

Stylistics Analysis of the Poem "Ambulance"

by Philip Larkin

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Abstract: Philip Larkin is known as a movement poet, because there are many poems which were published in the book of poetic movement, New Lines. This movement was started in 1950, against the unreasonable, inflated and extortionate romanticism of 1930's and 1940's. The common features of movement poetry are; the use of irony and wit, an element of satire, the loneliness of modern man, pessimistic outlook on life, realism, use of ordinary diction, use of symbols, and loss of religious faith. Robert Conquest is known as the representative poet of this movement. The poets of this movement believed that the language of poetry should be simple, lucid and intelligible. The poem Ambulance deals with the important features of movement poetry. Through the stylistics study of this poem the researchers will show the loneliness and concept of death in modern man.

Keywords: Stylistics Analysis, Ambulance, Pessimism, Loneliness, Modernism

1. Introduction

This is a very famous poem of Philip Larkin written in 10 January 1961. This poem is about the horrors of death and the impact of dying person on the others people around him. Ambulances can be seen in almost every street and at every corner. They are used for taking a sick man, a dead body or a man who got an accident to the hospital. When an ambulance reached at the gate of a house its siren make other person to think about the sick man and at the same time about their own death. The sight of ambulance makes the people that human life is meaningless and everything in the world is temporary. People feel sympathy for the person being taken to the hospital and call that man a poor soul. But the main problem with man is he forgot that very scene just after few minutes the ambulance departs. The poet describes the condition of sick old man before his death and after he is being taken to hospital in ambulance. The poem has a very pessimistic tone and deals with the theme of death. Word ambulance occurs not in any stanza of the poem but the poet has used such words in poem which suggest use that the poem is about ambulance and this is the real art of Philip Larkin.

2. Materials y Methods

This research work deals with the famous poem "Ambulance" by Philip Larkin. This research is analytical, further prescriptive in nature. The researchers have used many approaches to get the data for this study but, mainly got material from the already published material.

The researcher have used the methods of stylistic analysis offered by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short as stated in their works "A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry" Longman (1969) and "Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays, and Prose (1996) respectively.

Research Questions:

- Why modern man is alone in the world?
- What is concept of death in the minds of modern man?
- What are the common features of Larkin's poetry?

Objectives:

- To analyze the poem stylistically.
- To analyze the lucid language of the poem.
- To discuss the dilemma of modern man.

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The Poem:

AMBULANCE

Closed like confessionals, they thread
Loud noons of cities, giving back
None of the glances they absorb.
Light glossy grey, arms on a plaque,
They come to rest at any kerb:
All streets in time are visited.

Then children strewn on steps or road,
Or women coming from the shops
Past smells of different dinners, see
A wild white face that overtops
Red stretcher-blankets momentarily
As it is carried in and stowed,

And sense the solving emptiness
That lies just under all we do,
And for a second get it whole,
So permanent and blank and true.
The fastened doors recede. Poor soul,
They whisper at their own distress;

For borne away in deadened air
May go the sudden shut of loss
Round something nearly at an end,
And what cohered in it across
The years, the unique random blend
Of families and fashions, there

At last begin to loosen. Far
From the exchange of love to lie
Unreachable inside a room
The traffic parts to let go by
Brings closer what is left to come,
And dulls to distance all we are.

Leech and Short (1981) is of the view that, "The word style has an uncontroversial meaning. Style depends on the context for a given purpose for which the language is being used".

Leech and Short (1981) also said that, "It is the selection of the words from a grand linguistic vocabulary".

Short and Candlin (1989) said that, "Stylistics is a linguistic approach to texts".

According to Freeman (1971), "Stylistics is a sub-discipline which started in the second half of the 20th century".

4. STYLISTICS ANALYSIS OF THE POEM:

The researchers have analyzed the poem with great care and attention to produce a quality product. The researchers have analysed all the figure of Speeches in the poem. Different figures of Speech in this poem are as under:

4.1. Form:

Form of this poem is five stanzas with six lines each as in first stanza;

"Closed like
confessionals, they
thread
Loud noons of cities,
giving back
None of the glances
they absorb.
Light glossy grey, arms
on a plaque,
They come to rest at
any kerb:
All streets in time are
visited."

3. Literature Review

Widdowson (1975) defines stylistics as, "The study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation".

Adejare (1992) makes this clear when he said that, "Style is an ambiguous term".

