

13th Lecture

The main characteristics of Modern Poetry

- 1-Modern poetry is free from traditional restrictions of rhyme and rhythm.
 - 2-It is greatly affected by modern science and technology.
 - 3-The modern poet is pessimistic about the future of modern man and his world.
 - 4-Modern poetry is affected by modern political , social and economic theories.
 - 5-In modern poetry, words are used more symbolically than literally.
- The main characteristics of Modern Poetry
- 6-The language of modern poetry is that of everyday conversation. The modern poet is speaking to his reader in an intimate tone of voice.
 - 7-In modern poetry, man is represented as a lonely exile who is seeking his home.
 - 8-There is no logical argument in a modern poem. Rather , the poem depends on the free association of ideas. The modern poem is “ a heap of broken images”.

Next, Please by Philip Larkin-(1922-1985)

Always too eager for the future, we
Pick up bad habits of expectancy.
Something is always approaching; every day
Till then we say,
Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear
Sparkling armada of promises draw near.
How slow they are! And how much time they waste,
Refusing to make haste!
Yet still they leave us holding wretched stalks
Of disappointment, for, though nothing balks
Each big approach, leaning with brasswork prinked,
Each rope distinct,
Flagged, and the figurehead wit golden tits
Arching our way, it never anchors; it's
No sooner present than it turns to past.
Right to the last
We think each one will heave to and unload
All good into our lives, all we are owed
For waiting so devoutly and so long.
But we are wrong:
Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
No waters breed or break.

Summary

We are excessively eager to know what would happen to us in the future. On account of this eagerness, we develop the bad habit of expecting , or hoping for, good things to happen in our lives. All the time we have the feeling that something good is about to happen to us; and every day we say that it would happen soon.

We are like persons who stand upon the top of a cliff and observe a multitude of ships coming towards us. Actually, however we see not the ships but promises of bright and nice things

happening to us. The approach of these promises , like that of ships, is very slow; and they waste much time.

These promises do not materialize quickly, and eventually they do not materialize at all, so that we greatly disappointed and miserable. At a distance, each such promise looks distinct and concrete; but, with the passing of time, each of these promises fades away. We spend all our lives hoping for achievement and success, but our hopes prove to be false.

There is only promise and one expectation which never fails to materialize, and that is death.

Critical appreciation

The theme of disillusionment and of death.

The theme of this 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.

The title of the poem, Next, Please refers to one promise being followed by another . literally, the title refers to a queue of persons waiting to receive something, and an official at the other end calling out for the next man in the queue to approach him and receive his certificate, or his rations, or his visa, or whatever it is for which people are standing and which they are waiting to receive.

The last stanza of the poem points to the inevitability of death. In fact, the real theme of the poem is death. Larkin was obsessed with the idea of death; and many of his poems deal with this theme briefly or at length, directly or indirectly.

The use of an extended metaphor to express the idea

Our multitude of hopes is compared to a “ sparkling armada of promises”. In other words, hopes are regarded as ships which are drawing near but do not actually arrive at their destination. There is only one ship which would not fail to come ; and that ship is death. The metaphor of the ships begins from the second stanza of the poem and continues till the very end.

The premise of this piece is that we focus our attention on the future instead of living in the here and now. Notice the inclusive use of “we” and “our” throughout the poem. Larkin suggests we spend our entire lives waiting for the rewards the future will apparently endow to those who patiently wait for them. The irony is, of course, that from our vantage point think we are looking at our well deserved rewards in life when in fact we are only seeing The Grim Reaper’s vessel getting closer.

The rhyme scheme is *aabb* and the first three lines of each are mostly in iambic pentameter, while the last line of each is much shorter and is either four or six syllables in length.

Note the tone in the first stanza. Lexis such as “eager” and “expectancy” have rather positive connotations, yet there is a tension when we see the phrase “bad habits”.

The second stanza is rather cinematic in nature. This technique is rather typical of much of Larkin’s work. He often provides us with vivid mental images. We are taken to a cliff by the seaside.

From here we see an approaching metaphorical “armada of promises”. It brings to mind the phrase that “one day our ship will come in.”

He uses a three-part list to premodify this image; it is “tiny, clear” and “Sparkling”. This “armada” is laden with alluring “promises” and seems a very attractive proposition to the onlooker.

However, we have a hint of caution when we note the time-reference lexis in the second half of this stanza: “slow”, “time” and “haste”. He seems to be suggesting that much of life is spent waiting for rewards rather than having them.

The third stanza shows us Larkin’s pivot word “Yet”. He will often set up a scene then interject a “yet” or “but” or “however” to turn the conversation round.

The naval semantic field is extended with lexis like “balk”, “brasswork” and “rope”. Note the poet’s effective use of postmodification too, here: brasswork is “prinked” and ropes are “distinct”, but the first line has given us a very clear negative land-based metaphor in the lines:

“holding wretched stalks

Of disappointment”

We have been tantalized but are destined to be let down. Such is Larkin’s pessimistic view of life

The agony of lost opportunity is further extended in the fourth stanza. It starts with alliteration of the repeating “f” sounds and if we had originally thought the “promises” on board had been material wealth, our love life is equally doomed to failure.

Model Question

The last stanza of Next, Please points to

- The happiness of the poet.
- The beauty of nature.
- The inevitability of death.
- Pleasure of life.

The correct answer is (c)