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ABSTRACT

Matthew Arnold is universally known as a pessimistic writer in the domain of English literature. His very greatness as a poet lies in his elegiac poems, a poetic type which is always used by the English poets as a medium of expressing personal sorrow. The study of his poetic creation clearly reveals his melancholic mood which leads him towards stoicism, a philosophy of submission. He can be seen in the various situations to be a hopeless person. He takes world as a place reserve for suffering and life as a foul game of destiny. But the close study of his literary work also reveals the sustainable optimism. His concept of culture, definition of poetry and criticism, ideas of Hellenism, Hebraism, sweetness and light are resulted out of high optimism. He can be also seen as a hopeful person having great faith on life and its values. The present paper is an attempt to show the forgotten side of his writing that is optimism. The paper is concerned to bring various instances by which he can be claimed as an optimistic writer.

Key words: Stoicism, Culture, Hellenism, Hebraism, Optimism, Pessimism, Sweetness, Light.

Introduction

Matthew Arnold, a social and cultural critic of the Victorian Age, is known in the realm of literature as a pessimistic poet. The study of his poetry reveals his very weeping nature. As a critic of life, he can be seen everywhere in lamenting or weeping mood. The very temperament which resulted out of his sensitivity forced him to write elegies on the sorry condition of the age and the Victorian society. Throughout his poetic career, he has written nothing except elegies. Numbers of critics have gone to the extent to say that his very greatness as a poet lies in his elegies. He has been taken one of the greatest elegiac poets in English literature. His melancholic nature forced the critic to be active to say that 'Arnold is a pessimistic poet'. In this context, Hugh Walker, a great critic on the Victorian Age, asserts:

Nothing in Arnold's verse is more arresting than its elegiac element. He found in the elegies the outlet of his native melancholy of the 'Virgilian cry' over the mournfulness of mortal destiny.

Nothing in Arnold's verse is more arresting than its elegiac or melancholic element. He was not satisfied with the lives lived in his time. He saw the life of his age and concluded that it is affected with the strange disease of materialism. Naturally, he lamented everywhere on the loss of spiritual, religious, aesthetic and social values of the age. As a thoughtful, reflective and sensuous poet, he complained against the apathy of the people of his age to the real culture. The very condition of the age forced him to be stoic and melancholic. It is also fact that many times he advocates to accept the harsh reality without hurry and worry. He could not show Marlowian struggle to

fight a war against the situation. We can study numbers of occasion in his poetry where he is too submissive to hope. We can see such scattering references in his writing which reveal his pessimistic attitude and melancholic temper.

Arnold as a Pessimistic

The study of Arnold's poetic creation reveals his pessimistic attitude or sensibility to life, an attitude or a sensibility which beholds everything with melancholic touch. It is an inclination to see negative side of life. His poems are full with such references which can be taken as a sign of pessimism. The very toning of his poetry is always melancholic. He can be seen with stoic temper everywhere in his poetic outlet. He has taken poetry as a criticism of life. At the very beginning, he has seen life as a play in the hands of destiny before which humanity is helpless. Naturally, he accepted it as a reality and became hopeless. He reigned before the power of destiny. When he saw the spiritual, social and religious conditions of his age, he came to know that it is useless to struggle against the destiny. But he could not miss the chance to criticize the rootlessness of the age. In his poem, 'Dover Beach', he weeps in a submissive manner:

.....for the world which seems
To lie before us like a lands 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 darkling plain
Swept with confused alarm and struggle
and flight
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Here we can see him as a hopeless about the present condition of life. He takes life as a process of suffering rather than enjoying. He thinks that we are fighting a battle of life in darkness having no idea of our doing. Such lines can only project the negative approach to life. In his poem, 'Stanza from the Chartreuse', the tragic insight to life can be best seen:

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born
With nowhere yet to rest my mind
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn
Their faith, my tears, that world deride
I come to shed them at their side.
Oh, hide me in you gloom profound

In 'Sohrab and Rostum' he brings the bizarre irony of human life in the following manner:

We are all like swimmers in the sea
Poised on the top of huge wave of fate
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall

It is nothing more than submissive attitude. The lines show his melancholic temper to see life. He takes life as a puppet game in the hands of destiny. In 'Youth agitations' he forwards the endless suffering of human life. He writes:

All pains the immortal spirit must endure
All weakness that imparts, all griefs that bow.

