

Irony in MacNeice 's poetry (Irony)

Wijdan Hussien Ali

Ministry of education on, Baghdad, Iraq

Directorate of Baghdad Education Karkh III

Institute of fine Arts

thesun048@gmail.com

Abstract

This study is divided into two sections and a conclusion. Section one is an introduction and critical reception, while section two talks about MacNeice's poems and the irony in his poetry.

Irony in MacNeice's poetry seeks to present his perception of the world around his perception of the world around him. And while MacNeice does not seek to hide the sorrow, he attempts to display this sorrow with a touch of light heartedness. As Louis MacNeice illustrates, even death and despair can have a lighter side.

The conclusion sums the main findings of the study.

MacNeice is a slight bit impersonal at times, but only insofar as he does not explicitly place himself as the speaker by using me. Just as he looks at life's flux in. Variations on Heraclitus, his take on the Greek philosopher Heraclitus' idea that one can never step in the same river twice due to the constant movement of the world around us. MacNeice's notion is that one is not to be apprehensive about these uncertainties but simply to take them as they come. MacNeice takes on the issue of licentiousness and promiscuity and while poking fun he exposes the lonely and decrepit final condition of the libertine. In this manner, and even if MacNeice was not personally a libertine, we can be sure that this is an issue he thought about. Otherwise, thus MacNeice achieves both arm's length discussion of a social issue and an ironic look at a playboy who is representative of many a poet. the poet does not give you a full and accurate picture of the world nor a full and accurate picture of himself, but he gives an amalgam which, if successful, represent truthfully his own relation to the world. Thus the modern poetry of MacNeice

does not simply speak of abstract social issue such as sexual licentiousness or if strictly personal issues. His modern poetry is blend of personal emotion and social issues, personal not in a heavy - handed tone but with satire and irony. For in the real world, sorrow exists side by side with joy and laughter.

Introduction

The traditional view of modernism are alienation, loss, despair, and a rejection of society, this traditional view is a movement that seeks to create a new language, a new metaphors, and supposedly new depths of desolation.

The poems of Louis MacNeice display a simplicity and humorous conversational approach which is seemingly at odds with, or simply disguises, the seriousness of his ideas. His evolving forms of the modernist ethic poetry not limitless like the Romantics or stoically unaffected like some classicists, Hence MacNeice does not radically break away from tradition as modernists as doing, but flows into a new style that places the self in the physical world and address its problems and another's own personal fears, through Irony and satire.

Louis MacNeice's *prognosis* begins with lines "good bye Winter, the days are getting longer"(line1 & 2). The speaker begins by addressing winter with a capital W: making it a personified that adds a depth of emotions. And links winter to negative emotion, and the exaggerated dryness of tone and formality in these two lines forces the reader to view this poem. Adding a mournful undertone to the words of the speaker, thus, the poem starts off with heavy despair, a stereotypically modern beginning.

The third line in the first stanza offers a traditional British cultural symbol: tea. This "tea leaf in the teacup"(line 3 & 4) in the poem *prognosis*. That is "herald of stranger"(line 4) in the same poem is not the cheerful that the British cup of tea typically represents. Rather, this "herald of stranger"(line 4), introduces an uncertainty to the speaker's tone, which continues in later lines such as "will his name be John/or will his name be Johan" "will he come to beg / or will he come to bargain", and other such imaginations of who the stranger will be or what he will bring, both positive and negative. The word herald suggests a medieval messenger to a noble court; the word itself lends richness to the ears because of the rolling "r" sound in its pronunciation.

However, as fine as the imagery sounds with its medieval pomp and finery the herald brought both good news and bad. Absolutely this is where the uncertainty of the speaker, is the impending arrival of the stranger good or bad.

This multiplicities prognosis is the uncertainty set up by MacNeice from the beginning of the poem, but while one might expect these various uncertainties to induce a paralyzing anxiety for the speaker, this is not the case. MacNeice's jocular tone undercuts the seriousness of these possibilities at each step by means of humorous language and Irony. For example, MacNeice allows the "tea –leaves in the tea cup"(line 3) in the poem *prognosis*, usually the wares of old wives attempting fortunetelling, to be a vehicle for actual uncertainty for the speaker. This situation presents clear dramatic irony when the leader realizes the absurdity of someone worrying about the arrival of a stranger and what this might mean for him based on the dreg of a cup of tea. Moreover, the title of the poem "*Prognosis*" is supposed to be prediction of the future, especially of the probable course and outcome of disease but as such, the speaker does not offer a definite prediction but rather multiple possibilities. Thus, MacNeice not only jobs at the speaker for relying on tea – leaves in order to tell the future, but also jobs at the speaker for being a bad – fortune- teller, i.e. being unable to offer anything substantial to reader.

