
HUMANISM IN THE POETRY OF THOMAS GRAY

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Thomas Gray, in his poetry, zeroes in at humanism. There are certain characteristics of humanism which are abundantly found in poetry of Thomas Gray. Some of them are found in his odes – melancholy, morality, humanity, humility, sympathy, rapport, pity, and pathos are some salient features which are found throughout his poetical work. All these constitute humanism. The humanistic ideas are so dashed with the moralizing notes or didacticism that the combined effect becomes attractive to a very high degree. The gist of Gray's poetry is to satirize the artificial society that cannot resist the charm of gold and gaiety.

Gray's Poetry is packed with many a human value which Gray presents before us to be imbibed. He thinks that childhood is free from all sorts of mistakes which are committed by the grownups. Childhood is the only state of life that remains free from selfishness, jealousy, ambition, partiality, pride, temptation, abhor, and many other social evils. Solving of problems and reducing suffering and pains of the people with help of reason is more important than religious beliefs. Gray's attitude reveals his humanism through his poetry.

Thomas Gray, a leading eighteenth century poet, is the most accomplished craftsman of the transition Period. His refusal of laureateship shows him to be a man of will. He wrote literature merely because of his pang of humanism. Gray became an omnivorous reader only because of his will for imparting something special to society. Humanism lays stress on the fact that the basic nature of human being is harmonious and good. In other words, humanism signifies a process of demeanor adopted by a man that is based on human happiness, human service, human help, human interest, and human charity including other human values. It prefers human beings to gods and goddesses. It is easy to gauge the mood and mind of Gray regarding democratic values and human interest. He has poured out his

poignancy to such extent that one can easily understand his humanism through his poetical work. Gray has completely been an egalitarian, and has not only dreamt of an egalitarian society but also done his best to materialize it.

After making a serious study of his poems, it may become easy to say that Gray's poetical work is a record of moods of conflict between poverty and aristocracy, a war between sorrow and joy, honor and insult, adversity and prosperity, good and evil, and opportunity and misfortune.

The reason of his being a passionate lover of mankind or an empathetic being is that he believes that everyone is equal and should have the same right and opportunities. No one should be deprived of rights and opportunities to which one is entitled. Such a pang of egalitarianism makes him more worried or anxious about the miseries of the rude forefathers of the hamlet. Why does he ask for egalitarianism? Where for does he becomes a swain or a farmer who regularly visits a farm? For what is he overwhelmed by sympathies and empathies with the obscure villagers?

All these questions in connection with Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" give only one answer, that is, a pang of humanism which runs through melancholic notes and pathetic attempts. He asks for egalitarianism because it is an element of a set of humanism if he becomes a swain in "Elegy"; it is because he has empathy with poor farmers of the hamlet. If he is overwhelmed by fellow-feelings, it is only because he wants the readers to know the importance of humanism.

The most striking feature of Gray's elegy is egalitarianism that is most relevant and fundamental in every branch of humanism. It is Gray who writes the immortal or eternal line, "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power." Such virtues and thoughts dispersed at various place largely focus on humanism such as sympathy, empathy, civility, humbleness, melancholy, sermons, didacticism, and moralizing notes but none of them seen to be insignificant. All are essential parts of humanism. To sum up, it may be stated that Gray is not a teacher or a prophet, nor an artist, but a humanist.

The rise of the feelings or the sensibility is conspicuously illustrated in the poetical work of Gray. The awakening of feeling takes various forms of humanitarian notes throughout "Elegy." It is seen in the love for human values of all kinds. When we read Gray's "Elegy," faith in reason is replaced by faith in feeling and emotion. This awakens sympathy and empathy that manifests itself in the "Elegy." The consequence is the welfare of mankind.

It is the "Elegy" that has brought a palpable sense of relief in the society. It is hoped that his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" will continue to serve the purpose for which it is designed. The well marked memory of human value is palpable in the line, "Let not Ambition much their useful toil."

