



How Much Money Does a Man Require?: A Study of the Poems on Money by D. H. Lawrence and Philip Larkin

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Abstract

Many prominent poets so far have written poems on money including D H Lawrence and Philip Larkin. The present paper is the result of the study of the poems of D H Lawrence and Philip Larkin on money. The paper attempts to analyze and critically appreciate the poems to found out similarities and differences in them in terms of the attitude to and opinion of money of the poets. One of the major similarities is both the poets talk about the ill effects of money on money and the resulting sorrow and suffering. According to them there are so many things in the life other than money that go in making life meaningful and blissful. The poems give us insights into the true meaning of human life as well as how far money is necessary to make it meaningful. In short, money should be treated as a means, but certainly not as an end of life.

Keywords: Money, madness, human life, society, poor.

Analysis of D H Lawrence's *Money Madness*: David Herbert Lawrence (1885 – 1930) popularly known as D H Lawrence was a leading and versatile English writer of the twentieth century who wrote novels, short stories, poems, plays, essays, travel books, and letters. Though mainly known for his novels, he has also written some remarkable poems and *Money Madness*, a poem of present study is one of them. As the title suggests, the poem is a criticism of the money madness of the contemporary society, nay such society of any period.

Aristotle said that man is a social animal, which necessitates his living by social norms. In other words, humans have to follow the norms of the society he lives in or else he is thrown out of the system that makes his life unbearable. Therefore, most of the common people follow the social norms of the time. The society of D H Lawrence's time gave excessive importance to money; it was mad after money. He clearly states it in the beginning lines of the poem *Money Madness*:

Money is our madness, our vast collective madness.
And of course, if the multitude is mad
the individual carries his own grain of insanity around with him.
I doubt if any man living hands out a pound note without pang;
and a real tremor, if he hands out a ten-pound note.

Who forms the social norms? The answer is the majority. 'Multitude' i.e. masses, who are mad after money, form this social norm; hence there is collective money madness. In a society where majority of the people are mad after money no individual, however sane he/she may be, can remain unaffected by this collective mentality; therefore, 'the individual carries his own grain of insanity around with him' may be for the fear of being thrown out of the system. Obviously, a member of such society that is obsessed with money feels pang when he 'hands out a pound note'. When he feels pang when he has to give away a small amount of money, how can he hand out 'a ten-pound note' without 'a real tremor'? Money ruins us. It keeps us under constant fear. Those who have money are afraid of losing it, and those who do not have it keep chasing it. In other words, it keeps both the haves as well as the have-nots tense eternally; it 'has a fearful cruel power among men'. However, to put the fact precisely the man is not afraid of money, but fellow money-minded people who value everything on the basis of money. That is what is stated by the poet in the following lines:

But it is not money we are so terrified of,
it is the collective money-madness of mankind.
For mankind says with one voice: How much is he worth?
Has he no money? Then let him eat dirt, and go cold. –

The poet intends to say through these lines that the whole humankind is crazy after money; worse it measures the worth of everything on the basis of money. It values people who have money, who are affluent, but treat poor people as dirt, it makes them 'eat dirt, and go cold'. It means if a person has no money, he is humiliated at every nook and cranny and at all times. The figures of speech repetition and refrain are used in the following lines by the poet to drive this fact home emphatically:

And if I have no money, they will give me a little bread,
So I do not die,
but they will make me eat dirt with it.
I shall have to eat dirt, I shall have to eat dirt
if I have no money
It is that I am frightened of.
And that fear can become a delirium.
It is fear of my money-mad fellow-men.

Besides the aforementioned figures of speech, the last line drives home the seriousness of the miserable, helpless condition of the poor in this world wherein majority of the people are 'money-mad'. We experience it literally every day; people respect the rich and humiliate the poor. This is the way of the world. The poet indirectly criticizes this way of the world, this 'collective money-madness of mankind'. Money in itself is not bad, but the mentality of 'money-mad fellow-men'. They value everything on the basis of money or lack of it, thereby making the life of the poor a hell which the poet finds 'all wrong'. According to him, no person should suffer because of not having enough money. Instead, it should be the duty of the government to provide its every citizen with the basic necessities of life. The poet says:

Bread should be free,
shelter should be free,
fire should be free
to all and anybody, all and anybody, all over the world.
We must regain our sanity about money
before we start killing one another about it.
It's one thing or the other.

According to the poet once our basic necessities are fulfilled, we will stop running after money madly, we will regain our sanity and begin devoting our time and energy to really valuable

things of life which in turn will fill our life with bliss and make it meaningful. It is high time we strived to bring it into reality before we begin to kill each other for money.

