



## The Justified Blackness in Larkin`s Selected Poems

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By

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### Abstract

Larkin is a British poet whose poetry is characterized with deep morbidity. His environment and familial effect participates in increasing his gloomy views. His black looks are aroused effectively in front of certain issues like death, aging and frailty that Larkin fails to confront or comprehend in life as well as poetry. These subjects are frequent themes in his poetry. Thus; The uniqueness of his blackness is his justification to his black outlook that are aroused in front of specific subjects. Exploring his poems can reveal the sources and the seeds of his depression that Larkin`s pen fails to surpass. These sources have the power to stain even affirmative poems with pessimism.

Key Words: Larkin, blackness, pessimism, death, old age, fate.

### الملخص

امتازت اشعار لاركن بسوداويه اخترقت اغلب قصائده ولكن ما يثير الاهتمام أن تلك النظرة السوداوية لم تكن شامله لكل قصائده فرغم اختياره كأكثر شاعر حزنا في الأدب الانكليزي لكن هذا لم يمنع ان يتسلل التفاؤل لبعض

قصائده. البحث حاول تقديم رؤية جديدة للسوداوية في إشعاره من خلال اعتبار



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التي

كأبته مبرره أي انها تثار إمام جمله من الأمور مثل التقدم في العمر والموت. البحث تابع تلك العوامل

أدت إلى خلق الرؤية السوداوية في اشعاره وتتبع وقع تأثيره عليه

### Introduction

Larkin`s poems are characterized with pessimism whose principal characteristics are hopelessness and inflexibility. His blackness is unique since it does not sweep all his poems; some of his poems are affirmative and hopeful. Larkin`s pessimism is aroused sorely in front of specific sources. His blackness can be depicted here as justified blackness. His poems are injected with black outlooks concerning life. If these sources are present, blackness can creep even to his positive poems to stain the words with either explicit or implicit morbidity. The uniqueness of this blackness that distinguishes him from others is his justification to his black outlook, he fails to confront certain issues in human life like aging, death and human frailty. Exploring these points in his poems can reveal the sources of depression that Larkin`s pen fails to surpass. This research will probe his pessimism and the causes that arouse it in some of his poems.

### Larkin`s Life

Philip Larkin (1922-1985) is a popular British poet who engraves his name on English literature as the most pessimistic voice. In spite of being not prolific, he establishes a wide popularity. His morbid non-sentimental manner creates his unique stamp on English poetry. Many grounds participate in sharpening his gloomy views above them is being from the generation that witnesses the eruption of the two world wars. He is the fruit of series of global disasters which distort not only human bodies but also spirits. In amid of destruction, Larkin



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does not find any solace in religion (Day 74). He goes further to think that the world goes without God (Abrahams 182).

The poet selects the naked realism to be his means in writing to gain the accuracy of the "creative photography" (Kuby 154). He does not at any cost beautify the reality and he has a unique capacity to reflect reality as well as beauty. He mixes beauty with reality in the favor of the latter by stating that "the job of a poem is to make the beautiful seems true and the true beautiful," (Whalem 54). His birth and bringing up in a family of violent father increases his tendency toward morbidity to force his pen to focus on the predicaments of life. His bleak attitudes qualify him to be "the saddest heart in the post-war supermarket" (Baily 93). The seeds of his pessimism are: death, old age and decline of faith that can be analyzed through his poems.

### Death

The threshold of his pessimism can be traced in his "Going" which is the most pessimistic poem. In this poem, man emerges as trivial and insignificant object in this big universe. Man loses his will and decision in such scheming universe and he is too weak to stand against the sweeping of death which is the vital source of pessimism in Larkin`s poems. (Linda & Bryn 80). The evening which stands for death in this poem sweeps fields and farms without caring for human beings. The superpower of death can turn off every light in man`s world:

There is an evening coming in

Across the fields, one never seen before,

That lights no lamps

Silken it seems at a distance ,yet

When it is drawn up over the knees and breast



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It brings no comfort. (Larkin 114)

Amid the complete blackness of inevitable evening, man is the grave loser since he will be deprived of his physical and spiritual senses. Besides the loss of sight and sense, man should endure a heavy weighted pain on his head and breast.

