

Dover Beach—An Analysis.

By

Uma Biswas

Written in 1851, the poem *Dover Beach* was published in 1867 in a collection entitled *New Poems*. *Dover Beach* is considered to be one of the best poems by Matthew Arnold. It is written in the form of a dramatic monologue, where a single speaker, in this case the poet himself, speaks in the presence of a silent auditor. The poem is inspired by the poet's visit to the south coast of England with his wife, Frances. It is because of the occasion of the composition of the poem, that many critics claim it to be a love poem. However, there is much more to it. Arnold was writing at a time when conventional religion was being severely challenged by the tremendous advancement in science and technology. The 19th century Victorian England saw an unprecedented rise in terms of materialist production and an equal progress in all areas of human knowledge. As a result economy poured into the market and society became more and more money-orientated. On the other hand, new inventions and scientific discoveries gave man an illusion of gaining mastery over the forces of Nature. All these factors together with the Industrial Revolution made man attain a sense of glory and pride. Consequently, the idea of God gradually receded and religion received a heavy setback. People lost faith in God as they became more and more driven by machines.

The poem opens with a scenic description of a beautiful landscape. Apparently Arnold looks over the landscape from his hotel window, where he is holidaying with his wife. It is a moonlit night. Arnold looks at the English Channel that seems very calm and quiet. There is a high tide in the sea and the entire Dover Strait is moon-blinded. Geographically, the Dover Strait lies between the English Channel and the North Sea. The English coast lies to the north of this sea and to the south stands the French coast. The Dover Strait divides England from