The repetition of the word will in the first line of every following stanza saves the third intensifies this continuous prognosis. Positively toned lines such as "... will he bring me gladness" are contrasted with negative lines such as "will he come to poster. / To cringer to bluster."(Line 6, line 13, and line 14 in *prognosis*).The result of such vacillation between positive and negative is to not place the speakers in position of despair or fearful uncertainty, as he might seem in the first stanza.

The heavily accented words in lines "Will he bring me business "(line 5 in *prognosis*),and "or will he comes for cure"(line 7 in the same poem), possess using – song quality that lend lightness to the speakers tone. Moreover, the AABA, thyme scheme of these lines, with the words business, gladness, cure and sickness at the end of the four lines of the second stanza respectively, again cause the reader to either associate the first two lines and

the fourth, or to see them opposites "irony". Either way, it adds to the light tone of the speaker. The image given is that of an old Englishman drinking tea on his porch, rocking back and forth in his chair while musing about who his impending guest will be.

Irony in MacNeice's poetry

MacNeice's ironic tone in undercutting the seriousness of the speaker's uncertainty continues in the fourth stanza, with the threatening image of a gun. However stranger is not holding the gun, cocked to fire, but has only "A promise in his palm / or a gun in his holster" (line 13 & 14 in *prognosis*). This juxtaposition of the gun's position is what lessens the seemingly belligerent attitude if the stranger in this stanza. The stranger comes not to fight or even to yell in threatening fashion but only "To cringe or to bluster"(line 14). Bluster here is a particularly appropriate word to convey a sense of empty threat, not an actual danger to the speaker. In fact by images such as these, MacNeice heavily undercuts the traditional modernist theme of despair, and pokes fun at the idea of worrying about uncertainties of the future.

MacNeice's choice of language, as shown in previous examples, the non – rhyme of John and Jonah, in the lines "Will his name be John / or will his name be Jonah? By the addition of one letters, a takes the leader from a writer of the Gospel and one of God's favored men on earth to the prophet who didn't follow God's command and was thereby swallowed by a whale. John is an epic religious figure who speaks of judgment day and "Fire and brimstone." While the image of a man being swallowed by a whale and then emerging chastened by his experience is quite a bit less awe-inspiring additionally, the long syllabic pronunciation on the first part of "Jon – ah" gives it an almost mournful tone, as opposed to the stronger definitiveness in pronouncing "John" And the "Island of Lona" stretches out the pronunciation in the same fashion, it is this juxtaposition of strong and weak symbols that continues a sense of musing on the part of speakers, and not some definite prognosis.

MacNeice continues this theme in almost every stanza, playing off uncertainty against mock threats and jest. In the seventh stanza, the speaker wonders what the stranger's message will be. "War or work or marriage?"

"News as new as down / or an old adage? (line 26, 27 & 28 in his poem *prognosis*). This comparison between adage and marriage, appearing at the end of the fourth and second lines respectively in this AABA stanza, makes marriage into an "Old adage". A pithy and familiar statement generally accepted as wise. The comparison makes light of marriage, but at the same time, adage fun at "war or work or marriage", turning all three messages of the herald into clichés themes.

Following this, the speaker asks when the uncertainty will end and whether the stranger will give "a champion / answer to my question / or will his words be dark / and his ways evasion? (line 29...32), the first line, which ends with the word "champion" suggests the coming of some knight in shining armor, but the second line added on, "champion / answer to my question" immediately turns champion into schoolroom slang for "Excellent". This transforms the first option in the stanza to a childish naive statement, while the lines "or will his words be dark / and his ways evasion" seem humorously more likely, given the overall theme of uncertainty and MacNeice's tendency to poke fun at the speaker. Moreover, the long "V - a" sound in "Evasion" also stretches out the sound, adding to the overall uncertainty. By this point, however it is hard to take the speaker's dire tone seriously, and one is forced to acquiesce to MacNeice's lighter undertones. For MacNeice, life is about uncertainties and multiplicities, and these are simple to be experienced rather than worried about.

MacNeice then plays his final card in the last stanza as the speaker wonders "Will his name be love / and all his talk be crazy? / Or will his name be death / and his message easy? MacNeice again reverses" (line 33...36 in *prognosis* poem).

