment, and the search for meaning in life. Through the use of vivid imagery, metaphor, and allusion, Arnold conveys the feelings of disillusionment and the search for meaning in life that characterized the Victorian era. The poem is a powerful meditation on the nature of human existence and the quest for meaning in a world that seems increasingly uncertain and bereft of spiritual values.

The poem is set on the shore of the English Channel at Dover, a place that Arnold describes as "grayed out" and "bare." The speaker is looking out at the sea and observing the moonlight shining on the waves. He reflects on the beauty of the scene, describing the sea as a "Sea of Faith" and the moonlight as a "Calm of the Ages."

In the poem, Arnold portrays the loss of faith among the people through several symbols and metaphors. The most prominent symbol in the poem is the sea, which represents the shifting and uncertain nature of human beliefs and values. The speaker describes the sea as "grating roar" and "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar," suggesting that the world is in a state of constant change and that the foundations of human belief and values are slipping away. The speaker also says that "the Sea of Faith / Was once, too, at the full," but now "the tide is out," indicating that faith and belief in God and spirituality have diminished. This loss of faith has resulted in a sense of emptiness and despair among the people.

The poem begins with the speaker and his lover looking out at the sea from the cliffs of Dover. The image of the sea represents the changing and uncertain world, while the calm and peaceful atmosphere of the beach creates a contrast with the speaker's inner turmoil. Arnold uses the sea as a metaphor for the loss of faith, with the tide symbolizing the fading away of traditional values and beliefs. The speaker states, "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 stand / Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay." The poem opens with a vivid description of the sea and the beach at Dover, which is meant to represent the shifting, unstable world of the modern era. The sea is portrayed as a symbol of change, with the waves constantly surging and retreating, much like the thoughts and emotions of the human mind. This setting serves as the backdrop for the speaker's meditation on the loss of faith and the search for meaning in a world that seems to be losing its spiritual moorings.

However, as the speaker continues to contemplate the sea, he realizes that the "Sea of Faith" is no longer calm and unchanging. Instead, it is receding, leaving the shore "dismal and

naked." The speaker observes that the world has changed, and people no longer have the same sense of confidence and certainty in their beliefs as they once did. In this passage, the speaker contrasts the peacefulness of the sea with the changing and uncertain world. The "light" on the French coast, which is fleeting and temporary, represents the loss of faith and the fading away of traditional beliefs and values. The "cliffs of England" symbolize the steadfastness of the nation and its traditions, but they too are "glimmering and vast," suggesting that even these long-standing institutions are being affected by the loss of faith.

This sense of loss of faith is the central theme of the poem, and it is reflected in the speaker's melancholic tone. He laments the loss of innocence and the decline of morality in society. He compares the world to a "darkling plain" where "ignorant armies clash by night," suggesting a world of conflict and turmoil. The speaker feels that the world has become a place where truth is no longer clear and certain, and where people are lost and adrift.

The loss of faith that Arnold portrays in "Dover Beach" is a reflection of the broader cultural and intellectual changes that were taking place in his time. In the mid-19th century, the Victorian era was characterized by a growing sense of uncertainty and doubt about the foundations of society. The Industrial Revolution was transforming the world, and the old religious and moral certainties were being called into question. Scientific discoveries were challenging traditional beliefs, and the spread of secularism was undermining the influence of the Church.

Arnold was one of the leading voices of this cultural and intellectual transition, and his poetry reflects his own sense of disillusionment and loss of faith. In "Dover Beach," he portrays a world that is no longer certain and secure, where people are no longer guided by a clear sense of moral purpose. He suggests that the loss of faith in religion and morality has left people feeling lost and adrift, with no clear sense of direction.

However, Arnold's representation of loss of faith in "Dover Beach" is not simply a critique of society. It is also a personal lament for the loss of the things that give life meaning and purpose. The speaker in the poem speaks of a "longing to be loved" and a desire for connection with others. He suggests that the loss of faith has left people feeling lonely and isolated, unable to find comfort or solace in the world.

