

Elements of Modernity in the Poetry's Of Philip Larkin- A Critical Study

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Abstract

The paper aims at studying elements of modernity in the poetry's of Philip Larkin. Larkin grew to manhood in the era of Modernity. His poetic job also, which begins under modernist control, matures towards postmodern directions. Thus, Larkin's poetry, belonging mainly to the period of shift from Modernism to Postmodernism, reflects, from time to time, modern as well as postmodern tendencies. Philip Arthur Larkin was an poet and novelist. His contribution to The Daily Telegraph as its jazz critic from 1961 to 1971, articles gathered together in All What Jazz: A Record Diary 1961-71 (1985) and he edited The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse (1973). He was the heir of many honors, including the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. He was offered, but deny, the position of poet laureate in 1984, following the death of John Betjeman.

Key words: Modernity, Era of modernity, Modernism, Post modernism,

Introduction

Modernity:

The state or quality of being modern.

Something modern.

The term Modernity was coined by Charles Baudelaire in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life" 1864, to explore the life style of urban metropolis, and the responsibility capture that experience. Generally, the meaning of modernity is associated with the sweeping changes that took place in the society and particularly in the field of literature, between the late 1950's and the beginning of Second World War.

However, no clear elaboration by date, and although the term 'postmodernism' is increasingly use to describe changes since the Second World War, there are some people who argue that modernity persist, and others who see its demise as having occurred much earlier. When modernity explained in terms of history, it said that the world first

experienced renaissance, enlightenment, modernity and post modernity.

In a broader way, modernity is associated with the following: Industrialization and urbanization, development, democracy, capitalism, superiority of power, free market, optimism, rationality, the idea that gaining knowledge of the truth self was the only foundation for all other knowledge, the search of absolute knowledge in science, technology, society and politics. Modern literature is characterized chiefly by a rejection of 19th-century traditions and of their consensus between author and reader. Specifically, Modernists deliberately tried to break away from the conventions of the Victorian era. This separation from 19th century literary and artistic principles is a major part of a broader goal.

Modernity associated with the culture and intellectual movements. Modernity is closely related to the ethos philosophy, aesthetic modernism, Marxism, Existentialism, modern art and formal establishment of social science, this is an age of change and progress, everything is changing. Because of scientific and technological advancement, there is a remarkable change in the pattern of life in general. People are conscious of living in a world of rapid change. The

modern age is also an age of science and technological progress. Adventure and romance and even the peaceful things seem ruin. Being modern meant hurrying through life. The modern world is marked by its unprecedented dynamism, its dismissal or marginalizing of tradition, and by its global consequences, time seemed to speed up and space open up. Modernity's forward - looking thrust relates strongly to belief in progress and the power of human reason to produce freedom.

Modernists wished to distinguish themselves from virtually the entire history of art and literature. Many Modernist writers felt that every story that could possibly told, in one way or another, been told already. Therefore, in order to create something new, they often had to try using new forms of writing. The period thus produced many experiments. Perhaps best known for such experimentation are few fiction writers named James Joyce and Virginia Woolf

His poems are marked by what Andrew Motion calls a very English, glum accuracy about emotions, places, and relationships, and what Donald Davie described as lowered sights and diminished expectations. Eric Homberger called him "the saddest heart in the post-war supermarket"—larkin himself said that

deprivation for him was what daffodils were for Wordsworth. Larkin is influenced by W.H. Auden, W. B. Yeats, and Thomas Hardy. His poems are highly structured but flexible verse forms. Keith Tuma writes that there is more to Larkin's work than its reputation for dour pessimism suggestions. Larkin's poetic craftsmanship has been regarded by several critics as exemplary, and has been admired even by those who find his emotional range to be too narrow. His use of plain language shows his belief in the importance of tradition, a faith in the people who maintained a contact with the land, and a suspicion of modern society, urban development, and technological advances. Indeed, he stands as the chief example among his contemporaries of the line of anti-modernist poetry represented by Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling, for both of whom he had great admiration.

Philip Larkin is a person who embarrassed with the traditional concept, and against to modernity. He portrayed the negative impact of modernity through his poem and all of his poems deal with the life of human between birth and death. Larkin's poetry encapsulates the emotional challenges modernity poses to individual. Larkin's own poetry and sociological theory is good and better to understand modernity and how it shaped us. In *The*

Less Deceived, The Whitsun Weddings and *High Windows*, through an extraordinary variety of poetic structure the sub-themes of unhappiness. The following poem MrBleaney, Church Going, Going Going is all about the modern society which showcases the conflicts within the individuals and society.

MrBleaney This poem expresses the thoughts of Larkin as he depicts the rented room of 'MrBleaney'. In exposing the lonely and monotonous life of this figure, Larkin is unable to criticize as he sees reflection of his own life. The poem addresses the key themes of loneliness and the shallowness of human life from the outset due to modernity. The name 'MrBleaney' as the title itself evokes the emotion of insipidness and very monotonous with no strong syllables. Similar to the nature of the room Larkin describes, the name has little stimulation. This monotony is reinforced in the concept of him renting a 'room' as this has little status in comparison of being an 'owner'. The theme of the shallowness of existence is present from the clinical nature in which the landlord refers to his death as 'they moved him'. The use of indifferent language to refer to his death shows the little care for the ending of his life.

