
Melancholia and Creativity: A Psychoanalytic Study in Selected Poems of Philip Larkin

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Abstract

Melancholia, which is widely known as a “mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest” (Malacos, 2020 , p. 52), has an undeniable negative influence on human society. With many millions of people affected, depression or melancholia is the leading disease of modernity and the invisible force that robs people of their lives. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, is credited with helping to beat depression or melancholia through mapping a new way of how the mind works and analyzing depressed peoples’ behaviours using his psychoanalytic theories.

Depression, Freud argues, emerges when the brain is overwhelmed by the burden of the unconscious, that is the part of the mind where the ideas related to forbidden wishes and unacceptable thoughts are buried, which means releasing the repressed feelings that burden the unconscious can make depressed people maintain a certain level of recovery.

It is undeniable that poetry is at the top of the list when it comes to using writing as a tool of achieving catharsis because of the nature of its poetic language and the multiplicity of interpretations that it bears. Consequently, this study aims to give a psycholiterary insight into the essence of melancholia and shed light on its positive aspect. It also analyzes the theme of melancholia in Philip Larkin’s volume of poems, “The Less Deceived”, according to the psychoanalytic theory.

Introduction

It is common knowledge that human beings are complicated creatures to whom life can not be lived without a sense of meaning and purpose. Happiness, which Sigmund Freud believes goes hand in hand with meaningfulness and describes it as the ultimate pursuit of every human being, is the missing piece of the puzzle called life. Being all focused on finding happiness, human society has started to shy away from everything that can interrupt its individuals’ non-stop search of happiness and neglect the fact that the very opposite of happiness, melancholia, is part of the human nature.

Philip Larkin (1922 –1985) is a modern English poet who was commonly referred to as “England’s other Poet Laureate” during his lifetime. Being a sufferer of melancholia, Philip Larkin wrote poetry to get whatever repressed feelings and desires he had off his chest that he once said describing the healing power of writing poetry: “I’ve never had ideas about poetry. To me it’s always

been a personal almost physical release or solution to a complex pressure of needs”(Lerner, 2018, p. 42). Poetry was Larkin’s safety valve in the sense that it prevented his psyche from collapsing under the weight of his overburdened unconscious mind through giving him a source of relief.

Larkin wrote poetry that could create a bond between his readers and himself through writing about the common issues that matter to everyone in the language of ordinary people. His poetry tackles the themes of alienation, old age, death, depression, loss of identity, love, relationships, sexual desires, family, disillusionment, and war. Moreover, the distinctive characteristics identified in his poetry are “rigorous intellectual clarity, astringent wit, classical regularity in metre and rhyme, with blunt, disillusioned post-war common sense” (Hashim & Kadhum, n.d. , p. 2). Furthermore, his poetry does not sugar-coat the world; on the contrary, it mirrors it the way it is. According to Larkin’s point of view, the line between reality and unreality is blurred. He seems to be lost between what is known and what is unknown. His letters and poetry can be thought of as a representation of his quest for identity; “a record” of his “self-interrogation”(Gearey, 2007).

Using poetry as an outlet for his own personal experiences and traumas, the poems that Larkin wrote from 1955 onward implicate the following statement precisely:

I write poems to preserve things I have seen / thought / felt (if I may so indicate a composite and complex experience) both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake. Why I should do this I have no idea, but I think the impulse to preserve lies at the bottom of the art. (Harrison, 2005 , p. 103)

This particular belief has urged Larkin to imbue his poetry with a sense of melancholia that pretty much reflects the poet’s claim "most people are unhappy". He always regarded melancholia or depression as the source of his poetic creation; a stimulus that was responsible for heightening his poetic expression that he wrote in one of his letters: “outbursts of creative activity are always preceded by periods of intense depression which seem to precipitate the poetry. Consequently nearly all my poems are sad, which is wrong” (Brennan, 2002 , p. 131). The words “nearly all my poems are sad” indicate that Larkin was depressed most of his life.

Due to the gloominess of his poetry, Larkin has been classified as one of the most pessimistic English poets. His pessimism, which has blown the minds of many critics, is demonstrated in Calvin Bedient’s “Eight Contemporary Poets” as follows:

English poetry has never been so persistently out in the cold as it is with Philip Larkin -- a poet who (contrary to Wordsworth's view of the calling) rejoices not more but less than other men in the spirit of

life that is in him. The load of snow, soiled and old, stays on the roof in poem after poem and, rubbing a clear space at the window, Larkin is there to mourn once again a world without generative fire. (Bedient, 1974, p.69)