The speaker also uses the metaphor of a "darkling plain" to describe the world, which is a barren and desolate place, devoid of hope and meaning. This metaphor symbolizes the loss of faith and the resulting spiritual emptiness that has affected the people. The speaker says that "we are here as on a darkling plain," suggesting that the world has become a bleak and hopeless place, where people are struggling to find meaning and purpose in life. This loss of faith has left people feeling lost and alone, as they search for answers in a world that seems devoid of hope.

The speaker laments the loss of faith in the world, and describes how the sea, which once represented a source of solace and peace, has become a symbol of despair and loneliness. The sea is depicted as a "grating roar" that fills the speaker with "turbid ebb and flow" of thoughts and emotions. This depiction of the sea serves to emphasize the sense of disconnection and isolation that the speaker feels, as well as the sense of loss that permeates the poem. The speaker goes on to describe the human condition and the feeling of disillusionment that characterized the Victorian era. He states, "Come to the window, sweet is the night air!" The

use of the imperative voice and the personification of the night air create a sense of urgency and invite the reader to join the speaker in his contemplation. The speaker then reflects on the world and the loss of faith in human values, stating, "Only, from the long line of spray / Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land, / Listen! you hear the grating roar / 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."

The speaker goes on to describe the human condition and the feeling of disillusionment that characterized the Victorian era. He states, "Come to the window, sweet is the night air!" The use of the imperative voice and the personification of the night air create a sense of urgency and invite the reader to join the speaker in his contemplation. The speaker then reflects on the world and the loss of faith in human values, stating, "Only, from the long line of spray / Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land, / Listen! you hear the grating roar / 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."

The speaker then reflects on the loss of faith and the decline of traditional values and beliefs, stating, "Ah, love, let us be true / 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." The loss of faith is further emphasized by the reference to the "Sea of Faith", which is described as "now as level as the bright sea to the moon-blanch'd land". The "Sea of Faith" represents the belief and spiritual values that have been lost in the modern world, leaving the speaker feeling adrift and alone. The imagery of the moon shining on a sea that is now calm and level serves to highlight the emptiness and barrenness of a world that has lost its spiritual values.

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The poem also reflects the broader cultural and intellectual climate of the Victorian era, which was characterized by a growing sense of doubt and uncertainty. The Victorian era was a time of great scientific and technological advancements, but it was also marked by a deep sense of spiritual malaise, as many people struggled to find meaning in a rapidly changing world. Arnold's poem captures this mood of disillusionment and reflects the broader cultural and intellectual climate of the time.

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The poem also touches on themes of human relationships, and the speaker's sense of disappointment and disillusionment with his partner. The speaker refers to his partner as his "love", but the tone of the poem suggests that this love is cold and unfulfilling, serving only to deepen the sense of loneliness and despair that the speaker feels. The reference to the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of the sea can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the gradual withdrawal of love and connection from the speaker's life.

Throughout the poem, Arnold also employs melancholic and introspective language to emphasize the sense of loneliness and disappointment that has taken hold of the people. The speaker says that "the world, which seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams," suggesting that the world has become a place of disillusionment and disappointment. The use of the words "seems" and "dreams" emphasizes the sense of unreality that has taken hold of the people, and underscores their sense of disconnection from the world. The melancholic and introspective tone of the poem reflects the speaker's own sense of disillusionment and disappointment with the world, and underscores the loss of faith among the people.

This sense of loneliness and isolation is a common theme in Arnold's poetry, and it is perhaps best expressed in the final lines of "Dover Beach." The speaker turns to his beloved and speaks of the world as a "darkling plain" where "ignorant armies clash by night." He suggests that the only refuge from this world of conflict and turmoil is the love that he shares with his beloved. The love between two people is the only thing that can provide comfort and security in a world that is otherwise uncertain and frightening.

In conclusion, "Dover Beach" is a powerful meditation on the nature of human existence and the search for meaning in a world that seems increasingly uncertain and bereft of spiritual values. The poem reflects the loss of faith among the people in the Victorian era, and the broader cultural and intellectual climate of the time. Through its vivid imagery and melancholic tone, the poem captures the sense of loneliness, disappointment, and the search for meaning that pervaded the era, and continues to resonate with readers today.