“Behind the door, no room
for books or

Bags-.” (MrBleaney 11)

Modernity has both negative as well as positive connotations within the society. Through this line poet want to explore the actual position of a person on who is living in the rented room, people have more neediness at present so they never feel satisfied with what they have so far. But her Old man MrBleaney still have no neediness of big bungalow but he is struggling for basic needs where he can have sufficient place to keep his baggage and luggage. The lack of pride MrBleaney felt for the room is shown in the deficiency of home comforts. The upright chair and no hook behind the door symbolizes the pragmatic nature of MrBleaney's life, he didn't make an impression on the room. The use of sixty watt bulb reinforces the idea of an eerie glow, evocative of the theme of loneliness. The description of the flowered curtains as 'thin and frayed' coupled with the fusty bed evokes the idea of decay and the inconsequentiality of his existence. The use of one hired box to describe the room evokes the image of a coffin. Modernist poet concerned with the reality of everyday life and the imminent presence of death.

In *Mr. Bleaney*, Larkin delivers the severity of a life hardly lived. The language is drab, similar to the fraying curtains in the deceased Mr. Bleaney's room. It is evident that Bleaney led a life of loneliness, cyclically humdrum, and eventually died in his solitude. The poem is written through the eyes of Bleaney's landlord who, after the death of his tenant, takes Bleaney's place in a similar life of loneliness and monotony. Larkin foreshadows similar demise for the landlord to that of Bleaney, whose very name sounds watery and forgettable. Mr. Bleaney is a commentary on just how easy it is to fall into the trap of monotony. We get a very detailed portrait of Mr. Bleaney his job, routine, and lack of interests are detailed; however, even after the specifics, his life remains entirely forgettable. The landlord literally replaces Bleaney and shows that loneliness and disinterest similar to quicksand are capable of slowly suffocating those who do not expect them. Larkin's poem is quite stirring and shows his adept use of rhymes and language. His final lines reiterate his intention with the work.

“That how we live
measures our own nature,

And at his age having no
more to show

Than one hired box should
make him pretty sure

He warranted no better, I
don't know.”(MrBleaney
11)

Evidently, it does not matter that whether Larkin's readers truly understand the inner workings of Bleaney. His mind may have been great and he may have been an admirable man; however, he was judged on how he lived, what he actually accomplished, or in Bleaney's case, failed to accomplish. Good intentions equate to emptiness, similar to what Bleaney had to show at the end of his life. All over the poem Larkin tries to explore the defects of modernity, and how people are unsatisfied with their lifestyle. In general longingness of an individual and expectation of better life is the whole societies concern towards society, somehow everyone is running their life by the means of adjustment but in real everyone is frustrated with their day to day materialistic life.

In *Church Going* (1954), clearly reveals the social context of the time when it was written. It was a time of general decline in the attendance in churches

which had begun to take place in 1945.

This poem expresses the view that faith and belief in religion must die but that the spirit of tradition represented by the English Church cannot come to an end. Here the speaker of the poem sneaks into a church after making sure it's empty. He lets the door thud shut behind him and glances around at all the fancy decorations, showing his ignorance of (or indifference to) how sacred all this stuff is supposed to be. After a short pause, he walks up to the altar and reads a few lines from the notes that are sitting on a lectern. After this, he walks back out of the church and slides an Irish sixpence into the collection box, which is basically like donating an old shirt button. The speaker thinks that the place wasn't worth stopping to check out. But he also admits that he did stop, and that this isn't the first time he's done so. He can't help but wonder what he's looking for when he keeps coming back to this place, and also asks himself about what will happen to churches when there are no more believers left in the world.

“And let the rest rent-free to
rain and sheep.

Shall we avoid them as
unlucky places?.”(Church
Going 15)

He wonders if they'll make museums out of the churches or if they'll just leave the buildings' doors open so that sheep can hang out inside them. Nearing the end of the poem, the speaker asks what will happen to the world when religion is gone altogether. May be we will open all church doors and let the nature have its way. Finally here speaker wonders if we will avoid churches as unlucky places, meaning is that even if we were no longer religious, we might still be superstitious. Then he wonders what the very last religious person will be like. The title of the poem itself denotes the meaning of 'departure' means it's simply all about what is going actually at present scenario.

“Or, after dark, will
dubious women come

To make their children
touch a particular stone;

Pick simples for cancer; or
on some

Advised night see walking
a dead one?.”(Church
Going 15)

In doubtful nature women brings their children to touch a certain part of the church just for good luck. Speaker wonders that people might come and pick

herbs growing out of the church in order to heal someone. Treating the church in this way it will decay of all specific morals and meanings the church once stood for. Either church seems to be no better than haunted home in future. It means that simply religion giving the way to superstition.

