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## Empirical Mode in Philip Larkin's Poetry

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Philip Larkin is one of the Movement poets, who believed that every poem must be its own freshly created universe. If each poem is a universe by itself, then it does not rely on any tradition for enhancing its meaning. Larkin opposed to making allusions, obscurities and irrationalities in poems. He emphasizes the superiority of content over technique. The result is that his poems are realistic pictures of ordinary life. The poetry of the Movement was reactionary against the war literature and against the poets as Dylan Thomas whom, Robert Conquest accused of destroying the taste of the poetry and insisting on the debilitating theory that "poetry must be metaphorical."<sup>(1)</sup> Also Conquest, in his articles summarized the qualities of the poetry of the Movement

In one sense, indeed, the standpoint is not new, but merely the restoration of a sound and fruitful attitude to poetry, of principle, that poetry is written by and the whole, man, intellect, emotion, senses and all ...It is free from both mystical and logical compulsions, and like modern philosophy is empirical in its attitude to all that comes."<sup>(2)</sup>

Philip Larkin gained the celebration and admiration of Robert Conquest, who considered him an incarnation of all the principles of the Movement poetry. His early poems reveal the influence of his predecessors W.B. Yeats, W. H. Auden, and Thomas Hardy. He began writing after the Second World War, in the midst of disillusionment and uncertainty, but he advocated the simple and clear notions and rejected all the artificialities of the modern poetry. Clarity and elegance are two virtues of Larkin's poems. He observes the details with the interest of empirical views. He used empirical mode as a tool of his poetry. Empiricism is the philosophy that all ideas are derived from sense experience, observations and experiments. In the most of his poems, the poetic person is a careful observer of the behavior of himself and others. This observer is a detached person who is usually moved by deep sensitivity of reality. This paper attempts to highlight the aspect of empirical mode which is considered a prominent feature of the Philip Larkin's selected poems from *The Less Deceived* and *The Whitsun Weddings*.

Larkin had an empirical outlook on life and this outlook was a result of sense of alienation from society. The speaker in his poems seem alienated from their surroundings and cut off from the people. It is noteworthy that, in the great majority of these poems, the speaker is Larkin himself in these poems. It is this sense of alienation which leads the speakers to distance themselves from their surrounding and institutions around them. In the best poems, this distance

allowed the poet to observe the world in perspective and at the same time reminding the poet that he too is a figure of little importance.

This theme of a detached observer is repeated in Larkin's poetry. It may provide an objective stand to the reporter who transmits what he sees in an eloquent manner. Sometimes, he is present in the situation he describes, but he presents himself as a fastidious observer of the human scene, as a disinterested outsider, looking down metaphorically and literary at the others. This is perfectly presented in Mr. Bleaney, the poem, like many others written by Larkin, in which the character of a man called Bleaney has been portrayed. The person, whose name is Bleaney, is depicted as a poor fellow without any belongings and without any house of his own. He was living in a boarding house, which was inadequately furnished. His habits are specified by the speaker in the poem. Bleaney used to prepare sauce to gravy; he used to spend his summer holidays with his relatives in Frinton and Christmas with his sister in Stoke. But the speaker in the poem does not know whether Bleaney was aware of the fact that a man's nature and character could be judged by his mode of living and his habits. Bleaney seems to have been a somewhat eccentric kind of old man who had no money and who had no literary or artistic tastes either. He was evidently working in some factory or workshop and he also used to look after his landlady's garden.

The persistent aims of Larkin's poetry is to give hard blow to men those have bad habits of expectancy. Man's incurable optimism seems to him both strange and frustrating. The experiences of disillusionment do little to stop him from dreaming of a rosy future—"something is always approaching". However, what reality has to offer is something quite different frustration, suffering, bitterness, death. The poem Next, Please belongs to the same category. Life is depicted as a series of promises and hopes which are never fulfilled. Larkin here speaks of promises and hopes in terms of ships which are expected to arrive at the port but which never arrive. There is only one ship, a black sailed and unfamiliar one, which is searching us. This ship is obviously death. Here too, man has been depicted as a victim whom death prays consistently and who cannot escape from it.

Always too eager for the future, we  
Pick up bad habits of expectancy.  
Something is always approaching; every day

The poet observed the theme of the poem is the disillusionment that we experience as a result of the disappointment of all our hopes and expectations. We keep hoping for something good to happen to us but our hope is dashed to the ground every time. Only one expectation is always fulfilled in human life and that is the expectation of death. Here poet persona observes man's nature of hopefulness with critical tone that he is always disappointed by hope and true reality is that death, it is only reality of life. He used symbol of ship as a death coming near to the port of life. His observation is realistic and serious towards life of human being.