Larkin again emphasizes the inevitability of death that will sweep every things, its killing touches will reach nations, nomad tribes and urban families ;there is no exempt from its decline. In his "Ambulance", he stresses that death will not exclude anyone from its fatal blow. Ambulance will be a frequent visitor in every place as a sign for the coming of death in the disguise of disease or frailty:

Closed like confessional, they thread  
Loud noon of cities, giving back visited.  
None of the glances they absord.  
Light glossy grey, arms on a plaque,  
They come to rest at kerb;  
All streets in time are visited. ( 167)

Larkin's pessimism surpasses the morbid sense to take actions by asking man in his "Next, Please" to put an end to any promise or expectation in this universe. Larkin insists that "our hopes are never fulfilled" (Boyd 70) . He shows the futility of man promises with the existence of death:

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



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Till then we say,  
Watching from a buff the iny, clear,  
Sparkling armada of promises draw near  
How slow they are! And how much time they waste,  
refusing to make haste! ( 113)

Man should limit his expectation as life cannot achieve any of human hopes that are depicted as ships in this poem. These ships will not reach human port of hope in spite of man`s yearning. The only ship that arrives safely to the port is a black sailed ship of death that seeks man and wants to take him forcefully. Larkin depicts the main source of his pessimism which is inevitability of death. The poem shows the hopelessness of human that wishes to gain consolation:

Only one ship is seeking us, a black-  
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back  
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake  
No water breed or break( 113)

"Aubade" is a depressing poem which raises horrifying mediations about death. Though the poem triggers at dawn, it is far from any celebration of the coming of a new life. Selecting "soundless dark" dawn serves to drop any distraction on his mediation. Larkin shows his uncontrolled fear of his final extinction:

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse  
—The good not done, the love not given, time



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Torn off unused—nor wretchedly because  
An only life can take so long to climb  
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;  
But at the total emptiness for ever,  
The sure extinction that we travel to  
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,  
Not to be anywhere,  
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.( 247)

He seems to keep these prospects at bay by continual work and alcohol, being alone at dawn waiting the light of a new day which is a new step to the end. The emergence of the light does not alleviate the gloom, but it clarifies the painful reality and strengthens the coming demise.

The sky is white as clay, with no sun.  
Work has to be done.  
Postmen like doctors go from house to house.( 247)

Larkin proves in this poem that death which cannot be expected how, where and when is the main ground of his pessimism. He finds no solace in religion which is too worn out to offer any consolation for the aching soul. Rationalism also fails by offering a solace through the loss of sense in death which is the main reason for his fear ( Lavine 332). Though no power can stand in confronting death, life continues and moves from one house to another by a postman who seems to convey the messages death and messages of new birth . It is not significant to confront death with bravery since this does not change the horrifying end:



This is a special way of being afraid  
No trick dispels. Religion used to try,  
That vast moth-eaten musical brocade  
Created to pretend we never die,  
And specious stuff that says *No rational being*  
*Can fear a thing it will not feel*, not seeing  
That this is what we fear—no sight, no sound,  
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,  
Nothing to love or link with,  
The an aesthetic from which none come round. ( 247)

Larkin`s pessimism is justified since it is aroused in front of certain causes. Even in his affirmative poems pessimism creeps slowly to distort the happy beginning with sadness if there is a hint to the sensitive sources of pain. In his "Days," Larkin starts his poem happily then he begins to reflect human`s dilemma in this universe by referring to death and disease in the middle of joyous moments. Larkin hints that there is no happiness with the existence of death and disease that plague man at any moment:

Ah, solving that question  
Brings the priest and the doctor  
In their long coats  
Running over the fields ( 160)

Pessimism again under certain effects conquers happiness. "The Whitsun Wedding" is another affirmative poem that is plagued with a sudden pessimism. Wedding in this poem loses its happiness to be depicted as " a happy funeral "



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and "as religious wounding" ( 155). Larkin`s role here is as a sinister observer who makes a journey in which he marginalizes all the individual in the party to echo the universal marginalization of man:

Success so huge and wholly farcical,  
The woman shared  
The secret like a happy funeral,  
While girls, gripping their handbags tighter, stared  
At a religious wounding. Free at last ( 154)