Larkin's dreary attitude towards aging contributed to his lifelong struggle with mental instability and made him feel too weak to confront whatever might come to his way. Although being gloomily reflective is a psychological characteristic of old age, it is a personality trait in Larkin's case. In fact, Larkin harbored such an attitude from a young age. When Larkin turned sixty, his fellow poet and friend, Anthony Thwaite, published a book entitled "Larkin at Sixty" as a birthday present for him. The book includes what Alan Bennett, an actor and a critic, has written about Larkin's lifelong melancholic mood:

Apparently he is sixty, but when he was anything else? He has made a habit of being sixty; he has made a profession of it. Like Lady Dumbleton he has been sixty for last twenty-five years. On his own admission there was never a boy Larkin, no young lad Philip, let alone Philip, ever. (Jackaman, 1995, p. 158)

Bennett's words underline Larkin's obsession with writing about the futility of life and the miserable end that awaits all humans. The fact that death could be present at any moment that war had brought back to the surface made Larkin too cynical to truly think about what the purpose of human existence might be. To him, human existence is meaningless and life is nothing but a trap that humans, whom are preys of fate and circumstances, live their lives trying to understand why things happen the way they do, not knowing that justifications have never been on the list of things that life offers to humans (Singh, 2017).

A Psychohistorical Background of Melancholia

Melancholia has its roots in ancient Greece and is derived from the words (melas kholé) which mean "black bile". In line with the humoral theory that dominated Western medicine for centuries, doctors believed that melancholia developed when the stomach produced an excess of black bile that would rise up to the head to cloud the mind and soul. Having their minds clouded, the depressed would fall into an abyss of great despair and suffer from debilitating delusions, which were sometimes accompanied by horrifying visions (Gowland, 2006, pp. 86–88).

Throughout history, what melancholia might be, its causes, and symptoms greatly preoccupied medical and non-medical writers. Aelius Galenus (Galen), Robert Burton, Alexander of Tralles, Timothy Bright, Adolf Meyer and Thomas Clouston are some of the authors who have been credited with writing significant books that aim to make sense of melancholia. Galen(129 AD – c. 200/c. 216) is best known for his conceptual framework that dominated the

understanding of melancholia for over 1000 years and his major contributions to medicine (Menninger, Mayman and Pruyser, 1963). Galen's attempt to identify the essence of melancholia through revising the ancient theory of four humours and combining it with the "Pythagorean theory of the four elements", and his own conception of the spirit to create a tightly organized system that shows the divisions and symptoms of melancholia is widely considered as the foundation stone upon which all the later assumptions and notes concerning melancholia rest (Healy, 1997).

The "humoral theory" or the theory of four humours suggests that the four humours; (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) that exist in every human body have a huge impact on the human's general health. Humans, Hippocrates and Galen believe, are healthy as long as their four humors work in harmony with each other and are balanced (Healy, 1997). According to Galen's system of diagnosis, melancholia is of two kinds; pathological melancholia (black bile melancholia) and melancholic temperament (yellow bile melancholia). Galen assumes that the cause of melancholia is not restricted to black bile, but also yellow bile, suppression of hemorrhoidal or menstrual flow, dietary deficiency, and emotional factors (Healy, 1997). Consequently, the difference between pathological melancholia and melancholic mood was determined in the 6th century that a physician called Alexander of Tralles characterized patients with black bile melancholia, as sad and fearful, and the ones with yellow bile melancholia, as angry and agitated (Brunet, 1933).

Later, the English physician, Timothy Bright (1586), classified melancholia into natural melancholia and unnatural melancholia. He further claimed that a disharmony of humors was the main cause of natural melancholia. In Bright's *Treatise of Melancholia*, natural melancholia is considered a Galenic temperament characterized by a sad and gloomy disposition with "a vague feeling of sullenness, irritability, moodiness, and oddities of conduct" (Menninger, 1963, p. 426), while unnatural melancholia is a severe mental disorder characterized by "violent and disorderly passions" and insanity.

However, Robert Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy" was, in fact, the most comprehensive attempt to understand the state of melancholia in the 17th century. In the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Burton gives an apt illustration of the extent to which the 17th century society tried to comprehend melancholia and deal with its debilitating feelings of despondency (Burton, 1989).

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the debate concerning the essence of melancholia continued to challenge writers' mindsets until the beginning of the 20th century in the course of which it began to unfold. It is notable that the term melancholia started to fall out of use in the first decade of the 20th century because of two important reasons: Emil Kraepelin's classification of mental illness according to which mental disorders were divided into "affective and cognitive", and then separated into manic-depressive insanity and dementia praecox and Adolf Meyer's new classification of mental disorders and his

groundbreaking decision to neglect the long-lasting psychological resonance of the term melancholia in favour of a medical term. Meyer was a Swiss psychiatrist who had emigrated to the United States in the 1890s. At a meeting of the New York Neurological Society in 1904, Meyer suggested that melancholia was not particularly useful as a diagnostic category, since the term “implied a knowledge of something” that medicine “did not possess” (Meyer, 1908). In addition, Meyer highlighted the fact that depression was a symptomatic term that described a key feature of the disease through stating that if “instead of melancholia, we applied the term depression to the whole class, it would designate in an unassuming way exactly what was meant by the common use of the term melancholia” (Meyer, 1905, p. 114).

