

DECONSTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SEA ARCHETYPE IN COMPILATION OF MATTHEW ARNOLD'S POEMS: "DOVER BEACH", "THE FORSAKEN MERMAN" AND "TO MARGUERITE: CONTINUED"

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Abstract– This is an attempt to make a new way to reading and analysing Arnold's poems. Here I will make a deconstructive reading and show how the image of sea as archetype misses its centre implying meanings and interpretations at different levels. The Arnold's sea is not limited within the structure of Victorian society, rather it connects past and present. The sea is same but it plays multiple functions in the poems. The sea though a large protective form cannot reach to the core of the ultimate. In this paper I will prove that sea for Arnold provides a plurality of meaning that contradicts themselves in these three poems taken together. For that purpose I will show the 'binary opposition', 'violent hierarchy' and 'differance' implemented in the poems.

Key Words– deconstruction, sea archetype, binary opposition, violent hierarchy.

Arnold's popularity lies in his representation of the image of Victorian society that had and still has its great impact on human life. His poems play a major role to serve this purpose, especially "Dover Beach", "The Forsaken Merman" and "To Marguerite: Continued". From classical age to the present times the sea imagery has been existing as a dominant part in corners of literature and turned to the status of an archetype. In twentieth century literary criticism, literature is surrounded by numerous archetypes which open the way for the critics and the readers to go for deeper analysis of literature. A Swiss-born theorist Carl Gustav Jung presenting a psychological interpretation talks about myths and archetypes in relation to the unconscious mind. He used the term "collective unconsciousness" that refers to the thoughts, memories, instincts, feeling latent in the unconscious state of mind of all people. He also talks about primordial images through which archetypes are represented and they had their origin at the very initial stage of mankind. Notably from the birth of literature archetypes like hero, God, heaven, hell, Old wise man and so on are prevalent in literature. And sea as archetype is also a product of that "collective unconsciousness" existing in the literary world also. It is in the 1940s and 1950s largely due to the work of Canadian critic Northrop Frye archetypes are given a place in the tradition of literary studies. M. H. Abrams in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* has rightly pointed out that for Frye archetypes "play an essential role in refashioning the material universe into an alternative verbal universe that is humanly intelligible and viable, because it is adapted to essential human needs and concerns" (Abrams 224-225). What makes these three poems special to me is that whenever these three poems are read together as a single one they bring some inquiries regarding the image of sea and its implications. Critics think that image is not only apt for the comparison and without superfluity but has a beauty and striking effectiveness of its own, which is enhanced by felicity and noble directness of expression that is characteristic of Arnold at his best. Undoubtedly sea as a dominant image serves this purpose. But sea appears in these poems in different shapes and colours. For a postmodern reading it is the subject of dismissing the 'centre' from the fixity of meanings to the multiplicity of meanings. Interestingly the thoughts and ideas expressed in the language to describe the sea do not only decentralise the image of the sea archetype, but also they are contradictory to each other. In terms of deconstructive analysis linguistic descriptions of the sea create binary oppositions within themselves so far the variable contexts are concerned. When "Dover Beach" takes sea for religious faith, "The Forsaken Merman" points towards a life of renunciation, contemplation, and on other side bleak, grim world. Again "To Marguerite: Continued" shows sea as a symbol of isolated individuals of their sad predicament. Though the sea is at the core of each poem, it finds its connotations somewhere else.

In the realm of English poetry, sea functions as a mirror where one can see human life and its ceaseless changing from the time of Anglo-Saxons to the today's generation. The two remarkable poems composed during Anglo-Saxons age are *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* which have wonderful passages dedicated to the description of sea voyages. The passages beautifully throw light on human isolation, loss and sadness. Sometimes sea voyage is used to step forward towards an union with the Almighty, abandoning earthly pleasure. The epic poem *Beowulf* seems to be full of sea passages. Even if we look at the Romantic age we would find that Romantic poets also created some beautiful sea imagery, especially Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In this poem he links sea to human life in general, and shows the changing mood of sea and human struggle for survival. The Victorian age gifted two poets, Tennyson and Arnold respectively who have used the sea myth to express their melancholy thoughts. For Tennyson sea stands for intense sorrow and a sense of loss. His two poems "The Lotos-Eaters" and "Break, Break, Break" bear the note of harsh life. Having played a great role in literature sea has acquired the status of an archetype. We may see that this archetype always performs a dual functions of evoking the appropriate atmosphere and give expression of the emotions aroused in the heart of the poets concerned. But Matthew Arnold's poems can be well understood by their linguistic expression. To make a deconstructive analysis we focus on the language and structure used in these particular poems.