In "Toad Revisited ," Larkin appears to discuss the ways to escape the heavy load of work. The pessimism is not far from this positive poem. the pessimistic touch tries to stultify anything that are used to alleviate the weight of the dilemma of death. In his argument, man is not a hero but a weak dependent creature who has no power to adjust circumstances. Life is imposed on him and he fails to adapt life to his circumstances. According to this positive poem, man should indulge in work so as to fight thoughts of death:

When the lights come on at four  
At the end of another year?  
Give me your arm, old toad;  
Help me down Cemetery Road. ( 152)

"Nothing to be Said" presents a lesson in human disappointment. Larkin states that the existence of death in human life limits man expectation. He shows the inescapability of death. Besides death there is a slow dying which turns to be a sign of life. According to Larkin, everything reminds us of our fatal decay like passing of hours, new birth and others. Thus, man seems to endure death in life through fearful waiting of the end. Man in Larkin's poem





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is a pathetic creature who is usurped from strength to be a victim of disappointment and circumstances. He shows via these views that his gloom is caused by life fact and not inherited:

Hours giving evidence

Or birth, advance

On death equally slowly,

And saying so to some

Means nothing; others it leaves

Nothing to be said( 144)

### Old Age and Frailty

Old age is not far from Larkin's pessimistic arena. Old age in Larkin's poems does not only threaten the life with coming death but also it threatens beauty and youth with distortion. Larkin who is characterized with "reflective... and direct with commonplace experiences" ( Moran 151), selects a common situation of a woman who feels pain because of the quick passing of youth. In his "Lines on a Young Lady`s Photograph Album", Larkin mourns the loss of beauty of a woman who tastes the bitterness of old age:

But o, photography! As no art is,

Faithful and disappointing! That records

Dull days as dull, and hold it smiles as frauds

And will not censor blemishes

Like washing-lines, and Hall`-Distemper board (106)

Her old album reminds her of the grave loss of beauty due to the wrinkles of old age. She stands hopeless in front of such human crisis providing with no



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means to maintain her old beauty. Larkin shows through this woman, the frailty of man in front of the outside power of the world and it shows his central pillar of pessimism:

But shows the cat as disinclined, and shades  
A chin as doubled when it is, what grace  
Your candour upon her face!  
How overwhelmingly persuades  
That this is a real girl in a real place (106)

Fearing the passing of years continues to reappear again in his "Afternoon". Losing the old charm continues in aching Larkin's heart to add a push to his pessimism. He traces the distortion of old age on human face:

Their beauty has thickened.  
Something is pushing them  
To the side of their own lives. (178)

His horror from old age makes him detail the effect of years on a face of a woman to kill the old beauty and thicken the skin. He goes further with his morbidity to universalize his fear from any natural downward movement and decline in nature. The passing of years does not destroy only human countenance, but also guide man through downward cycle. the world according to the poet goes downward "summer is fading/ the leaves in ones and two". He shows the effect of years on every things in the world besides woman`s charm.

Passing of years and its effect on man arouse Larkin`s deep sadness. In "At Grass" , he depicts the two different states of man by depicting the youth and retirement of two horses running the life of legendary. The first part of the



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poem is exploited for the depiction of the horses in their youth running in the race and winning cups:

two dozen distances sufficed  
To fable them: faint afternoons  
Of Cups and Stake and Handicaps,  
Whereby their names were artficed  
To inlay faded, classic Junes( 139)

Describes the retired horses gathering together waiting their death and losing the old appreciation occupies both the second part of the poem and the disappointed mind of the poet. The poet penetrates the mind of the horses to check if tasting the pain of loss disturbs them or not:

do memories plague their ears all stole away ears like flies?

.....