Analysis of Philip Larkin's *Money*: The poem *Money* is written by Philip Arthur Larkin (1922-1985). He was named after the famous Renaissance poet Philip Sidney by his parents with the expectation that their son should become a poet like the him which proved to be true as Philip went on to become a distinguished poet. Besides he was friends with the contemporary poets Kingsley Amish, John Wain, and Alan Ross. The social and political atmosphere of Oxford University where he studied helped inculcate in him a pragmatic approach to life and literature. The theme of the poem is the relationship between money and happiness. Money is personified in the opening lines of the poem. The poet personifying money intends to convey to the readers that money speaks and its language is universal. Many people have talked about it. According to Larry Ryan 'money speaks loud in language everyone understands'. In the beginning lines of the poem money, like a human, reproaches the narrator for not making use of it and letting it lie 'wastefully'. It urges the narrator to make use of it and buy him the things that he lacks: 'goods and sex'. About money Kent Nerburn says:

Money is like any other language through which people communicate. People who speak the same language tend to find each other. If you are one whose money speaks of protection and hoarding, you will find yourself involved with others whose money speaks the same language. You will be staring at each other with hooded eyes and closed fists and suspicion will be your common value. If your money speaks of sharing, you will find yourself among people who want their money to speak the language of sharing, and your world will be filled with possibility.

Possibility Going by what Nerburn says, the narrator of the poem does not seem to be much interested in money which is why his money 'reproaches' him for letting it lie 'wastefully'. Money asks the narrator to use it and buy himself 'goods and sex' he had never had 'by writing a few cheques'. It means money can buy you anything. It also means money objectifies everything including sex, the most intimate of human relations which is seen by the association of it with goods by the poet. The poet may intend to suggest that money can buy goods, but not good

things as it can buy you sex, but not love. This objectification of human, his intimate relations, love the noblest of the feeling is reiterated in the second stanza when the poet says:

So I look at others, what they do with theirs:
They certainly don't keep it upstairs.
By now they've a second house and car and wife:
Clearly money has something to do with life

Here the poet equates wife with a house i.e. an object; it implies the objectification of wife. Here the poet plays with the words; it seems that the poet expects to consider that the enumerator *second* qualifies all the nouns that succeed it including *wife* suggesting that you can buy wife, nay any number of wife with your money like you buy any number of house or car with it. The last line of the second stanza is important as the poet through this line intends to convey that for the people like the ones mentioned in these lines that life is money and the vice versa. Such people cannot go beyond money for they think that everything and anything can be bought with money. They are materialistic people who have not understood what life really is. They are unaware of the spiritual aspect of life. They live and die on material plane. They never do soul searching. The meaning of life found out by ancient Indian sages is out of their reach. Therefore, they cannot live meaningful life. Seneca's quote: 'Money has never yet made anyone rich' is appropriate in this context. However, the fact is that most of the people, including the so called religious ones, belong to this category, and live and die like animals; who fail to lift themselves above beasts. Why are most of the people of this type? It is because the society they live in respects them. They are the people who fit in the social norms of the successful person, and hence given importance and respect by others. It is because of this the man runs after money throughout his life. That is what is stated by the poet in the third stanza:

—In fact, they've a lot in common, if you enquire:
You can't put off being young until you retire,
And however you bank your screw, the money you save
Won't in the end buy you more than a shave.

Here the poet says that all the money minded people are alike. They 'can't put off being young' until they retire to amass money just to realize in their old age that it cannot buy them 'more than a shave'. It money's they waste their life running after money for it is an unquenchable thirst; this Hindu proverb beautifully states this eternal truth: 'To try to extinguish the drive for riches

with money is like trying to quench a fire by pouring butterfat over it'. Here one cannot help remember Leo Tolstoy's well known short story 'How Much Land Does a Man Require?'

The poet talks about the evil effects of money on humankind in the last stanza. It reads:

I listen to money singing. It's like looking down
From long french windows at a provincial town,
The slums, the canal, the churches ornate and mad
In the evening sun. It is intensely sad.

In the stanza, the poet says that he listens to 'money singing' which is like looking down from 'long French windows at a provincial town, the slums, the canal, the churches ornate and mad'. Through these lines the poet talks about the unequal distribution of money i.e. wealth and the resulting sorrow and suffering. The churches are 'ornate and mad', which are contrasted with 'the slums' by the poet. A very small chunk of the society which is affluent has all the luxuries of the world, while the major chunk of the society languishes in the slums. The poet in these lines also criticizes churches which too have become materialistic; therefore, he describes them as 'ornate and mad'. The poet hints at the fact that the so called religious people related to churches behave exactly opposite of what they preach in the churches. Instead of helping the poor out of their money, they spend it on making the church ornate. Therefore, the poet describes them as 'mad'.

Conclusion: Thus both the poems are scathing indictments of the respective contemporary consumerist societies. They criticize the people who are crazy after money and value everything on the basis of money. Such people are criticized in both the poems for objectifying everything, including human relations. The poems are plea to such people for giving significance to fellow humans rather than money for its human relations which will enrich their lives, and not the craze for money. The present pandemic of Covid 19 vouches for the eternity and universality of the message given in both the poems as it too has brought home the message that human life is more important than money.



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