Deconstruction theory was propounded by Jacques Derrida in a lecture on "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" delivered in 1966 as a reaction against structuralism to suggest that meaning and structure of language are not stable and closed. In linguistic, deconstruction points towards a system in which language is used to produce meaning without having a particular centred

structure— fixed and stable, rather it talks about the plurality of meaning. No text can produce a single ultimate meaning to understand literature. It is ultimately a language game which works with a chain of signifiers. And in this system every word, every linguistic expression depends on other word or expression. It is like finding a meaning of a word in dictionary with the help of other words. Deconstructive analysis does not only finish in its myth structure because one literary work does not always provide the same pattern in conveying myth. Multiple meanings are concealed inside a literary work and the creativity is to reasonably dig up those meanings to understand a text in depth. As the representation of sea in these poems tends to bring more than one interpretation, deconstructive reading is suitable to mug up Arnold's sea in a true way as it goes towards a multiplicity of meanings. The poem "Dover Beach" presents a "calm sea" with the "moon-blanch'd land" and "tranquil bay". This picture suggests serenity, balance, and stability which Arnold seeks for himself. The "tremulous sensory cadence slow" sums up what has gone before and introduces the "eternal note of sadness". Thus the sea waves bring a tragic note, i.e, the loss of faith in God on surface level of interpretation. Arnold then passes on to a Sophoclean interpretation of sea as well as Time and Life. It suggests that the sea is an archetypal image because Sophocles long ago heard the "note of sadness" on "Aegean sea" and Arnold can also hear the same note on the "Northern sea". If we go through a close reading we would find that the expression "calm sea" creates a romantic atmosphere in a combination of other phrases like "moon-blanch'd land" and "tranquil bay". The calmness of the sea postpones its meaning on others which is in deconstruction called "différance". To oversimplify the concept, here words are always at distance from what they signify and must be described by using other words. In the description of sea we here see binary opposition since the representation of sea is not for a single role when it refers to delight, joy, happiness and at the same time stands for sadness. In terms of binary opposition, sea archetype always points towards creating opposition in production of meanings so far plurality of meaning is concerned. The idea of sea which is primarily supposed to be positive, immediately appears to be something negative. Interestingly both the attitudes whether it is positive or negative cannot be the central idea because in other two poems we would see that the sea has changed its colour and shape and delayed its meaning on something else. The sea is the same but the idea and thought imposed on it are variables according to context and situation. It happens in this way for it is a language system open for "free play" and here poet's personal thoughts and emotions are hardly given importance. Now Arnold moves from concrete to abstract, from natural to the conceptual and compares the sea with the "sea of faith". In this comparison, belief and disbelief in religion are represented by the ups and downs of sea waves. On surface level it compares the deep faith in past with the loss of faith at present as in Arnold's words :

The sea of faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, (21-25)

Here, the "sea of faith" may suggest the faith in religion, but it is not the only possible meaning because initially the sea was for romance, then for sadness and then again for religious doubt. Hence the connotation of sea always delays its meaning on other countless signifiers. No idea is of much importance than others. As in deconstructive analysis, each interpretation is right in its own way after all language does not maintain any hierarchy, rather it is the violation of hierarchy so far the central idea of sea is missing here. The description of sea "at the full, and round earth's shore" in general suggests the vastness and vitality of sea as an organic form, and along with this it immediately points towards its exact opposite condition in use of the phrase "withdrawing roar" (showing binary opposition). The same sea appears in another poem "The Forsaken Merman", but this time it appears in different context. Here the sea plays the role of third character. Arnold excellently and artistically interpreted the water-home of the Merman. The sea presents a life which is full of sensuous pleasures while the grey church on the hillside and the prayer book represent a life of renunciation and contemplation. The world to which Margaret returns is bleak and grim while the sea life was rich and aristocratic. Here the sea stands for freedom at one level of interpretation. To prove this there is a picture of the Merman's world in sea:

In the caverns where we lay,
Through the surf and through the swell,
.....
Where the sea-beasts rang'd all round
Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground,
Where sea-snakes coil and twine
Dry their mail and bask in the brine (32-33, 39-42)

This description naturally creates an impression of free and independent life of the Merman's family. But that is not enough to understand the world of sea. This linguistic description does always carry within it some hidden meanings which can be put in opposition to this. In comparison to this image of sea, it refers to England which has lost its ancient heritage of poetic beauty and poetic truth. It is also notifiable that Merman's sorrows for his wife that she will not return to sea-life is parallel to Arnold's nostalgia of his Oxford life gone for ever. The same surface of the disturb sea suggests the lively picture of the forsaken family with sadness written on their face while looking at the church against on eerie background. Sea stands for safety and security for the Merman's family but the same "sea grows stormy, the little ones moan"(65). Now the question is how to define the image of the sea archetype? This question cannot provide a particular point to draw its conclusion. It is because this archetypal sea is related to multiple connotations which are also logical and reasonably true. On the whole all types of meanings are delayed to each other. The emphasis is not given on a particular one. Apart from these two poems Arnold's "To Marguerite: Continued" also presents sea as key figure. At the opening stanza of the poem life is considered to be a sea and islands divided by the sea are compared to human beings. Here, sea stands for isolation. In this poem, the treatment of the sea is different from what we find in his other poems. The image of the sea reminds the isolated individuals in their sad meaningless life. The significance of islands in the sea that stand for the men in life is clearly projected in the first stanza. The poem is a lament not merely for separation of the two lovers but for the universal incurable isolation into which "we mortals millions live alone"(4) and separated by "estranging sea" caused by Almighty:

Who order'd, that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
Who renders vain their deep desire?—
A God, a God their severance rul'd;
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea (19-24)

If we focus on the phrase “estranging sea” we find that it refers to divided islands, isolated individuals, separation of lovers, millions of lonely human beings and so on. The production of meanings goes on without a full stop, rather it passes on an endless chain of signifiers. A plurality of meaning which can be imposed on the image of sea is nothing but supplement to each other. For deconstructive analysis, the poems are the composition of words in a system of language that has no fixity and stability in structure. Therefore no conclusion can be drawn in search of central idea. Textual interpretation begins where it ends. Having considered these three poems in a single one, we find that the meaning of sea does vary from context to context, situation to situation, time to time. They create binary oppositions among themselves. Meaning and explanation are not bound within individual poem, rather they try to find the ‘centre’ in whole system of language. The more we try to point the ‘centre’, the more we go far from reaching it.

Summing up, Arnold’s selected poems are the poems of the sea with uncertainty in production of meaning. In the absence of the origin or the author, this uncertainty leads to the risk of mistaken interpretation, but if the plurality of meaning is set uncovered, the risk of mistake can be minimized. The interpretation of sea must be considered as a whole, rather than a small part of literature. As in literature sea is an archetypal concept, it cannot be only explained on the basis of a particular time, culture and a society’s point of view. The wholeness and the partialness of the sea create the binary oppositions. This is just an attempt to create an underlying structure from the basic mental operation of binary opposition where the sense of the sea changes within the individual poems. The sense also changes from poem to poem because the context of representation is different. But that interpretation is not the final interpretation in the poems because the meaning or, in particular the interpretation of the poems is always shifting according to the discourse. The binary oppositions do not refer to two equivalent terms, rather they show “violent hierarchy” by which one can create a new interpretation. In deconstructive analysis, this leads to understanding that there is no certain meaning and it is indeed a ceaseless pursuit of meaning to acquire better understanding of the poems. The internal conflict in the poems shows that the meaning or interpretation of sea is always postponed in accordance with “differance”, “supplement”, and “free play”. The analysis in this paper is entirely based on qualitative data and library resources. Hence, it may open up the way to perform another analysis toward the poems, “Dover Beach”, “The Forsaken Merman”, and “To Marguerite: Continued” using deconstruction theory. Apart from that research can be done further on the phonological system in the poems.

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