

PESSIMISM AND MELANCHOLY IN ARNOLD'S POETRY

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Abstract

Matthew Arnold's feeling of melancholy is in each and every poem of Arnold. Arnold's melancholy and pessimism sprang from many causes .The first and chief is contemplation of man's destiny from the hopeless complication of his own age ,disappointment in love ,deaths of friends and relatives ,loss of faith in the age and above all melancholy cast of his mind .It is also due to the religious and social changes brought about by the development of science .His this melancholy and pessimism is revealed in his poems through isolation ,estrangement, confusion, crisis, alienation and mental tension. Arnold's melancholy is not totally sickening or sad .It has a silver lining in his clouds. The poet has thrown hints of his cheering message in a number of poems .In his some poems serenity opposite to Wordsworth's is visible. Arnold's serenity is the quiet stoicism of a melancholy soul.

Keywords: crisis, disappointment, isolation, melancholy, agony, estrangement, stoicism, serenity

Matthew Arnold, a distinguished 19th century English poet and critic brought a revolution in the world of English literature with his prose and poetry .Arnold giving the definition of poetry that poetry should be the 'criticism of life' expressed his philosophy. He refused to obey Conservative Christianity. However, he admired those people who entirely devoted to religion.

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The social, scientific, religious circumstances of his age made a great effect on the literature he wrote.

Because of the Industrial Revolution and advancement of science there was an intellectual commotion in England. Arnold belongs to the later Victorian era when Victorianism was already being questioned. It was the time of intellectual unrest, and era of prosperity, an era of aggressive nationalism and an era of rising imperialism. Because of the advancement of science religious faith was shaken.

The age in which Arnold matured and wrote was an era of social change. Man was caught between the two worlds, with the old one crumbling down and the new one not yet born. Doubts and unrest possessed man's soul. Arnold was a man of sensitive nature. Being a sensitive nature he was too much disturbed because of this situation of his age. He reflects this spiritual unrest and agony of the age in each of his works. He took a gloomy view of life for he felt miserable and helpless. According to David Cecil. It was for the first time that conscious, considered pessimism became a force in English literature. Most of his personal poetry is steeped in melancholy spirit of an era of transition. All the features of his age expressed in his poems in a melancholic tone.

In the poem "Mycerinus", the father and uncle of Mycerinus who had lived long, who shut up the temples and disregarded the Gods and destroyed men contrary to this h was an embodiment of good deeds. Here we see the conflict between noble deeds and ignoble deeds which creates crisis in his relationships. Arnold himself was worried about the religious situation of his time. His despair is expressed through this poem.

In the poem "The Forsaken Merman" the poet describes with great agony the Merman's disappointment and the children's helplessness , because Merman has been cruelly deserted by his human wife. The Merman had gone to Church, but Margaret did not pay any attention towards him and his pleadings. His grief is expressed in the following lines.

Margaret, hist !come quick, we are here !
Dear Heart, I said, we are long alone;
The sea grown stormy, the little ones moan
But, ah, she gave me never a look
For her eyes were sealed to the holy book !

**-The Forsaken Merman
(Lines:77-81)**

In "Self Deception" the poet expresses the highest type of alienation of man in the sick society of the Victorian era. F.D.H. Johnson in the book The Dialogue of the mind with itself says about Self deception It records the mood of bewildered despair in which the poet cast about for an explanation of why he had been granted inborn potentialities and yet denied the opportunity to make any constructive use of them" Arnolds be wildered situation and a strong temperament are reflected in the following lines.

Ah, whose hand that day through heaven guided
Man's new spirit, since it was not we ?
Ah, who swayed our choice, and who decided
What our gifts, and what our wants should be ?

**-Self Deception
(Lines:13-16)**

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His the best narrative poem Sohrab and Rostum deals with paternal and filial affection. It was the story of how a father killed his son. He reveals to us the workings of their mind and makes them live so that the combats seem to be taking place before our eyes. The sobbing of Arnold's melancholy souls finds expression in the closing lines of the poem. A tragedy is created when a son is slain by his father. See the following tragic lines.

Speechless; and then he utter one sharp cry
O Boy - thy Father !and his voice choked there.

-Sohrab and Rostum
(Lines:690-91)

The poem Consolation deals with the barrenness of the poet's heart. Arnold could not find happiness anywhere. He saw moral distress and spiritual decay everywhere. The tragic circumstances made Arnold an alienated and isolated individual. He says,

Mist clogs the sunshine
Smoky dwarf houses
Hem me round everywhere;
A vague dejection
Weighs down my soul
For him the present
Holds only pain.

-Consolation
(Lines:1-5, 39-40)

In the poem "Philomela" the confused and alineated condition of Procne as well as of Philomela brought crisis in their relationships with Tereus. The beauty of Nature cannot provide Philomela any consolation in her grief. See the following lines.

O wanderer from a Grecian shore,
Still, after many years, in distant lands,
still nourishing in thy bewilder'd brain
That wild, unquench'd deep-sunken, old word pain.

-Philomela
(Lines:5-8)

“Dover Beach” one of Arnold's most popular and finest poems expresses a mood of melancholy. The mood expressed not only of Arnold himself but of the century. This poem expresses the sense of religious loss, the feeling of spiritual isolation. Just as the ancient Greek tragedian thought of the flow of human misery as he heard the melancholy sound of the Aegean sea, Arnold also finds in the sound of the northern sea a thought too deep for tears.

Touched by this thought Arnold thinks of the entire Victorian age or even of the modern world in general. It was a time when he found loss of faith and religious values because of the materialism and scientific advancement. For him the world of his age was devoid of love and light and joy and peace. His these views are expressed in the following lines.

The sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the fall, and round, earth's shore
lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

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But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, with drawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world

-Dover Beach

(Lines:21-28)

One major cause of Arnold's melancholy and pessimism was his disappointment in love. Arnold was essentially a divided personality because of the alien and hostile circumstances. His love was torn between his beloved Marguerite and his wife Frances Lucy Wightman. Arnold could not get real happiness from his meeting with Marguerite in spite of her charm. His most passionate desire was to be alone on the snowy peaks. Arnold's own sense of isolation through disappointment in love created crisis. Arnold's love lyric poems have been discussed in two groups which created crisis in his love relationships with marguerite and with Frances Lucy Wightman. The theme of crisis in human relationship was responsible for his pessimistic and melancholy throbs. We can see melancholy through the theme love and crisis in the following poems.

A Memory Picture is a love lyric. It deals with the memory of the french girl Marguerite at Thun. The poet feels agony within his heart in the absence of his beloved. Arnold remembers her in a confused manner.

A face is gone
If too hotly mused upon;
And our best impressions are
Those that do themselves repair
Many a face I so let flee,
Ah !is faded utter'y.

-A Memory Picture

(Lines:-9-14)

In the lyric "Meeting" Arnold's disappointment is revealed. His relationship with Marguerite was neither satisfactory nor pleasure giving because some mysterious and superhuman power had created frustration, dejection and bewilderment.

"Parting" is connected with crisis and mental tension in Arnold's relationship with Marguerite.

His estrangement from his beloved marguerite was the root cause of his despair and melancholy. Because of the hostile and alien circumstances he could not prolong his love making with Marguerite. The unpleasant and frustrated situations are reflected in the following lines.

Forgive me !forgive me !
Ah, Marguerite, fain
Would these arms reach to clasp thee !
But see ! It is in vain.

-Parting

(Lines:59-62)

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In "Isolation To Marguerite" in a perfect lyric he conveys the full intensity and pathos of his loneliness and isolation. Arnold's philosophy that the so-called love is a mere delusion and each person is lonely soul and condemned to live in total isolation all his life is revealed.

"To Marguerite Continued" is the inherent expression of pessimism and aloneness. It introduces the failure of communication in the possibility of true love. Arnold himself realized the pathetic loneliness of the individual, sad luck of human, affection in life that unplumbed salt, estranging sea, which divides man from man. His line "We mortal millions live alone" illustrates the universal spiritual loneliness that is apparent what Arnold felt to be at the heart of Marguerite experience.

In the poem "Absence" the confusion and sadness of the heart in absence of his beloved Marguerite is revealed. The following lines reveal Arnold's melancholy and frustration:

This is the curse of life !that not
A nobler, clamer train
Of wiser thoughts and feelings blot
Our passions from our brain.

**-Absence
(Lines:5-8)**

The poem "Too Late" reveals general suffering attitude of human beings. Each and every one has to suffer because of the harder fate. Two souls can never be united together because of hostile circumstances. Thus this poem suggests alienation from others.

"Separation" is the poem of Arnold's inner estrangement from his wife Frances Lucy Whightman.

The poem "Longing" is about normal correspondence between Arnold and Miss Whightman. In spite of suffocation, frustration and despair, the poet longs to meet her but he fails. He can't enjoy familiarity or close friendship and a sense of complete unification. His longing to be united with Lucy Weight man creates crisis in relationship and brings tragic and helpless and hopeless situations.

Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again !
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.

**-Longing
(Lines:1-4)**

Arnold found in the elegy the outlet of his native melancholy of the Virgilian cry over the mournfulness of mortal destiny. Arnold's personal elegies are marked with a note of general grief. "Thyrsis" is an elegy on his friend Clough. Rugby Chapel, commemorates the death of his father Dr. Arnold the Headmaster of Rugby; A Southern Night is for his brother and Westminster Abbey is written on the death of Dean Stanley.

Arnold had thus the capacity of writing a formal or traditional elegy and of expressing his elegiac mood in a poem.

Arnold's melancholy is not altogether sickening or sad. It has a silver lining in its clouds. His scepticism is not without sunshine; his sadness not without gladness. The poet has thrown hints of his cheering message in a number of poems:

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Despair not thou as I despair'd,
Nor be cold gloom thy prison !
Forward the gracious hours have fared,
And see !the sun is risen !

- **Obermann Once More**
(Lines:81-84)

Arnold's poetry was influenced by the ideals of stoicism. Arnold's stoicism laid emphasis on self-control, fortitude and austerity. He possessed both the strength and weakness of stoicism. "All pains the immortal spirit must endure"

-**Shakespeare**
(Line:12)

Arnold's stoicism is not of the purest kind. Too sensitive to troubles and tragedies around him, Arnold broke down into sadness and burst into sobs for himself and the world. Thus, Arnold's sadness, makes him a loss of stoicism, but he becomes a gain to poetry.

In Arnold's poems serenity is visible, but the serenity of Arnold differs from the serenity of Wordsworth. For Arnold serenity is a state of mind and an intellectual effort whereas for Wordsworth serenity is a matter of temperament. It is a deep cheerfulness for Wordsworth but lack of it in Arnold. Arnold's serenity is the quiet stoicism of a melancholy soul.

In Arnold's poems there is no any joy, any real peace. It is the serenity of a troubled but brave spirit. He is restful but not at rest. He is serene but not tranquil. He is not satisfied with calm.

Calm's not life's crown,
Though calm is well.
This all perhaps which man acquires.
But his not what our youth desires.

- **Youth and Calm.**
(Lines:23-25)

Matthew Arnold was a deeply troubled, bewildered and dissatisfied individual .This was because of the complexity generated by cultural pressure as well as intellectual environment. This environment made him alone and isolated .He expressed his this pessimistic tone artistically through the medium of poetry.

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