The lines show his negative attitude to life and living. He found life affected with the strange disease having no hope for future. It is full with sick hurry and divided aims. In such a condition he could not do except weeping and lamenting. He could not see hope for humanity in such conditions. The

hopeless attitude can be seen in the following lines:

**But now the old is out of date,
The new is yet to born
And we can be alone elate,
While the world lies forlorn.**

On the basis of above instances, he has been taken by the critics as a pessimistic poet who developed melancholic attitude to life. His hopeless attitude to life resulted into pessimism.

Arnold's Optimism

But the thorough study of his literary creation also reveals his optimistic attitude to life, an attitude to see everything with positivity. It is an inclination to see the good side of life. The present paper is a perspective to see the hidden optimism in his work. It can be also seen that the very optimism attitude goes side by side to his Pessimistic. It is an attempt to see the very optimistic temper which Arnold possessed in his nature and expressed in his work. His prose work reveals the temper in a very impressive manner. But it is also wrong to take his poetic work without optimism or hope for bright future for humanity. There are numerous instances by which we can claim Arnold's position as an optimistic poet. His very definition of poetry is the best example of his positive attitude to life. It has been said that Arnold was always optimistic about his personal future and present life. But, it can be also stated that he was more optimistic about the future of humanity. He does not show the dark side of the life but comes with remedy for the ailments related to darkness. The element of hope can be seen everywhere in his poetry. His definition of poetry as a

criticism of life in which the spirit of our race will find its last source of consolation can be taken the best example of his positive approach to the future of mankind. Through his definition, he tries to provide the hope for humanity. His high hope from poetry is resulted out of his optimism. He takes 'criticism of life' as the profound application of ideas to life. He was very serious but not about the negativity of life of his age but about the application of the best ideas to life to lead it towards its perfection. He was not only concerned with the external perfection but also the internal. He wept on the very condition only to create the effect of the consolation. He had intensified the negativity only to increasing the value of positivity. He had made life too thirsty to forget anything except thirst. He was not concerned with the thirst but with the value of water. He has shown the pessimistic image of life only to bring interest in optimism.

His poetic work can be studied with the optimistic approach. His 'Dover Beach', which is always hailed as a cry over the loss of faith and love, can be read with the optimism. His line, "Ah, love, let us be true" can be taken as an instance of high optimism. It should be also remembered that he has written this poem when he was enjoying the best moments of life in the company of his wife. How can a person think about negative aspect of life when he is enjoying the best? His promotion of love as a remedy to all strange disease should be taken as a result of his optimism. While promoting the value of love he can be seen nothing more than optimist. His real purpose of weeping is to create pathos for life. In 'Memorial verses' he is also seen as an optimist. While referring 'the end is everywhere' he

does not forget to say 'art still has much truth, take refuge there'. He is very much optimistic to the teaching of Goethe, Byron and Wordsworth. He would believe that their teaching is full with hope and positivism. He writes:

Since dark days still bring to light
Man's prudence and man's fiery might
Time may restore us in his course.

What an optimism it is! He would believe on time which always brings hope out of despair. His most famous elegy 'Scholar Gypsy' embodies optimism in greater extent than any other poems. He spreads the values of natural living to get the real pleasure of life through the life of the scholar. He advocates deep love for nature by believing that such a love can lead humanity towards its perfection. His very attitude of showing remedy to the strange disease of his age is nothing more than firm optimism.

His prose works contain more powerful optimism and hope than his poetry. His social and political essay 'Culture and anarchy' reveals Arnold's high and firm faith on the future of humanity. We cannot find any trace of pessimism in the essay. He was very optimistic about his concept of culture which is taken by him as an ideal perspective to life with all its beauty. His concept of culture and various ideas of living are resulted out of his hope on the future of humanity. He puts his concept as a way of living, thinking and believing. He takes it as an alternative to all types of anarchy-spiritual, religious and social. In this respect Lionel Trilling's remark should be taken in consideration:

For Arnold culture means many things but nothing less than reason experienced as a kind of grace by each citizens, the conscious effort of each man to come to the realization of his complete humanity

He can be seen much optimistic about his concept by taking it as an option to religion. He recommends it as an inward operation to bring inward perfection. He is desirous to lead society in the ideal realm. It is an idea of perfection and process of rendering an intelligent being more intelligent. He defines his concept with high hope and confidence. He defines it:

Culture is a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which have been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning the stream of fresh water and free thought upon our stock notions and habits.