Keeping in mind that the term depression has officially become a synonym of melancholia (black bile), these two terms are to be used interchangeably in the remaining of the present study.

Since it is easy to mistake non-pathological melancholia for pathological melancholia, spotting the difference between the two is of a great significance. To a layperson, grief and melancholia (depression) might seem the same partially because modern people are used to misusing and overusing the word “depressed” that the words “depressed” and “sad” are used interchangeably in modern society. However, the matter of distinguishing between these two mental states has preoccupied many physicians and authors and is still a source of contention and disagreement today.

In the 19th-century, psychiatrists held the opinion that distinguishing between depression and non-pathological low mood depended on how professional a psychiatrist was. It was believed that ordinary sadness had a clear external cause, whereas melancholia was the result of internal pathology. This superficial distinction between those two mental states was proved to be faulty in the 20th century because external causes as financial stress, disappointment in love, and childbirth were frequently listed as causes of melancholia in asylum case notes as well as published works (Jansson, 2020).

In fact, the 20th century views concerning depression are not in agreement with any of the previously mentioned assumptions in the sense that they view this mental condition as a disease characterized by:

mental pain, emotional depression, and sense of ill-being, usually more intense than in melancholy [grief], with loss of self-control, or insane delusions, or uncontrollable impulses towards suicide, with no proper capacity left to follow ordinary avocations, with some of the ordinary interests of life destroyed, and generally with marked bodily symptoms (Clouston, 1883, p. 37).

The modern medical community also rejects the idea that committing sins can cause this disease. It was actually agreed upon that committing what was called “the unpardonable sin” could cause mental suffering to humans until 19th century physicians started to reject that spiritual idea in favour of a more

scientific view of the world. Like 19th century physicians, modern physicians tend to describe their patients' spiritual manifestations as "religious delusions" (Maudsley, 1867).

To put all the various assumptions concerning the essence of this mental state into perspective, the term depression does not always refer to a mental disease due to the fact that it is closely related to some modern Western concepts like stress, guilt, and fatigue. Sushrut Jadhav, an Indian psychiatrist, claims that "depression can be construed as a culturally valid concept for Western settings," but "it is fallacy to assume that depression is some real objective disease entity" that can be found across all cultures and time periods (Jadhav, 1996, p. 281). In fact, many authors and physicians tend to associate clinical depression with modernity that Brandon B. Hidaka states in one of his works that clinical depression is the result of humans having "dragged a body with a long hominid history into an overfed, malnourished, sedentary, sunlight-deficient, sleep-deprived, competitive, inequitable, and socially-isolating environment" (Hidaka, 2012, p. 211). Moreover, critics of the depression diagnosis, like Edward Shorter, insist that depression is a cultural condition, not a medical illness since it emerges as a result of a bunch of stress-related symptoms like sadness, anxiety, sleep disturbances, inertia, inability to concentrate, etc (Shorter, 2013).

The Psychoanalytic Theory of Melancholia

The psychoanalytic theory is undoubtedly among the best modern theories that analyze the way the human mind functions and deals with the negative feelings that hold it back. The father of modern psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, is credited with formulating the psychoanalytic theory according to which all human behaviours can be understood.

Sigmund Freud was born to Galician Jewish parents in 1856 in Moravia; a town located in the Austrian Empire. His father was a wool merchant and his mother was his father's second wife. When he was a kid, Freud's family moved to Vienna and lived in it for most of their lives. Being constantly at the head of his class, Freud joined a medical school and became interested in neurophysiology and physiology in general.

Later, he became a resident in neurology and a director of a children's ward in Berlin. Before the outbreak of The Second World War, Freud emigrated to England and lived in it until his 20 year battle with cancer resulted in his death. It is undeniable that Freud's books and lectures place him as the father of modern psychoanalysis and one of the greatest authors of the early 20th century medical community (Boeree, 2009 , pp. 4).

The most celebrated and significant work of Freud is the psychoanalytic theory for it is the cornerstone upon which Freud's other theories are based. The fact that psychoanalysis is simultaneously a form of treatment, a theory, and an "investigative tool" has paved the way for Freud to make use of these three facets of psychoanalysis to develop our understanding of human mental functioning (Lothane, 2006, p. 711) .