Gray's "Elegy" reminds us that we cannot discover new oceans of human values unless we read it. As has been said that one cannot discover new oceans unless one has the courage to lose the sight of the shore, Gray's attitude in the "Elegy" is that little things are capable of making oceanic difference.

We support the view that Gray is a committed and candid poet whose "Elegy" is a full-fledged stream of fellow feelings, natural, and humanitarian notes. Now it may be said that his "Elegy" enjoys higher reputation, not because of his literary art but because of a deep melancholy and broad humanity that runs throughout it. It begins as a common elegy on the fate of mankind but ends on a personal note. We also feel that this world-famous poem is a fine flower in the garden of poetry. Its fragrance of humanism has permeated the entire world. Who can resist reading it? Why can't one help reading the famous line, "Full many a gem of purest ray serene"?

In "The Progress of Poesy," we find a mixture of melancholy and morality which is one of the characteristics of humanism. What type of poetry is necessary for society? What are the values of poetry? These two questions are not so important as to know what type of man Gray is or how he has poured out human value in "The Progress of Poesy." What are the various components of humanism? What are the sources of humanism? How can we fulfill our needs regarding humanism? The answer of these questions can easily be marked by evaluating or assessing poetry mentioned or defined by Gray in "The Progress of poesy."

Having read "The Progress of Poesy," we feel that Gray is neither a writer nor an artist, nor a man but an institution that gives inspiration to thousands and thousands of people. If some criticize or find faults with Gray and his most popular Pindaric ode, it is merely because the tree laden with ripe fruits bears the strike of stones thrown by people. If he has used allusions or references of gods and goddesses, it is not because he wants to worship or eulogize them but it is only because he wants to be blessed with pious sights with which he may visualize only good things, not evils in human beings. Through them, he wants to send the message of humanity.

In Gray's "The Bard," it is realized that attitude is a little things that makes an oceanic difference. The perusal of "The Bard" makes it clear that a drop of ink may make a million think. In "The Bard," Thomas Gray returns to the middle Ages, and deals with a Welsh legend. It is not confined to the middle ages regarding the message of humanism. Though it has been written in the matter describing Welsh legend, yet its message of humanism is in the vogue. The fear of devastation and the hopes of redemption are almost expressed in the Pindaric ode, "The Bard." It is "The Bard" that proves to be most agonizing and tragic piece of literature based on human values.

It comprises some other new virtues which inspire us to know how to behave in society and how to prefer human beings to gods and goddesses. He requires honesty, civility, brethernhood, fidelity, subjectivity, love, rapport, sympathy, constancy, sociability, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, patience, discipline, decorum, and humanity through "The Bard." In the beginning of this Ode, Gray sees not a single virtue out of the aforesaid virtues which adores and constitutes a high humanistic society. At the end of Pindaric ode "The Bard," Gray hails constancy of love and severity of moral truth as embellishments of society.

Not only human happiness has been emphasized by Gray in the Ode but also animals or insect happiness makes the readers cheerful while reading the Ode. All round cheerfulness or happiness, as the title of the Ode implies, is found abundantly. Cuckoo and nightingale begin to sign and pour out their effortless and spontaneous music. This is also the message of humanism. At one time Gray is seen melancholic; and another time he is happy. These

two opposite states of position imply the same destination that is humanism. If he describes or depicts prosperity of nature and human beings, it is only because he wants to see them happy. If he muses on adversity or poverty that causes to suffer, it is merely because he wants them to get rid of social injustice.

Looking at the above characteristics or ingredients of Gray's poetry, we can evidently and confidently reassert that Gray's poetry is inundated or flooded with humanism. Gray's poetry, sometimes or somewhere, gurgles with humanism, and at other times or at other place, flows majestically with the strong din or commotion of humanism. His name is engraved in our hearts, not because of erudition but because of humanism as reflected in his poetry.