

Why Gerry Rafferty's Lyrics in 'Baker Street' Are Worth Paying Attention to

I was recently in a bar having dinner with a friend when Gerry Rafferty's hit 1978 song "Baker Street" came on. When my friend mentioned that he loved the song, I agreed and noted the song's powerful lyrics.

"Really?" he responded. "I never paid much attention to the lyrics."

Most people, of course, remember "Baker Street" for its wailing saxophone, and my friend was no different. Nor was I, for many years. But at some point—I don't know when—I began to pay attention to the song's lyrics. They go like this:

Winding your way down on Baker Street

Light in your head and dead on your feet

Well, another crazy day

You'll drink the night away

And forget about everything

This city desert makes you feel so cold

It's got so many people, but it's got no soul

And it's taken you so long

To find out you were wrong

When you thought it held everything

You used to think that it was so easy

You used to say that it was so easy

But you're trying, you're trying now

Another year and then you'd be happy

Just one more year and then you'd be happy

But you're crying, you're crying now

Way down the street there's a light in his place

He opens the door, he's got that look on his face

And he asks you where you've been

You tell him who you've seen

And you talk about anything

He's got this dream about buying some land

He's gonna give up the booze and the one-night stands

And then he'll settle down

In some quiet little town

And forget about everything

*But you know he'll always keep moving
You know he's never gonna stop moving
'Cause he's rolling, he's the rolling stone
And when you wake up, it's a new morning
The sun is shining, it's a new morning
And you're going, you're going home*

The lyrics—in contrast to the seductive sax and upbeat strings and keyboard—are rather dark. It's not your typical rock/pop song about finding or losing love.

I've never heard "Baker Street" explained, but my take on the song is this: It's about two lonely people in a city. They find comfort in booze, chemicals, and (occasionally) each other. The relationship is probably dysfunctional, but they are struggling to change. Struggling to grow. Struggling to find *meaning*.

“Baker Street” peaked at #3 in the UK and held the #2 spot in the U.S. for six consecutive weeks. I think part of the reason the song was such a success is because the lyrics touched on something a little deeper than most rock tunes, something that resonated with audiences. And though the song is 40 years old now, I have a hunch it resonates even more now than it did then.

It has been more than a decade since Pope John Paul II [observed](#) that “[o]ne of the most significant aspects of our current situation . . . is the ‘crisis of meaning.’” Some mental health [professionals have linked this crisis](#) to the [surge of mental illness](#) in our society.

Health professionals say [it’s quite common](#) to cope with feelings of meaningless like the people in Rafferty’s song—late nights, booze, one-night stands. (And, of course, there are additional ways to cope or distract ourselves that are more common to modern man: texting, workaholism, Twitter, internet porn, day-trading, etc.)

The point of the song gets at what I believe is an important truth: our lives often turn into sad patterns that are difficult to escape. This is especially true, I think, if people lack clear purpose and meaning in their lives.

The song made me think of something I recently read in Rod Dreher’s new book [The Benedict Option](#), which focuses on Christian living in a post-Christian nation. Now, most Christians would not confess to living in a state of meaninglessness. However, I think many Christians suffer from a different (but similar) problem in our culture: a lack of a coherent *order*.

In his book, Dreher concludes that disorder is “the defining characteristic of the modern world.” It permeates most parts of our lives in the Western world, and it affects people of faith and non-believers alike.

As a result, many of us have found ourselves walking through life much like the two people in “Baker Street”—lost, aimless, dead on our feet. Why? A monk who spoke to Dreher—one Father Cassian—might have touched on a clue. He brought up Pope Benedict’s observation that “the Western world lives as though God does not exist.”

“I think that’s true. Fragmentation, fear, disorientation, drifting—those are widely diffused characteristics of our society,” the monk continued.

How many of us feel this way? I’d be lying if I said I did not identify to some degree with the description above (although, like many men, my feelings usually exist in a state of healthy repression).

Dreher, I suspect, would probably suggest this is the result of people of faith living in a secularized world. He might be correct, but I’m not sure.

In any event, it makes me wonder how many people feel the way Father Cassian described—drifting, fragmented, anxious—but continue to get up and do the same thing over and over just like the people in “Baker Street.” Convinced that in another year, then they’ll be happy.

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