The psychoanalytic theory assumes that all people have unconscious desires and ideas that dominate the way they behave. It is notable that the psychoanalytic theory was formulated in the late 19th century in Vienna and was the work that Freud devoted his life to developing (Mitchell, 2000). It is also the bread and butter of “the Ego and the id” which was the most important and successful paper that Freud published in 1923. In it, Freud divides the human consciousness into three levels of awareness; the conscious, preconscious and unconscious, and goes further to divide the latter into the Id, Ego and Superego (Freud, 1914g, p. 16) .

According to the psychoanalytic theory, the id is the instinctual part of the unconscious mind that represents the most animalistic urges of the human being, like the desire for food and sex. It is actually what keeps humans alive. The ego is the part of the mind that represents reality and tries to meet the demanding desires of the Id in a socially acceptable way. And the superego is the part that represents ethics, and social principles and operates as the moral conscience of the human mind.

The concept of the unconscious is considered “the central tenet” of Freud's psychoanalytic theory because it is the concept from which two corollary concepts; hidden meaning and repression are derived. It is “a part of the mind that is hidden from our conscious awareness and is continuously motivating our behaviour”(Freud and the Unconscious: The new mini writing competition , 2015 , para. 5). It is worth mentioning that Freud emphasizes the significance of the concept of repression in achieving an understanding of the unconscious through describing it as the “cornerstone” of psychoanalysis and “the prototype of the Unconscious” (Freud, 1923a). Freud believes that repression is the mental process that creates the unconscious. However, the aim of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory is to release the repressed feelings and experiences that burden the unconscious and result in Melancholia or depression (Freud, 1915b, p. 148).

The psychoanalytic theory suggests that depressed people have to bring themselves to express the affects that are associated with their traumatic memories for it is through this process, which is known as “catharsis”, the symptoms of depression start to disappear. Once the depressed dare to articulate whatever unacceptable ideas and taboo impulses that they have buried into the unconscious, the feelings of anxiety, guilt and conflict, which are key symptoms of depression, get reduced. Freud believes that it does not matter how hard individuals try to repress their forbidden thoughts, these thoughts always find their way out of the unconscious and end up being expressed in subtle, symbolic or disguised ways, such as dreams, slips of the tongue, jokes and symptoms (Freud, 1915b, p. 148) .

Melancholia and Creativity From a Poetic Perspective

Whether melancholia is an emotional state or a symptom; a real mental disease or a cultural condition, its presence accompanies humans throughout their lives. Although melancholia is always thought of as a negative mental state

that poisons peoples' minds with suicidal thoughts and pushes them towards self-destruction, it can inspire something positive through sharpening one's vision for life. Eric Wilson, a contemporary American author, emphasizes the positive aspect of melancholia in his book, "Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholia", through stating that "Melancholia (in my eyes) generates a deep feeling in regard to this same anxiety, a turbulence of heart that results in an active questioning of the status quo, a perpetual longing to create new ways of being and seeing" (Wilson, 2008, p. 8).

Numerous authors such as Wilson, Marsilio Ficino, Jonathan Flatley, and Walt Whitman consider melancholia as a source of creativity that they think of the bleak contemplation that humans experience during melancholic moods as a positive process that results in creativity, rather than a psychological paralysis of the mind and soul. Several studies have found that "depressive" emotions sharpen creativity and enlighten the melancholic mind. In fact, the nobilitation of melancholia is not a brand-new thing that melancholia has been associated with creativity throughout its history. Aristotle is one of the earliest authors to notice the chameleonic changes of melancholia and highlight the positive impact that it could have on its sufferers through proposing that all those who have become eminent in philosophy, politics, poetry and art in general seem to be ill-tempered or affected by diseases caused by black bile.

Poetry actually seems to be the perfect outlet for expressing the kind of creativity that melancholia inspires since it has the power to relate to all humanity as the Bulgarian politician and the former Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, stated in honor of 2015's World Poetry Day "perhaps never before have we needed the power of poetry to bring women and men together, to craft new forms of dialogue, to nurture the creativity all societies need today" (Bokova, 2015, para. 7).

Furthermore, a Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, has compared the experience of reading a poem to the way melancholic moods inspire poets to write about the world that he believes that:

Poetry is what in a poem makes you laugh, cry, prickle, be silent,
makes your toe nails twinkle, makes you want to do this or that or
nothing, makes you know that you are alone in the unknown world,
that your bliss and suffering is forever shared and forever all your
own. (Dana & MacKenzie, 2007, p. 89)

John Keats is one of the prominent romantic poets whose melancholia has played an important role in flourishing his poetic creativity that he calls melancholia the "wakeful anguish of the soul" in his poem, "Ode on Melancholy" to highlight the poetic "might of sadness" (Middeke & Wald, 2011). Walt Whitman is another poet to whom Aristotle's assumption concerning the relationship between melancholia and creativity applies. Whitman, who is well known as the father of American poetry, hints at the important role that melancholia plays in helping people appreciate joy. It is

unarguable that if it was not for melancholia, humans would not value joy. In “A Song of Joys”, Whitman describes having his mind preoccupied with ideas about death, which is obviously a symptom of melancholia, as a joyous thing that he states “Joys of the thought of Death” (Whitman, 1993). Melancholic people take pleasure in thinking about death since they believe that “Death...is not merely decay or rot or grave. It is a call to life, an electrical jolt enjoining us to explore, with vigor and wit, our own odds and risks” (Wilson, 2009 , p. 44).