Days express the view that days are the important part of our lives, which we can lead active, vigorous and happy lives. If there were no days, we would then merely wait for death which is inevitable. A pessimistic mood characterized in this poem, which actually describes the values of days. The poem is certainly about living but an awareness of death is also present here. Poem Day's which begins happy note comes to the sad conclusion that a little thinking reminds us of the priest and the doctor, thus suggesting that we are subject to disease and death. Larkin admits this himself when, in an interview with *The Observer* (1979), he remarked that "it is unhappiness that provokes a poem....it's very difficult to write about being happy—very easy to write about being miserable."<sup>(3)</sup> Thus even a cheerful poem has a sad ending in Larkin's hands. Here, too man is made to realize his own futility in the face of the realities of life.

*Afternoons* is about the inevitability of change and the passing of youth. It reflects the life style of a young woman with husband and family. Larkin presents the idea of the dull, repetitive and empty life of typical house wife. Larkin examines the lives of people, analyzing the existence of a mob of young mothers he observed at the local recreation ground. Larkin's poem is a more eternal and universal contemplation on the melancholy of all our lives. He concludes that the woman's beauty has thickened and that something is pushing them to the side of their lives. Larkin extends this vision of the mother supervising their children at play ground. He imagines the woman's husbands in skilled trades and in addition to other details of their ordinary life, such as their weddings, photo-album near the television at home.

Their beauty has thickened.  
 Something is pushing them  
 To the side of their own lives.

The poem *Afternoons*, which gave an impression of the poet being death obsessed. According to Stephen Regain expresses the view that "this poem, like several others, records the changing social and cultural climate of the late 1950s and early 1960s in an extraordinary way."<sup>(4)</sup>

The poem *Deception* about a rape has based upon actual incident which took place in 19<sup>th</sup> century and which had been rerecorded by writer called Mr. Mayhew in his book *Lodon Labour and the Lodon Poor*. Larkin describes himself as an alienated observer who chooses to observe what happens to life. Poet says that he can imagine the bitter and sharp pain which the woman experienced when she was raped. He then describes a few details of daily life in London, such as noise of wheels in the street. In this noise, woman forgets her memory of the outrage, which the rapist had committed on her. She still remembers the pangs of grief which she experienced throughout the day following the night of the rape. He thinks that any attempt to console the irritated woman would be an act of insolence.

Even so distant, I can taste the grief,  
 Bitter and sharp with stalks, he made you gulp.

The poet says that it was not only woman but also the rapist who had been the victim of deception. She was deceived because she was first drugged by the rapist and he was also deceived by his feeling. There is very objective reality presented at the closing lines of this poem. Generally our sympathies are always with the woman who has been raped because a man has no right to use force against the woman who satisfy his lust for her and no justification at all in using force. But, in the closing lines of the poem, the author has clearly tried to extenuate that rapist guilt by suggesting that perhaps the rapist himself felt more deceived than woman had been deceived by first being drugged and then sexually assaulted. Larkin first explains the woman's misery and then proceeds to after to use the rapist point of view. "I see a girl dragged by the wrists." Larkin here shows compassion towards woman's suffering but ends in a problematic matter because he shows a great deal of sympathy for the man who had sexually assaulted her. However, the poet dramatizes the woman's agony in the light of the rapist's dissatisfaction once the sexual act has done.

I conclude this paper with the view of the eminent critic Andrew Motion who says that "Larkin's best and most characteristic poetry might be regarded as a dialectical between the empirical mode of the Thomas Hardy and the symbolist mode of W.B. Yeats, the language of sadness and isolation repeatedly competing with the language of aspiration and transcendence."<sup>(5)</sup> Man is depicted in these poems either as a victim of social condition and the environment around him without being able to find any comfort and consolation in anything. Larkin did not depict man as a creative capable of deriving any comfort from his faith in God or his belief in immortality.

In Philip Larkin's poetry, we come across the recurring themes; the gap between the human hopes and reality, the constant awareness of old age and death, the disastrous effects of time, the insubstantiality of love, the boredom of modern mechanical life and the emptiness of religious beliefs. Larkin, as a representative of the Movement poets, aimed at depicting the realities of life. Larkin was haunted by the nature of human identity and his divided self and separateness. He explores this major issue in painful imagery. Though his poetry is basically poetry of detachment, he is equally conscious of being observed as he himself observes.

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