It can be said that in his poetry he has shown the sorry condition of humanity with despair and in his book, 'Culture and Anarchy' has brought remedies on the problem with high hope and optimism. Through his concept and various ideas, he wanted to spread the will of God to bring real perfection. He was desirous to make life more and more beautiful by developing the sense of duty as well as all sides of humanity. He writes:

Culture, which is the study of perfection, leads us to conceive of true Human perfection as a harmonious perfection, developing all sides of Our humanity, developing all parts of humanity.

Here we can see Arnold as a man having a desire to bring all round development of humanity through introducing high

cultural canons. Such a view and hopeful statement can be come from a man who has a great faith on the future of humanity. There is no trace which can show any types of pessimism. He takes culture as a desire of consciousness to bring peace and harmony in the social life.

But there is another view in which the love for our neighbours, the impulse towards action, help and beneficence the desire for removing

Human error, cleaning human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we find it.

His aspiration to leave the world happier and better is definitely resulted out of his optimistic attitude to life and its desire. It is unbelievable to take such a statement by a man who has a pessimistic and hopeless attitude to life. In his life he was always concerned to bring an ideal condition for living. He wanted to introduce the kingdom of god on the earth:

“My foremost design in writing this preface is to address a word of exhortation to the society for promoting Christian knowledge”

He was more concerned with the good side of life rather than the bad. He exposed the bad only to annihilate it from the living. Otherwise he would not have written such hopeful statements. His concept of culture came as a silver lining in the dark cloud of anarchy and chaos. He had high faith and high hope on morality as a standard of living and behaving. A man having pessimistic attitude does not believe on morality or spirituality. The following statement reveals Arnold's high optimism:

“It is in making endless addition of its power, in endless growth in wisdom and beauty, that the spirit of the human race finds its ideal.

To reach these ideals, culture is an indispensable aid, and that is the true value of culture”

He has forwarded his concept with the desire to leave the world more and more beautiful in which humanity may find the source of consolation. It is an attempt by a man who has high hope from moral and spiritual living.

“I say, culture is considered not merely as the endeavor to see and learn this, but as the endeavor also, to make it prevail, the moral, social values”

For Arnold culture is a ray of hope and certainty in the shadow of doubt and anarchy. He writes:

“For Arnold culture means many things but nothing less than reason experienced as a kind of grace by each citizens, the conscious effort of each man to come to the realization of his complete humanity.”

His view and idea of culture is all pervasive. Culture, in other words, is a quest for knowledge, a desire to tread the path of truth, a means to reach the domain of perfection, a right path to do right things. From the study of such statements one can get an idea that they must have been written by a man who loves life in all its forms. A man who loves life, a man who believes on morality, a man who speaks about religion and the will of God, a man who desires to see the world more and more beautiful, a man who is very much conscious about the future of humanity, a man who desires to bring

internal perfection to life can only be taken as an optimistic and hopeful.

We can also set some examples from his writing which can also claim his position as an optimistic writer. His idea of sweetness and light, his affinity with Greek culture, his idea of the best self, harmonious mixing of Hellenism and Hebraism should be taken as rays of hope in despair. His definition of criticism, in which he mostly concerned with life, also reveals his high hope on literature. In his essay 'The Function of Criticism at The Present Time' he defines criticism as a disinterested Endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh thoughts. His very desire for the best should be taken as the superb instance of his optimism. His ideal concept of life is nothing more than the attitude of

a man who sees life with hope. His criticism of politics also reveals his positivity to the world.

Conclusion

The overall discussion clearly indicates that Matthew Arnold can be also studied as an optimistic writer in the realm of English literature. His book 'Culture and Anarchy' claims Arnold's position in the line of the optimistic poets. His optimism and pessimism have gone side by side by sustaining and intensifying each others. It also shows that he is not only forwarding optimism but also very much serious about it. He has not taken it in a casual manner like Robert Browning and Lord Tennyson. His optimism is grounded on reality and possibility.

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