Although, there are several studies that explore how experiencing “negative emotions” results in enhancing artistic creativity, these studies have been overshadowed by a ton of scientific studies that advocate how positive emotions are a beneficial source of human health. Modupe Akinola and Wendy Berry Mendes’s study, “The Dark Side of Creativity: Biological Vulnerability and Negative Emotions Lead to Greater Artistic Creativity” is among the most prominent studies that explain the association between melancholic feelings and artistic creativity. In it, Akinola and Mendes conclude “that when individuals are biologically vulnerable to experiencing negative affect and are exposed to a situation that brings about intense negative emotion, they show the most artistic creativity” (Akinola & Mendes, 2008 , p. 1).

Although melancholia is a source of inspiration, it is still uncommon for people to view it as something other than a killing disease. The power that melancholia holds over its sufferers’ minds is overwhelming and dangerous that it manipulates the depressed mind into committing suicide.

Melancholia in Philip Larkin’s “Next, Please” and “Wants”

“The Less Deceived” (1955) is commonly known as Larkin’s first mature collection of poems. The poems “Next, Please” and “Wants”, which belong to this volume, are to be analyzed since they serve the theme of the present study. “The Less Deceived” is regarded as milepost in his poetic career for it is what has reserved him a place among the most admired poets of his generation. Larkin extracted the title of this volume from a remark made by Ophelia in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “I was the more deceived”; he replaced the word more with less to express his intention to be less deceived by the realities of life (Ruchika, 2012). The poems included in this volume, though tackle different subject matter on the top of which is depression, share a common theme, that is of deception. As the title of this volume indicates, the poems explore the human tendency to deceive him/herself and delve in delusions and fantasies instead of seeing reality for what it is. Self-deception is actually the outcome of relying on that defence mechanism called projection rather than accepting one’s shortcomings and working on them. It is, as Freud perceives it, a defence mechanism that means displacing one’s unwanted feelings onto others because dealing with such feelings does not make the person feel good about his/herself. Self-deception, the author Simon Petch claims, “is shown to be a consequence of our tendency to project our desires into our lives, and then allow our lives to be governed by them” (Suhail, 2016 , p. 43). However, the poems of

this volume actually hold mirror to Larkin's personal experiences and attachment to the theme of melancholia.

The poem, "Next, Please" (1951), is an articulation of Larkin's depression. Its title, which is indicative of Larkin's impatience, sets the tone for the rest of the poem and underscores his state as a despondent observer. The poem starts with an emotional statement that implicates the readers in his existential crisis through using the first person plural "we" and implicitly criticizes the human tendency to be "always too eager for the future". This kind of incurable enthusiasm and optimism that humans tend to attach themselves to, Larkin argues, urges them to adopt "bad habits of expectancy" that expose them to a countless number of disappointments. This useless hope that people refuse to let go of distorts their worldview and blinds them to the cruel realities of life. The pathetic habit of telling oneself; "Something is always approaching; every day", Larkin claims, keeps people in a state of utter disappointment.

In this poem, life is depicted as a series of promises that raises humans' false hopes and makes them overlook the factuality of death which is the only thing that is worth remembering. The rose- coloured glasses that excessive optimism convinces humans to wear make life look like a generous giver that offers humans whatever they want and takes nothing in return.

Larkin uses the metaphor of ships to convey his gloomy image of human existence. "The extensive use of a naval semantic field produces a vivid, graphic and moving view of life... and death" (Rasheed, 2011, p, 44). The promises and hopes of life, which he likens here to a "tiny, clear, Sparkling armada", are what humans waste their lives waiting for. They keep watching the ships that are supposedly loaded with what they have wished and prayed for to come around and anchor, unaware that what these ships carry will never give them the kind of satisfaction that they crave. Since he uses the pronoun "we" throughout the poem, he is also overtaken by his natural tendency to expect things from life. Larkin's existential crisis and aggressive attitude towards life seem to stem from his unmet expectations.

Throughout his life, Larkin, like any other human being, planned out his life especially the emotional aspect of it, and trusted that things would go the way he would like them to until life with all its unexpectedly terrible incidents made him "shrink into his shell in terror" (Rapport, 2000, p. 18-19). Among the unwanted things that life threw at him was rejection which was a feeling that he could not get over. In his autobiographical essay "Not the Place's Fault", Larkin pours out his heart and gives voice to his romantic disappointment that he states; "perhaps strangest of all was that no girls so to speak appeared on the threshold of my life as a natural part of growing up, like beer and cigarettes, as novels say they do" (Larkin, 1986 , p. 52).

