

Hello students. Welcome to Unit 1 Poetry of the paper British Literature: Post World War Two.

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This is the program Bachelor of Arts for 3rd year students.

The subject is English, Semester 5. The paper code END 105.

The title of the paper British Literature Post World War Two.

In this module we will be analyzing two poems by Philip Larkin - Whitsun Weddings and Church Going.

We will briefly look at the historical background at the time.

We will have a brief overview of the life of Philip Larkin.

In addition to analyzing his poems, Whitsun Weddings and Church Going, we will analyze the themes, the features and his poetic style.

By the end of the module, you would be able to understand the sociopolitical background of the Post World War Two period.

You would acquire knowledge of the life of Philip Larkin. And you will be able to analyze the poetry of Philip Larkin in the context of Post World War Two.

Before we begin with Philip Larkin, let us set ourselves against the background. 1914 to 1918 was the World War One, which caused great distress, destruction and chaos.

A decade later, in 1929 was the Great Depression, which caused worldwide economic collapse, unemployment and suicides.

Furthermore, a decade after that, 1939 to 1945 was another major war - World War 2. This was characterized by depression, disillusionment, futility of life, increased search for religion and morality, and existential concerns. By the time 1947 appeared, England's role as a dominant colonial power was on the decline.

A brief overview about Philip Larkin. He was born in 1922 in Coventry, England,

and his childhood - he was a very solitary person. He enjoyed

reading, enjoyed writing, and he also had a stammer, so he was not very confident.

He belonged to the Movement School of Poetry, which was a response to the social and cultural conditions of Post War England and this particular School of poetry is also anti romantic. The poetry is not emotionally charged.

He was influenced by W.H. Auden, W.B. Yeats and Thomas Hardy.

In 1965 he was awarded the Queen's Medal for Poetry.

And in 1984 he was to be the Poet Laureate, but he declined because, as I mentioned earlier, he was not a very social person and he did not like media attention. He also was of the opinion that he had not composed as many poems prior to 1984.

The first poem Whitsun Weddings.

It is a contemplative poem of eight stanzas of 10 lines each.

Whitsun is a weekend. It's actually the 7th Sunday after Easter, where the British government freeze marriage taxes and people, particularly of the lower social economic background, can avail of this facility. The Monday after that is a bank holiday, and therefore it becomes a long weekend.

This poem is about a train journey which the speaker takes on that particular Saturday - Whitsun Saturday and he is observing the landscape or the view outside the train. But his thoughts are interrupted by the commotion of these wedding parties, these wedding passengers, who board the train.

Let us look at a few stanzas,

the first stanza. "We ran behind the backs of houses, crossed the
street of blinding windscreens smelt the Fish-dock, thence the
rivers level drifting breath began where Sky and Lincolnshire
and water meet."

In this first stanza, he is describing what he sees outside.

Two stanzas later.

"At first I didn't notice what noise the weddings made. Each

station that we stopped at, sun destroys the interest of what's happening in the shade.”

Here you get a feeling that the speaker's thoughts, his observation about the outside world is interrupted by the wedding commotion. In the same stanza, towards the end,

“once we started

though, we passed them grinning and pomaded, girls in parodies of

fashion, heels and veils. All posed irresolutely watching us go.”

In this stanza he describes the passengers, their attire, but he also describes the people on the platform and in a way he is mocking the wedding parties.

Stanza 6 - “the women shared the secret like a happy funeral,

while girls gripping the handbags tighter stared at a

religious wounding.”

Now this stanza is interesting because there is an antithesis. There are two examples of antithesis

which is ‘happy funeral’ and ‘religious wounding’ and antithesis is where two opposite words are put together.

‘Happy funeral’, so in this stanza he is realizing that marriage is important, but while it is a happy event, there are shades of unhappiness, and so the ceremony then becomes a ‘religious wounding’, a painful affair.

The final stanza,

“We slowed again and as the tightened

brakes took hold, there swelled a sense of falling like an

arrow-shower sent out of sight, somewhere, becoming rain.”

Now this “arrow-show” is an allusion to Cupid's arrow. And this final image of rain is very symbolic of fertility of God, or continuity of the human race. So throughout the poem we see the speaker has an initial

dislike towards marriage, but towards the end he realises the importance and this image of rain symbolizes that.

The Speaker's character is transformed throughout the poem.

Initially, he is a nonchalant observer. He is a disinterested observer, but towards the end he becomes a wise commentator. As I mentioned earlier, he has a dislike towards marriage or newlyweds but towards the end he realises the importance of marriage. This poem is important because it reveals Larkin's reluctant acceptance of the institution of marriage and an important factor, remember, is Larkin was a Bachelor. He never got married.

We move on to the second poem, 'Church Going'.

This is a poem of seven stanzas of nine iambic pentameter lines each.

This poem is about a speaker. He is again alone and he is entering an empty church. He is observing his surroundings and he is pondering on the role of the church or the role of religion during this particular time, after World War Two.

The title of the poem Church Going is interesting because not only is the speaker going to church, but it is also reflecting churchgoing that the role of the Church or the role of religion is fading away gradually.

Stanza one, "once I am sure there's nothing going on, I step

inside letting the door thud shut. Another church matting

seats and stone, and littlebooks. Sprawlins of Flowers

cut."

Here he is entering the empty church and he is solitary. He is observing things

around him.

Stanza 5 "a shape less recognizable each week, a

purpose, more obscure. I wonder who will be the last.

The very last to seek this place for what it was."

In this stanza he is questioning the role of religion, questioning the role of the Church and the purpose of religion.

Stanza 7 "a serious house on serious Earth. It is in whose

blend air all our compulsions meet, are recognized and

robed as destinies."

So in this final stanza, he is actually wondering whether at some point after many years, whether this church will become a museum and somebody will go to the Church and wonder, OK, what is the purpose of this building? This construction? But then they might realize that this is a place to get wise, where all the ancestors have died and were buried here. This point becomes a mirror to contemporary society because the role of religion is questioned here in the Post War world.

The speaker begins observing with a casual irreverence, casual disregard for the surroundings for the church. But this gives way to serious questioning of human ideals. The speaker is not a regular churchgoer, but towards the end he appreciates the peace and silence. He also realises that humanity has a need or a spiritual longing for this fulfillment.

Some themes that we observe in Larkin's poetry is religion, as you saw in the

second poem, 'Church Going', love, pessimism because of the time

period, isolation, social chaos and death. His poetic style is conversational in tone with ordinary themes. He uses sharp imagery and vivid descriptions, and pays detailed attention to syntax and rhyme scheme. His poems reflect the poetic world, and the reader is really able to experience that poetic world there. His poems are noted for the intelligibility.

Features of his poetry. They explore the experiences of common people in the modern age. They reflect the dreariness of Post War England. They highlight the spiritual despair of the modern world, because man has lost faith in religion. His poetry shows the simplicity because he believed in simplicity, and finally to conclude. His personality was very solitary. He was a shy and reclusive person and this is reflected in his poetry because in the 1st and 2nd poems he is a solitary speaker. The speaker, is solitary observing things around him. There's no communication with other people.

For further information you can.

Refer to the links.

Thank you for watching.