The traditional attributes of love as beautiful and simple and death as harsh and feared, by calling love crazy and death easy. But putting two heavily written about themes, love and death, in the final stanza, MacNeice emphasizes the trite nature of any supposed telling of the future. MacNeice final "prognosis" is this nothing is what it is, and what starts off as a dark sojourn into the speaker's thoughts turns into an ironic look at the speaker's unnecessary worrying at life's uncertainties.

MacNeice” the Libertine” is another poem that uses irony and a light tone. This time to depict Fun at the licentious lifestyle of a hedonistic man. It exposes a very real social issue, that of promiscuity in modern society. Unlike “prognosis” where there is only one speaker, in “The libertine” both an external narrator and the libertine himself take turns speaking. The poem’s first four words “In the old days” [the Libertine], convey a very grandfather tone that would seemingly imply the virtue of the old as opposed to the immorality of the younger generation. This is akin to a parent of grandparent telling a younger person. “In our day we didn’t do things like this” a sort of admonition against the looseness of the modern generation.] However, the next few words, “With married women’s stockings / Twisted round his bedpost he felt himself a gay/ Dog, convey quite a different sense; in the old days, this particular young man lie. The libertine was quite licentious. this sense of immorality is increased by use of the word “Married” in Line 1 – not only is he having affairs with many women, but specifically, with other men’s wives, thereby rending the social Fabric. Moreover, the word “Twisted” conveys something lightly wound, perhaps a metaphor for the licentiousness that is tightly wrapped around his life – it might even be so tightly wound as to be choking the life out of him.

The speaker creates a somewhat colloquial term for the libertine, saying “He felt himself a guy / Dog. This is not just a sign of the strain of his lovemaking, because the choice of liver as opposed to heart points to something else. The heart would be the natural organ strained by excess physical activity, while the liver, an organ that purifies the blood, would be strain more by harmful substances such as excess amounts of alcohol. Because of excess sexual activity that is harmful to his own sense of morality or wellbeing. And thus, the libertine can only cry. “O leave me easy, leave me alone” a phrase repeated at the end of every stanza; the image of the libertine as a “skirt – chasing” “gay / Dog” is now reversed by the repetition of this phrase, and ironically, he now seeks to avoid the women who seek him out.

Additionally, the ABCBC form of the poem seems a newer more modern version of the traditional ABAB or BCBC for these purposes) rhyme scheme, with a non – rhyming line at the head of each stanza. This is an

example of the modern craft in MacNeice: he does not seek to radically break from the older tradition, but appropriate its style into his own evolving from poetry. Rhyme is still a part of the modern craft but the innovation is the addition of a non – rhyming at the opening of each stanza. It is MacNeice’s modern stamp upon a traditional style.

MacNeice continues to use wordplay to poke fun and irony at the libertine, describing him as “Voluptuary in his teens and cynic in his twenties”. “Voluptuary” a reader might ask, and with a good reason. Although the word means one who is given over to luxury and sensual pleasure, it is usually applied in the context of “a voluptuous woman”. The rolling sound one’s tongue produces when he saying the ‘g’ in voluptuous makes it a very sensual and charming word. Hence, by this word, MacNeice both accentuates the language of the poem and jests at the lifestyle of the libertine. the words “... cynic in his twenties” add to this humor, with the radical irony of the libertine as a cynic who thinks all people to be motivated by selfishness, while he himself is driven by desire for pleasure.

MacNeice continues to undercut the image of the now despite libertine with images of the libertine’s youth MacNeice speaks of the libertine as one who “ran through women like a child through growing hay / looking for lost toy whose capture might a tone / for his own guilt and the cosmic disarray”. Likening the libertine to a child looking for history both creates a more poignant image of the libertine’s immaturity and apparent lack of purpose in life, but also in sense, gives depth to the portrait of the libertine. He is a man desperately seeking the one woman who will make sense of his world – thus, these lines add both color and seriousness to the poem.

While the “toy” he seeks is just an object to give him pleasure, the libertine, like the child is perhaps deluded in thinking that the one woman he finds will fix the comic disarray. Moreover, the word “cosmic” creates a universal scope that goes beyond the finite window of the libertine’s personal life, and perhaps even hyperbolizes the effect that the libertine feels he can have on the world. Unfortunately, the libertine is unsuccessful at this quest, and the repetition of the line “O leave me easy, leave me alone”. At the end of each stanza serves to return the reader to the present state of mind of the libertine. MacNeice balances the humorous language and imagery of the

libertine's past with the actual reality of the libertine's current life; this is one sign of the modern poet: the presentation of the speaker and the subject in the real world. Possessing real problems, language that exposes the sorrows of the subject while bringing light – heartedness to the situation.