In addition, he could not live up to his own expectations concerning writing a kind of poetry that could imbue him with the sense of belonging and common understanding that he had lived his life longing for. Being unable to attain what he once thought was attainable resulted in intensifying his depression which in return escalated his level of pessimism. The impact of such disappointments had turned him into a self-centered poet to whom showing compassion for others' misfortunes was a folly (Niazi, 1999).

Larkin's morbid pessimism and insistence on convincing the readers of the importance of putting an end to their positive expectations and hopes underscore his depression for having no positive expectations for the future and losing interest in worldly stuff are commonly considered as symptoms of depression. What life threw at him did not only contribute to his social image as an inherently bleak poet, but also inspired him to keep writing poetry. To Larkin, his feelings of deprivation and dissatisfaction fueled his depression which in return sharpened his poetic creativity. To put it differently, his never tension-free state of mind had turned his boring encounter with life into an intense lifelong argument between life and himself. This conflict made him believe that the creative halo that his depression had surrounded him with would never vanish.

Nevertheless, optimism, Larkin claims, runs in whomever belongs to the human species. The lines "Yet still they leave us holding wretched stalks/ of disappointment, for, though nothing balks" indicate that humans are accustomed to waiting for the ships of their hopes and promises even when these ships abandon them. He also highlights how we humans, including himself, mostly tend to refuse to understand that happiness is not really around the corner and that those ships of airy promises will not make us happy even if they anchor. The good that we think we owe these ships because we have been "Waiting so devoutly and so long" for them to anchor will not make us achieve fulfillment. Larkin's notion that human desires can never be truly satisfied is hinted at in this poem.

According to the psychoanalytic theory, it is the instant fulfillment of the demands of the pleasure principle that can make humans truly happy and satisfied. In Freudian terms, "[what] we call happiness in the strictest sense comes from the (preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree" (Schaefer, Fowler & Cooke, 1968, p. 327). Since the restrictions that civilization has placed on humans make the instant gratification of the pleasure principle impossible to achieve, the kind of satisfaction that their Id's desires get is too temporary to keep them in a permanent state of happiness. Taking this into perspective, Larkin seems to have traded off his happiness for poetic inspiration which culminated in making his life more suffocating. Depression, which was the most costly trading loss that he had to bear, obliged him to live a life of contradictions, rigidity, fears and misery.

Larkin ends his reflection on, what he considers, the dreary state of the human existence through stating that:

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. (Next, Please)

By using the metaphor of a black sailed ship that is unfamiliar, Larkin ruins the element of surprise which life relies on to fool people into believing that happiness can be humans' permanent companion rather than a guest and refers to the idea that it is death that the future has in store for humans. The sinister description of death as a ship that brings deathly silence and eternal nothingness hints at the fact that Larkin's death anxiety or thanatophobia takes over his psyche whenever the thought of death comes to his mind. In fact, his obsession with death is traumatic. The trauma of his father's death overshadowed his life and resulted in making him thanatophobic. It also made him prophesy that he would die at the age of 63 which was the age his father died at and live his life overthinking about how terrible that would be.

In 1985, he had his worst fear actualized that he did not only die at the same age as his father, but also deceased of the same disease: cancer (Rapport, 2000). The brevity of the final line; "No waters breed or break" emphasizes that the fertile voice of life, though sounds loud, can be easily silenced by death. In the universal battle between life and death, death usually wins.

"Wants" (1951) is another poem in which Larkin's Melancholia is given voice to. It functions as a complement to the bleak Larkinian contemplation on human existence that is set forth in "Next, Please". It, although represents another attempt of Larkin to overcome his depression, explores his desire to find a source of release from life. "Wants", which interestingly refers to the poet's desires whether the title is taken as a verb or a noun, does not really voice what Larkin wants in his life, but what his depression deludes his mind to crave. Larkin opens the poem with the line: "Beyond all this, the wish to be alone:" which denotes his urgent need for loneliness; a desire that having his mind controlled by depression has much to do with. Loneliness was actually among the very first feelings that he experienced during the early stages of his life. The roots of his alienation come from the state of his family and society. Being the son of aloof domineering man whom had willingly secluded himself and his family from the society, Larkin grew up thinking that spending most of his time alone was not something that would expose him to depression. Besides, having a speech impediment added up to his loss of interest in socializing with others for it was a source of deep estrangement to him. Furthermore, the disintegration and various upheavals of the post-war English society made it easier for, what

he called, “the maggots of loneliness” (Motion, 1993, p. 193) to creep into his head. In this poem, the demands of the slowly modernizing society contributed to his depression through enhancing his sense of loneliness. Larkin describes loneliness as a wish; something that is not easily attainable because of the modern society that had had even the basic human needs like being alone placed restriction on.