Lawal (1997) also added that, "It may be reckoned in terms of the sociolinguistic contexts and it may also be reckoned or analyzed on linguistic, semantic and even semiotic terms".

4.2. Rhyme Scheme:

The rhyme scheme of this poem is ABCBCA, for example in second stanza "road" in first line is rhymed with "stowed" in last line, "shops" of second line is rhymed with "overtops" of forth line and "see" of third line is rhymed with "momently" of fifth line.

"Then children strewn on
steps or **road**,

Or women coming from
the **shops**
Past smells of different
dinners, **see**
A wild white face that
overtops
Red stretcher-blankets
momently
As it is carried in and
stowed,"

The fastened doors
recede. Poor soul,
They whisper at their
own distress;"

4.3. Alliteration:

Alliteration is there in first line of first stanza
"Closed like confessionals, **they thread**"

Alliteration is there in forth line of first stanza
"Light **glossy grey**, arms on a
plaque,"

Alliteration is there in third line of second stanza
"Past smells of **different dinners**, see"

Fourth line of second stanza also contains alliteration
"A **wild white** face that **overtops**"

Alliteration is also there in second line of fourth stanza
"May go the **sudden shut** of loss"

Last line of fourth stanza also has alliteration
"Of **families** and **fashions**, there"

Last line of last stanza also has alliteration
"And **dulls** to **distance** all we
are."

4.4. Repetition:

In third stanza there is a repetition of word "And" for four
times, just deliver the idea that death is a bitter truth and we
can't make an escape from it.

"**And** sense the solving
emptiness
That lies just under all
we do,
And for a second get it
whole,
So permanent **and** blank
and true.

4.5. Simile:

Simile is there in very first line of the poem where poet has
compared ambulance with a confessionals box. Confessionals
boxes are those boxes in which a priest listen to the
confessions of people to release them of their sense of
wrongdoing.

"**Closed like confessionals**, they thread"

4.6. Imagery:

In second stanza Larkin gives us a complete image of an
effected site where an ambulance is taking a body to hospital.
Children are playing, women are coming from shopping and
few people are doing dinner in the hotels. It is important to
mention that Larkin images are not visual or auditory but at
the same time his images are concerned with the sense of
smell and taste.

"**Then children strewn**
on steps or road,
Or women coming
from the shops
Past smells of different
dinners, see
A wild white face that
overtops
Red stretcher-blankets
momently
As it is carried in and
stowed,"

4.7. Metaphor:

Metaphor is there in first line of the first stanza by using
the phrase "**they thread**". Larkin has used his phrase in the
poem just to show clear picture of the site of casualty.

"Closed like
confessionals, **they thread**"

4.8. Onomatopoeia:

In poetry when a word presents the sounds that are like the
noises it is known as onomatopoeia. In last line of third
stanza there is Onomatopoeia.

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“They whisper at their
own distress;”

Last line of last stanza also contains onomatopoeia where words describe the sound of ambulance bells.

“And dully to distance
all we are.”

4.9. Oxymoron:

When two words used together and they have different meanings then it is known as oxymoron. Oxymoron is there in last two lines of the fourth stanza where poet tells us common and unique part of our life, after the death and before the death.

“The years, the unique
random blend
Of families and
fashions, there”

4.10. Enjambment:

In poetry when one idea runs over from one stanza to next stanza its known as Enjambment. Enjambment is there in fourth and fifth stanza of the poem where idea of fourth stanza runs over to fifth stanza.

“Of families and
fashions, there”

“At last begin to loosen. Far”

4.11. Themes:

Isolation, death, busy life of city, materialism and loneliness are the themes of this poem and as Larkin is a modern poet so all his poems contain these themes. **Loneliness** and **isolation** are the major themes and they fit with the life of modern men.

4.12. Symbolism:

Ambulance is the major symbol in this poem. Ambulance symbolizes **death, road accident, illness and diseases**.

5. Conclusions

It very important to note that Larkin has never used the word ambulance even a single time in the poem but the choices of word used by him are very well. It looks like he is master of playing with words and use the words to meet the requirements of wide readership. Larkin's poem "Ambulance" has a very pessimistic theme but the poet is surely very successful in creating a solemn tone to deliver the message that death will come to us all. By using the ambulance as a symbol, that is something from daily life that we may see in any corner of the street at any time, he realized us that this could well happen to us. Just like in this poem, Larkin artfully borrow a variety of poetic technique to describe a daily life experience and to make it important and significant to a wider readership.

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