Will they be an obsessive compulsive, who just can't stop wanting to smell incense? Or will they be more like the speaker, someone who's bored and ignorant about the church, and just passing by without knowing what they're looking for? Finally, the speaker just comes out and admits that he's pleased by the church because it's a serious place for serious questions. Humanity, he concludes, will always have a hunger to ask those big questions like 'Why are we here?' and 'Where do we go when we die?' And for this reason, the kind of urge that created religion in the first place will never go away, even if organized churches do. Sorry, atheists. If you were looking for a poem that just trashes religion and calls spiritual people stupid, you'll have to look someplace else. The poem refers both to the erosion of the Church as an institution and to the perpetuation of some kind of ritual observance. In other words, the poet here explores different perceptions of the

same event (the event being the decline of attendance in the churches).

In *Going Going* is another nice poem of Larkin. Here, the title is the key to the whole poem. In Larkin's view, the landscape of England as a green and pleasant is going away. It is being replaced by shoddy development. Thus, like William Wordsworth, the gradual loss of natural beauty of the country moves the speaker to pessimism from optimism. From the beginning of the poem, Philip Larkin has a disillusioned air about the future of England. He thinks that it will last his time. There is a comfortable public belief that traditional England will not be overwhelmed by development. There will always be an England. He knows that there will be alarms, but thinks them false. Despite that, Larkin already signals danger in the words:

“There would always be
fields and farms,

Where the village louts
could climb

Such trees as were not cut
down ;”(*Going Going* 25).

In the poem bears the stamp of city life because it is seen in cities and towns not in the country. It also indicates that the

beautiful landscape is being replaced with the modern buildings and cafes where a crown of people will spend their time.

“Their kids are screaming
for more –

More houses, more parking
allowed,”(*Going Going* 25)

In addition, the new generation demands more and more houses, caravans sites, pay and so on. Afterwards, the speaker of the poem frustrated and shocked, mourns for the loss of the natural beauty in England in the similar way Wordsworth mourns for the loss of natural beauty in ‘*Intimation of Immortality*’.

“For the first time I feel
somehow

That it isn't going to
last,”(*Going Going* 26)

Later on, the speaker of the poem feels almost alarmed at the thought that after his demise everything will be bricked and there will be a sign of development everywhere because with the passage of time, progress is a must by the dishonest people in society. And such development implies the destruction of the beauty of the county by cutting down trees and by building industries and mills or cafes there.

He is giving awareness to the people that what are all the things, we are going to lose. Especially here, the speaker names the valuable things that will be lost soon in England as:

“The shadows, the
meadows, the lanes,

The guildhalls, the carved
choirs.”(Going Going 28)

Towards the end of the poem, the narrator predicts the future of England that there will be time when the natural beauty of the country will vanish with so called development in England. As a result, England losing her past beauty will soon be bleak. In summing up the elaborate discussion above, it can be said that once the natural beauty of England was charming that it influenced many a poet along with Wordsworth and John Keats to compose poetry and also gave peace to people but now people have brought a radical change in nature doing cruel things to it. Such loss of natural beauty has left Philip Larkin pessimistic in true sense.

Therefore, Larkin's response to life and experience is characterized by freshness and by poetic integrity. Larkin himself emphasized the way in which his poems derived their basic impulse from his

raw feelings about ordinary life, and from what he called 'unsorted experience'. He writes honestly and directly about whatever happens to arouse and hold his interest. Larkin certainly does not approve of the soulless modernity of the kind of atomistic society which is governed by a commercial ethic.

It is in keeping with this modernistic notion of progress that Larkin sardonically describes Britain as the first slum of Europe in his poem *Going Going*. And it is in keeping with this attitude of his that in poems like *Here*, *In Mr. Bleaney*, he shows his great compassion for people whose search for happiness in the modern world seems doomed to failure in the atmosphere of unashamed and growing materialism. Larkin's Conservatism Larkin is a conservative in the profoundest sense of the word. His disgust with urbanization, cheap stores, and foul-smelling roads all these add up to a tradition of profound conservatism. He shows his scorn for the commercialism and collectivism which are responsible for the moral, social, and aesthetic breakdown. Finally this paper critically analyzed how Larkin foreshadows his view of modernity with negative connotations. Due to modernity lots of changes happen in the society which has both positive as well as

negative results so as per the society's welfare concern, they should make use of positive things rather than worrying for negative. Else people will lead isolated life for sure, may have all luxurious things but they feel lack of satisfaction, happiness. In the ultimate analysis the continuing effect of the Industrial Revolution right from the previous era [the Victorian Age] transforming the Agrarian economy into an Industrial one. The growing distinction between the rich and the poor, between the exploiters and the exploited led to a sense of hopeless urbanization. Describe the life of people in industrial cities of England.

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"Mr Bleaney" was written in May 1955 and "Counting" is belived, according to Antony

Thwaite, to be written in September the same year. Though he puts 'after September' in his dating of his poem in his edition of collected poems, it is accurate because of the nearness of the themes of the poems.

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