To Larkin, having his aura of loneliness disturbed entails that something ominous will happen. The melancholic image that the line; “the sky grows dark with invitation-cards” draws points out to Larkin’s rejection of the importance of human sociability which some scholars consider a primary human instinct. He likens the negative change of mood that overtakes him when communicating with others to what happens to the sky when dark clouds cut off the light beams of the sun. Those “invitation cards”, which refer to the formalities of life, subdue the sense of serenity and peace that seclusion brings to his psyche the way dark clouds block the glimmering light of the sun. This kind of intense attachment to loneliness is pathological and is a symptom of depression. His commitment to loneliness can be attributed to his early experience with abandonment. Larkin encountered utter abandonment in all the stages of his life. The lack of empathic attunement that was the hallmark of his parents’ marriage had negatively affected the social, emotional and behavioural development of his persona. Furthermore, this kind of alienation was reinforced by the early memory of rejection that he experienced at the age of five when he had a crush on a little girl named Mary and tried to flirt with her (Motion, 1993). The way the little girl refused his advances and violently rejected him had left a long-term scar on his persona; a scar that, although he tended to deny by claiming that he did not remember much about his childhood when he could even recall an incident that happened when he was only five years old, continued to crash whatever positive expectations he had about his emotional life.

However, Larkin continues pointing out what disturbs him about the duties of social existence by stating “However we follow the printed directions of sex” which means that modern man is also expected to follow a specific pattern of sex. Even the sex drive, which the psychoanalytic theory considers a biological and fundamental facet of human existence, is brought under control.

Larkin expresses his cynically depressive attitude towards the social aspect of human existence further in the line; “the family is photographed under the flagstaff –” which evokes a sense of unity. He deliberately uses the first person plural “we” to convey the notion that this plight is shared by whoever is caught up in the throes of modernity. The fact that the family photograph and the flagstaff, which indicate togetherness and conformity, are followed by a repeated articulation of Larkin’s wish to be alone underscores how deep his sense of alienation is. His feeling of detachment did not only come from the “taut, ungenerous, defeated pattern of life” (Bradford, 2005 , p. 30) that was privileged at the family home, but also from his homeland. His feelings towards

England are best illustrated in these words of his “No: England may be full of dishonesty and unpleasantness and sordidity etc. but I (naturally, I suppose) have a prejudice in favour of it” (Steinberg , 2010, p. 170). The way Larkin crudely points out the fallacies of England underlines that he, although claims to love his country, seems to consider it as one of the factors that lie at the root of his melancholia.

Larkin adds “the artful tensions of the calendar,/ The life insurance, the tabled fertility rites,” to his list of the earthly stuff that get in the way of the human desire to stay alone. The worldly deadlines, the supposedly significant life insurance which is socially considered a form of accountability, and the restricted fertility rates, although keep modern man trapped in a busy dull lifecycle of needs and obligations, can not subdue the death instinct. The need to find a means to flee this temporary life, Larkin argues, lies deep within every human; “Beneath it all, desire of oblivion runs”. Since it is death that leads to oblivion, Larkin views death in this poem as a welcome relief from the cunning earthly distractions that culminate in “The costly aversion of the eyes from death–”. The earthly pursuits that humans aim for and the humans’ engagements with life are superficial. Life fools humans into thinking that their existence is of meaning and that happiness is pursuable. Due to his depression, Larkin has always viewed life as web of deceit that distorts the only worth-knowing truth that is death. His nihilistic outlook for life is best illustrated in this letter of his:

It[life] is a grim business, & I do sympathise: it is also a business that appears differently to every man. To me it appears like the floor of some huge Stock Exchange, full of men quarreling & fighting & shouting & fucking & drinking & making plans and scheming to carry them out, experiencing desires & contriving to gratify them, and in general acting & being acted upon: I sit shuddering at the side, out of the fray, too much of a funk to fight or contrive, imagining I am living a full life when I pick up an old bottle and toss it back into the mêlée. (Larkin, 1992, p.157)

According to the psychoanalytic theory, death is not merely an instinctual desire, but the most desirable instinct in the human psyche. It urges the human organism, Freud claims, to return to the pre-existence state and therefore the activation of the death drive that depression causes is dangerous in the sense that it pushes the depressed mind to jeopardize the whole human organism in favour of embracing the nothingness that it used to be. Larkin’s view of death as a source of solitude and peace is indicative of the accelerating level of his melancholia.

