

Larkin's portrayal of
place in "i remember,
i remember" and
"places, loved ones"



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Philip Larkin's wrote his collection of poems *The Less Deceived* in 1955, and it became a work which garnered him public recognition. His poems often include a deep sense of his feelings of inadequacy and contain his view that he did not belong within society or at least that he never fulfilled the requirements of society's expectations. As a consequence of this his works often contain a melancholic and negative mood. An example of Larkin not meeting the expectations of society can be found in the fact that he never felt that he belonged in a specific place, this view is expressed in his two poems, I " Remember, I Remember" and " Places, Loved Ones.:

The poem " I Remember, I Remember: portrays the physical journey of Larkin on a train where he passes through the place in which he was born, Coventry. This is shown by the lexical choice of the word " line" in the opening of the poem and the later reference to a " whistle" both of which have connotations with the railway environment. Despite this journey to his place of origin Larkin is revealed to be just stopping in an unmoving train to some other unspecified destination. This shows his lack of attachment to the location of his birth, throughout the whole transience of the poem he remains onboard the train. The reason for his lack of attachment is described later on in the course of the poem when his uneventful childhood is revealed. The classic imagery that people normally associate with their place of origin is illustrated through Larkin's use of reference to the literary works of authors who have romanticized the world of childhood such as Enid Blyton. Larkin achieves this reference in stanzas four and five of his poem. His use of images such as " Spoken to by an old hat" and " flowers and fruit" provide a direct contrast to the nature of his own childhood. He feels no connection to

the location of Coventry due to the fact that he did not have the idyllic childhood that is illustrated in so many literary works. The use of the negative to portray this area of Larkin's life is characteristic of Larkin, bestowing a typical melancholic and depressed tone to the mood of the poem. This is another indication of Larkin's own personal feelings of not fitting in with the average member of society, he has not gone through the same childhood experiences as most people.

Larkin portrays his disconnection to his place of origin through the lack of emotional response that he has for being there. He describes at the end of the poem his uneventful childhood as being not the "places fault" again revealing his feelings of inadequacy, he does not blame the location but himself for not having the idyllic childhood that is presented by the authors that he makes reference to in stanzas four and five. The regular structure and rhythm of the poem again reveal his lack of strong emotion or attachment to the place where he was born. This is suggested through the constant regularity. Just as an irregular structure could be seen to emphasise strong emotions which take over the structure of the poem, the ordered consistent regularity of Larkins poem acts to highlight the absence of strong emotion. The regular consistent iambic pentameter rhythm mimics the passage of time within the poem and also reflects the theme of growing up. The regular rhyme pattern, A, A, B, B, C, again reflects the uneventful nature of his childhood. The one break in this regularity and uniformity of the poem is its final line where Larkin results to the conclusion that places are interchangeable, he could have "unspent" his childhood anywhere due to the fact that "Nothing, like something, happens anywhere".

Similarly, in his poem "Places, Loved Ones," Larkin demonstrates his lack of connection to any particular location. This poem contains strong references to Larkin's acknowledgement of the fact that he does not fit the typical expectation of society. This is shown through his reference to other expectations of society such as marriage, Larkin reveals that he has not, "met that special one" again demonstrating his acute awareness of the fact that he does not fit the regular pattern. Larkin's lack of success in love is also a prominent theme across his other works for example, maiden name, again in this area of his life it appears to be his own inadequacy's and lack of commitment that prevent him from being successful.

In "Places, Loved Ones," Larkin condemns the expectations of society that you have to belong to a place by portraying this expectation as a removal of individual freedom. This is shown in the line, "You want no choice". Although this façade of meaning that Larkin creates within the poems acts as a cover to hide his deeper desires to belong to a person and place that he is unwilling to admit. He does this in an attempt to dispel another expectation of society that those who do not find their person and place should be damaged by this emptiness in their lives. This view is achieved by the use of the visual image created by the lexical choice of the word "mashed" which gives a sense of the damaging effects of not belonging to a person or place. Recalling "I Remember, I Remember," "Places, Loved Ones" contains a regular structure and rhyme scheme. This is again reflective of the passage of time. Larkin describes the ongoing search through his lexical choice of the word "found" for person and place upon which to have an "instant claim". The regular rhythm also acts as a cover for Larkin's hidden desires to belong.

In the regularity a sense of emotional detachment to place and people is expressed.

The same negative tone is thus found in both of the two poems " I Remember, I Remember" and " Places, Loved Ones." Such purposeful negativity used to describe the sense of not belonging to a place. In both poems, Larkin portrays place as something that he feels no emotional attachment to. The poems also present Larkin's feeling of inadequacy that he does not fit into the template that society provides due to the fact that he does not belong to a specific place. This sense of not belonging and detachment provides both poems with a melancholic mood typical of the style of Larkin.