Summer by summer all stole away(139)

The horses are very young and active till the arrival of old age that stultifies their power and turns them into idle horses that lose the old attention; "They have left behind them all that gave significance to their lives" (Cox 138) . In the past these horses are rarely to be seen save in the race:

The eye can hardly pick them out  
From the cold shade they shelter in,  
Till wind distresses tail and main;  
Then one crops grass, and moves about  
-The other seeming to look on-  
And stands anonymous again. (139)



The black outlook of Larkin affects his exploitation of symbols. The moon that is a symbol of beauty and youth turns in "Sad Steps" to be a symbol of the lost beauty and the lost strength. Moon in this poem plays the role of the reminder of the lost charm and the passing years. The continual dashing of the moon in the sky reminds the poet about the passing of time and it is part of downward movement "the way the moon dashes through clouds that blow/loosely as cannon –smoke to stand apart". Man is depicted in Larkin's poems as a toy that should endure different occurrences and has no power to change or alleviate the pain that imposed on him. According to the poem ,the moon :

Is a reminder of the strength the and pain  
Of being young; that it can`t come again,  
But is for other undiminished somewhere.( 205)

Larkin is the poet of common man whose experiences are quoting and "generating delight in the state of living" (Larkin 151) . In spite of his literary progress, he is accused of being limited as a " provincial poet" though he is not (Booth 31). He advices man not to attempt to correct the cruel steps of fate. In "Dockery and Son", he shows the futility of searching for any vent for happiness, one of human assumed vents are marriage and children. The poem presents depressed argument about the uselessness of marriage. The most pessimistic part of the poem is its conclusion which shows the boredom of life that is full with fear, pain and old age. To Larkin marriage and children cannot bring happiness as they are part of social habit and custom:

Nothing with a son`s harsh patronage.

Life is first boredom, then fear.



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And leaves what something hidden from us chose,

And age. And then the only end of age ( 172)

### Decline of Faith and the Movement Poets

Larkin`s religious skepticism aggravates his gloom since his lost faith cannot offer any comfort for his soul. Man in Larkin's poem is deprived from any spiritual consolation. Another point which deepens the sense of sadness is his being one of the Movement poets who is devoted to reflect reality of life which is characterized with harshness. They write without any decoration to the truth and their poetry reflect "a cautious skepticism... Empirical attitudes and examine a problem with alert wariness" (Press 45). Besides that Larkin's habit in which he does not offer appraised appreciation even for his personal life worsens the state. The pessimism in "Church Going" deserves studying since it reveals the seeds of pessimism in Larkin's spirit. Losing faith seems responsible for deepening Larkin`s morbidity. Losing faith nurtures his despondency. In this poem, Larkin shows that attending church is not necessary to be religious, it can be for earthly purpose like holding marriage, funeral and birth ceremony. Church`s role is diverted due to the decline of faith (Regan 33). He states:

Only in separation- marriage, and birth,

And death, and thoughts of these- for which was built

This special shell? For , though I`ve no idea

What this accoutered frowsty barn is worth,

It pleases me to stand in silence here; (121)



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He shows the limited role of religion in modern life since the frequent visitors of the church will be superstitious woman, bored man and tedious man like the poet. He shows his bitter irony for the church in this poem: he suggests to change the churches into museum or farms:

Bored, uniformed, knowing the ghostly silt  
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;  
But superstition, like belief, must die,  
And what remains when disbelief his gone?  
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky, (121)

Larkin goes further by foretelling the retreating role of church and the decline of religion which fails to alleviate the weight of life since:

The decay of faith in Christianity has poisoned one traditional source of strength and consolation. Since we lack the stoicism and the pure hedonism of vigorous pagan civilization and we have lost the hopefulness of a Christian society death may well appear more terrible to us than to most ages of the past. ( Press 4)

### Conclusion

Larkin appears in his poems as inflexible pessimist who regards man as insignificant and frail to confront the hard circumstances. His pessimism is centered around specific subjects like quick passing of hours, old age and death. Death appears to be the principal cause of his pessimism and all other causes emanate from death. Some causes of pessimism are signs of the departure. He cannot confront these points that have the ability to divert even positive poem into negative. He illuminates in some of his poem the ephemerality of man`s



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happiness in a world that stultifies his power to have no choice since everything occurred without his will. He is provided with no weapons to mould or change difficulties since his decline of faith leave him without any hope of survive . Happiness of having children and marriage fail to alleviate or nullify man`s despondency. Larkin has other positive poems which prove that Larkin's pessimism is aroused only in front of certain topics.

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