It is notable that this poem, which is consisted of two five-line stanzas that match each other stylistically, is heavily relied on repetition and parallelism which are two literary devices that Larkin usually uses in his poetry to “reinforce the mood of a particular ending”(Martin, 1978, p. 106). The particular

end that he wants to stress in “Wants” through using these two devices is that of human existence which can be brought about once “the desire of oblivion” or the death drive gets stimulated.

To sum up, Larkin’s poem “Next, Please” can be thought of as the starting point of his depression for it reflects Larkin’s inability to picture the future as something worth waiting for which is a symptom of his depression. The way he portrays his hopes as ships that never anchor indicates that he has lost faith in the goodness of life. Larkin’s other poem “Wants” indicates that his depression has developed to the extent of triggering his death instinct. The way the lines of the poem keep referring back to Larkin’s desire to be alone and sink into oblivion highlights that his death instinct, whose engine is depression, is taking over his psyche.

Conclusion

Melancholia is a state of mind that modern society refers to as the mental obstacle that stands between humans and their happily ever after. Despite the fact that the history of melancholia and that of art have intertwined thousands of times, the creative aspect of melancholia is still overlooked. The study gives a psycholiterary account of the state of melancholia and clarifies the link between Melancholia and poetic creation through analyzing the theme of melancholia in Philip Larkin’s *The Less Deceived* according to the psychoanalytic theory. The analysis of the poems “Next, Please” and “Wants” indicates that Melancholia has inspired Philip Larkin and heightened his poetic expression.

Philip Larkin, who is well known as a recognizable poet of the movement, took advantage of his melancholia and considered his suffering an inspirational journey towards self-discovery. The fact that Larkin refused to consult a therapist underlines that he did not regard melancholia as a disease; on the contrary, he thought of it as a mental state that could sharpen his poetic talent. Being aware of the dangers of depression, Larkin managed to find a psychological tactic to prevent the deadly symptom of depression, that is suicidal ideation, from destroying his psyche. It seems that he knew that keeping his life instincts in a constant state of dissatisfaction would make his mind too busy trying to satisfy his id’s desires to process suicidal thoughts.

However, in a world where happiness equals meaningfulness, describing melancholia, which is the very opposite of what everyone seeks, as a tool of creation and empowerment might not make as much sense as demonizing and dramatizing it to the majority of people. The decline of the theory of “the Tortured Artist” that considers suffering a necessary factor in the process of artistic creation and the tones of scientific papers that indicate how suffering is not the secret element in the formula of artistic creation underline the social rejection of the nobilitation of melancholia.

المالنجوليا و الابداع: دراسة نفسية تحليلية في قصائد مختارة لفيليب لاركن

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الملخص

إنّ المالنجوليا او الاكتئاب هو اضطراب مزاجي يسبب شعوراً دائماً بالحزن وفقدان الشغف، له تأثير سلبي لا ريب فيه على المجتمع الانساني إذ انه يشكل اثراً سلبياً على حياة الملايين من الاشخاص. فهو من أكثر الأمراض شيوعاً في العصر الحديث هذا الأمر يجعل التعايش معه صعباً كونه القوة اللامرئية التي تُفقد المصابين به قابليتهم على التحكم بأجسادهم وأفكارهم.

إنّ مؤسس علم التحليل النفسي (سيغموند فرويد) له الفضل في التغلب على الاكتئاب في ضوء ايجاده لطريقة جديدة تبين كيفية عمل العقل البشري وتحليل سلوكيات المكتئبين باستخدام نظرياته الخاصة بالتحليل النفسي. إحدى أهم المفاهيم النفسية التي طورها فرويد هي مفهوم العقل اللاواعي و هو المكان الذي تتواجد فيه الرغبات الممنوعة والأفكار غير المقبولة إجتماعياً. يعتقد فرويد بأن الإكتئاب ينتج عندما تُنقل المشاعر المكبوتة العقل اللاواعي بمعنى أنّ تحرير هذه المشاعر من الممكن أن يؤدي إلى جعل المكتئبين يصلون إلى مرحلة معينة من الشفاء.

إنّ من غير القابل للإنكار ان الشعر يأتي في مقدمة الوسائل التي من الممكن أن تُستعمل بوصفها أداة للحصول على مصدر للتنفيس عن هذه المشاعر المكبوتة وذلك بسبب طبيعة اللغة الشعرية وقابلية الشعر على إستيعاب العديد من التحليلات المختلفة. إستناداً لذلك، يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم نظرة نفسية ادبية عن المالنجوليا و تحليل مجلد قصائد "الأقل انخداعاً" لفيليب لاركن تبعاً لنظرية فرويد للتحليل النفسي. يهدف هذا البحث ايضاً لتوضيح الجانب الايجابي لهذه الحالة العقلية من خلال ربطها بالابداع الشعري.

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