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**S. No 16 B.A.Part-1 English Hons, Topic: Summary :*Dover Beach* Dr Umesh Prasad Singh, Assistant Prof of English, D. B. College Contact No 7250460920, Email-ID [drumeshsingh131@gmail.com](mailto:drumeshsingh131@gmail.com)**

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**Summary:**

Summary “Dover Beach” is a brief, dramatic monologue generally recognized as Arnold’s best—and most widely known—poem. It begins with an opening stanza that is indisputably one of the finest examples of lyric poetry in the English language. The topography of the nocturnal setting is a combination of hushed tranquillity and rich sensory detail. It is the world as it appears to the innocent eye gazing on nature: peaceful, harmonious, suffused with quiet joy. The beacon light on the coast of Calais, the moon on the calm evening waters of the channel, and the sweet scent of the night air all suggest a hushed and gentle world of silent beauty. The final line of the stanza, however, introduces a discordant note, as the perpetual movement of the waves suggests to the speaker not serenity but “the eternal note of sadness.”

The melancholy strain induces in the second stanza an image in the mind of the speaker: Sophocles, the Greek tragedian, creator of Oedipus Tyrannos (c. 429 b.c.e.; Oedipus Tyrannus, 1715) and Antigone (441 b.c.e.; Antigone, 1729) standing in the darkness by the Aegean Sea more than two thousand years ago. The ancient master of tragedy hears in the eternal flux of the waves the same dark note, “the turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery.” Thus, the speaker, like Sophocles before him, perceives life as tragedy; suffering and misery are inextricable elements of existence. Beauty, joy, and calm are ephemeral and illusory. The speaker’s pessimistic perspective on the human condition, expressed in stanzas two, three, and four, undercuts and effectively negates the positive, tranquil beauty of the opening stanza; the reality subsumes the misleading appearance. In the third stanza, Arnold introduces the metaphor of the “Sea of Faith,” the once abundant tide in the affairs of humanity that has slowly withdrawn from the modern world. Darwinism and Tractarianism in Arnold’s nineteenth century England brought science into full

and successful conflict with religion. "Its melancholy, long withdrawing roar" suggested to Arnold the death throes of the Christian era. The Sophoclean tragic awareness of fate and painful existence had for centuries been displaced by the pure and simple faith of the Christian era, a temporary compensation promising respite from an existence that is ultimately tragic.

The fourth and final stanza of "Dover Beach" is extremely pessimistic. Its grim view of reality, its negativity, its underlying desperate anguish are in marked contrast to the joy and innocent beauty of the first stanza. Love, the poet suggests, is the one final truth, the last fragile human resource. Yet here, as the world is swallowed by darkness, it promises only momentary solace, not joy or salvation for the world. The world, according to the speaker, "seems/ To lie before us like a land of dreams," offering at least an appearance that seems "So various, so beautiful, so new," but it is deceptive, a world of wishful thinking. It is shadow without substance, offering neither comfort nor consolation. In this harsh existence, there is "neither joy, nor love, nor light,/ Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain."

Arnold closes the poem with the famous lines that suggest the very nadir of human existence; few poems have equaled its concise, sensitive note of poignant despair. Humanity stands on the brink of chaos, surrounded in encroaching darkness by destructive forces and unable to distinguish friend from foe. The concluding image of the night battle suggests quite clearly the mood of the times among those who shared Arnold's intellectual temperament, and it is one with which they were quite familiar. Thucydides' *Historia tou Peloponnesiacou polemou* (431-404 b.c.e.; *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1550) describes the night battle of Epipolae between the Athenians and the Syracusans. Dr. Thomas Arnold, Matthew's father, had published a three-volume translation of Thucydides' text in 1835; it was a favorite text at Rugby. Another ancillary source was John Henry Newman, who, in 1843, published a sermon, "Faith and Reason, Contrasted as Habits of 3 Mind," in which he alludes to the growing religious controversy of the time, describing it as "a sort of night battle, where each fights for himself, and friend and foe stand together."