Conclusion:

Modern poetry as seem in MacNeice neither seeks to be detached from the emotional realm nor seeks to overwhelm the reader with sorrow. MacNeice simply writes of his place in the world, combining his personal introspection with a humor and irony that makes his poetry not stuffy and intellectual but appealing to society as a whole. As MacNeice states in the preface to modern poetry: Thus MacNeice illuminates the troubles of the society he live in, while offering a look at the lighter side of these sorrow. He uses irony and satire to mock excessive despair while disguising the seriousness of his idea by this very irony and satire.

MacNeice is a slight bit impersonal at times, but only insofar as he does not explicitly place himself as the speaker by using me. Just as he looks at life's flax in. Variations on Heraclitus", his take on the Greek philosopher Heraclitus' idea that one can never step in the same river twice due to the constant movement of the world around us, he also offers a view on the multiplicities of life in "Prognosis". MacNeice's notion is that one is not to be apprehensive about these uncertainties but simply to take them as they come. Similarly, in "The libertine". MacNeice takes on the issue of licentiousness and promiscuity and while poking fun at the antics of the libertine, also exposes the lonely and decrepit final condition of the libertine. In this manner, MacNeice points to amoral of restraint regarding sex, while retaining a light – heartedness throughout the poem. But how personal is this issue to him? And we cannot be sure if this dilemma that the libertine felt was one that MacNeice personally underwent. Nevertheless, poets write of what they feel, and even if MacNeice was not personally a libertine, we can be sure that this is an issue he thought about. Otherwise, why write about it? And thus MacNeice achieves both arm's length discussion of a social issue and an ironic look at a playboy who is representative of many a poet. As v wrote in the conclusion to modern poetry: A personal essay, the poet does not give



you a full and accurate picture of the world nor a full and accurate picture of himself, but he gives an amalgam which, if successful, represent truthfully his own relation to the world. Thus the modern poetry of MacNeice does not simply speak of abstract social issue such as sexual licentiousness or if strictly personal issues. His modern poetry is blend of personal emotion and social issues, personal not in a heavy - handed tone but with satire and irony. For in the real world, sorrow exists side by side with joy and laughter.

Bibliography

- Springboard poems 1941-1944(London: Faber & Faber, 1944: New York: Random House, 1945).
- Collected poems 1925-1948 (London: Faber& Faber: 1948: New York: Oxford university press 1963).
- Visitations (London: Faber& Faber, 1957: New York: Oxford press 1958).
- The last Ditch (Dublin: Cuala press, 1940).
- The New York: Random House, 1937 poetry of W. B. Yeats (London, New York & Toronto: Oxford university press, 1941).
- Plant and phantom (London: Faber &Faber, 1941).

السخرية في شعر ماكنيس (السخرية)
م.م. وجدان حسين علي

وزارة التربية - مديرية تربية بغداد / الكرخ الثالثة
thesun048@gmail.com

مستخلص البحث:

هذه الدراسة مقسمة الى فصلين وخاتمة. الفصل الاول هو مقدمة لقصائد ماكنيس واستقباله الحرج للعالم حوله. اما الفصل الثاني فيدور حول قصائد ماكنيس والسخرية في شعره. ان السخرية في شعر ماكنيس تسعى الى تقديم تصويره للعالم من حوله ماكنيس لا يسعى الى اخفاء حزنه بل هو يحاول اظهار ذلك الحزن بلمسه من الخفة وكما يوضح انه حتى الموت واليأس يمكن ان يكون لهما جانب أخف. ان النتائج التي توصل اليها ماكنيس ان المرء يجب ان لا يكون قلقا بشأن جوانب الحياة حيث يمكنه الاستفادة من صعوباتها ليتخطاها وعدم العوده لها ثانيا حيث تبني ماكنيس فلسفة الفيلسوف اليوناني هيراقليطس بانه من غير الممكن للمرء ان يخطو في نفس النهر مرتين بسبب الحركة المستمرة للعالم من حولنا ان فكرة ماكنيس هي ان المرء يجب ان يواجه كل صعوبات الحياة حيث ان ماكنيس ينظر بسخرية لمصاعب الحياة مم اجل تذليلها. حيث ان ماكنيس اعطى مديحا من الصدق والسخرية في اشعاره ليصف العالم. ان شعر ماكنيس الحديث هو مزيج من المشاعر الشخصية والقضايا الاجتماعية وبالرغم من ثقل كلماته الشعرية الا انها تكون مثقلة بالهجاء والسخرية لانه في العالم الحقيقي يتواجد الحزن جنبا الى جنب مع الفرح والضحك.