

ENGL 215 World Literature II

A Teaching Unit on

Toubab Dialaw, Senegal, and Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," and why being informed matters in true World Literature.

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In this course, ENGL 215 World Literature we read and discuss an array of literature from around the world and from the seventeenth century to the present. A daunting task, to be sure. Of course, we can only scratch the surface of world literature over such a span of time and space, but, hopefully, besides encountering some works that have "stood the test of time" as being significant works of art, we also have some fun looking through the "window" of literature at other people's truths, other people's attempts to make sense of the world and what it means to be human. Our major purpose here in this unit is to enrich the course with a modicum of integration of what I saw live in Senegal.

This unit is important to me because it brings out similarities and differences between various periods in history and literature, and similarities and differences between different or various geographical parts of the world. The concept of "dead white writers" loses its meaning when one critically probe content against a meaningful background of world literature, the humanities, and the social sciences.

This unit on Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" will cover more material than the poem itself.

Assumptions about Students:

- Students have a basic reading ability.
- Students can understand basic metaphors and literary concepts.
- Students are adept at navigating the internet.

Assumptions about Learning:

- Learning is best and meaningful for students when it approaches a concept from multiple angles.
- Students are more likely to care if they feel the subject matter is pertinent to their lives.
- Students should be involved in discussion just as often, if not more, than the professor.
- It is best to give smaller reading assignments more frequently rather than larger ones spaced apart. That way, students are less likely to feel overwhelmed and more likely to enjoy the text.

As part of the Fulbright program in Summer 2017 in Senegal, we visited Toubab Dialaw, Senegal. I was particularly moved by what I saw from my hotel room at the beach (<http://sobobade.com>). It was a picturesque scenery that brought back or stimulated things in the recesses of my mind. One of them is a recall or reminder of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach"

The calmness, the gleaming lights, and incessant or ceaseless sea waves on the coast area especially in the night reminded me of the vivid description of the content and scene the famous 19th century poem, "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold. For sizzling teaching purposes, I have included below, the poem, "Dover Beach," in its entirety:

DOVER BEACH

By Matthew Arnold

The sea is calm tonight,
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.
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!

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.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Agean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
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

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath

Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

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;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

(1867)

But from the beach of Toubab Diallaw at night, you can see Dakar coast, “the light
Gleams and is gone” just like what Matthew Arnold saw, “on the French coast from his
Dover Beach location. It is important to note that only the English channel separates the
France from southern England where Dover Beach is.

Unlike “Dover Beach” and other parts of the southern coast of England, there are no
pebbles that provide the grating roar but you hear the sound of the waves—I guess very
similar to what “Sophocles long ago before Christ (**B.C**) heard on the Aegean.” And
what Matthew Arnold heard on “this distant northern sea” in his poem in the 19th
century, and what people hear today in the 21st century on this tropical area south of the
equator is not different. As a matter of fact, the sound of the waves has always been
there.

Isn't it interesting to note that the waters of the Aegean, Northern Sea, and the part of
the Atlantic, where Toubab Dialaw, Senegal, are all part of the same body of water?

(Saturday July15, 2017 – a visit to Toubab Dialaw).

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