# *Philip Larkin as a Postmodernist: A Philosophical Approach*

Prof. Amir Shebl El-Komy
*Professor of Mass Communication at Cairo University*

I wish to argue here that Philip Larkin is a Postmodernist, rather than a Modernist poet.

The concept of Postmodernism was formulated towards the end of the 1970s, with features wrongly attributed to Modernism, such as the absence of the old "fixities" that were based on the "whole" of Hegel. With the absence of the Hegelian coherent and totalitarian system, as well as the absence of big systems, "form" is said to have degenerated into formlessness, and order into chaos, as Enani says [1]. With the fall, or absence of Hegel's, as well as Marx's absolutes, the pluralization of world views has become evident. This has given birth to new social forms, new political and economic orders, and the new science of quantum theory.

Postmodernism started in effect in 1968 with the students' demonstrations in France, England, United States, Egypt, Algeria, Mexico, and Chekoslovakia. It was a revolution for freedom. In literature, the chief heroes of Modernism died nearly at the same time of the students' revolt, e.g. T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) and E.L. Pound (1885-1972). Since the beginning of his career as a poet, Philip Larkin made no secret of his hostility to the ideas and techniques of Modernism. His

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most severe attack on modernist art appears in the introduction to his collection of jazz criticism, *All What Jazz*, where Modernism is equated with mystification and outrage. Modernist experiments, whether in music, poetry, or painting, are regarded by Larkin as "irresponsible exploitations of technique in contradiction to human life as we know it" [2]. It may seem surprising, then, that the most striking development in Larkin criticism has been the insistence in the 1980s that his poetry has a profoundly 'symbolist' and, by implication, 'Modernist' dimension. This paper argues against this claim.

Larkin has explained his attitudes in his remarks to Ian Hamilton: he resents the "critical industry which is connected with culture in the abstract," a problem he lays at the door of Eliot and Pound: "to me the whole of the ancient world, the whole of classical and biblical mythology means very little …" [3]. Larkin made no secret of his anti-cosmopolitanism, his anti-Americanism, and his hatred of "the aberration of Modernism that blighted all the arts. He took every opportunity to attack the Modernist giants (Pablo Picasso, Ezra Pound, and Charlie Parker)."[4] He also made much of his literary conversion from Yeats to Hardy, which he defined as a rejection of grand rhetorical gestures and an acceptance of human limits. Hardy gave him confidence in his own authoritative pessimism. Thereafter, Larkin always insisted on an empirical, antiheroic, anti-transcendental poetic form. He took a skeptical, commonsensical approach to poetry.

It was Eliot who gave the Modernist poetic moment its character by stating "poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult".[5] Larkin commenting on this, in his essay on Betjeman, writes:

"For it is as obvious as it is strenuously denied that, in this

century, English poetry went off on a loop-line that took it away from the general reader. Several factors caused this. One was the aberration of Modernism that blighted all the arts. One was the emergence of English literature as an academic subject, and the consequent demand for a kind of poetry that needed elucidation. One, I am afraid, was the culture-mongering activities of the Americans Eliot and Pound. In any case, the strong connection between poetry and the reading public that had been forged by Kipling, Housman, Brooke and *Omar Khayyam* was destroyed as a result. It is arguable that Betjeman was the writer who knocked over the 'No Road Through to Real Life' signs that this new tradition had erected, and who restored direct intelligible communication to poetry, not as a pompous pseudo-military operation of literary warfare but simply by exclaiming 'Gosh, how lovely' (or 'Gosh, how awful') and roaring with laughter. He became the living contradiction of Eliot's contention that the better the poet, the more complete the separation between the man who suffers and the mind which creates". [6]

Behind Larkin's careful choice of clear language and familiar imagery lies not just an aversion to myth and allusion but a positive concern to correct what he calls in his book *All What Jazz* (1970) "an 'imbalance' between 'the two tensions from which art springs … the tension between the artist and his material, and between the artist and his audience'. The very high standard of linguistic scrupulosity set by Larkin has, it may be argued, helped poets like Geoffrey Hill and Seamus Heaney, who are in some ways the heirs of the 'Apocalyptic' poets of the forties, to avoid the looseness, obscurity, and pretentiousness of these writers while pursuing themes and using methods utterly opposed to Larkin's." [7]

Can it be that, as Eliot dominated the first half of the twentieth century, Larkin prevailed in the second half and the first decade of this century? I do not think this is completely unlikely. After all, his poems are memorized in schools and assigned on examination papers. In telling us about postwar Postmodern Britain, he is not alone, but backed by other poetic voices. His poems express the contemporary British mood, a Postmodernist condition that this paper proposes to discuss.

The task of the analysis of the *Zeitgeist* of Modernism and Postmodernism demands specific tools and invites certain kinds of treatment. One could be the contrast between Hegel and Kant: While Modernism arose from the ideal of knowledge based on Hegel, while Post-modernism grew out of the ideal of knowledge based on Kant.

Hegel's ideas started to dominate British life and thought after the appearance of J.H. Sterling's *The Secret of Hegel* in 1865. During the remainder of the nineteenth century and well into the middle of twentieth century, a group of vigorous thinkers, profoundly influenced by Hegel, assumed leadership of British thought. Among the influential figures of this movement were Thomas Hill Green, Edward Cared and Francis H. Bradley, whose work initiated Modernism in the 1890s. The problems dealt with were knowledge and the relationship between appearance and reality. Bradley deals with this subject in Chapter III "Relation and Quality" of his book *Appearance and Reality*.[8]

According to Bradley, Professor Frank Thilly writes, that the aim of metaphysics is to comprehend reality and to find a way of thinking about reality that is not self-contradictory. Reality is consistent and is compatible with itself. Whatever is inconsistent

with itself is unreal. Appearances can be inconsistent and contradictory. Reality, on the other hand, does not contradict itself; absolute reality is a unity and not a plurality: appearances may be manifested in a plurality of forms, and plurality implies that there are relations between appearances, and that some appearances may be inconsistent with, or contradictory to, each other. Plurality as appearance is transcended by the unity of absolute reality.

According to Bradley, all appearances can be experienced as a unity in Absolute reality. The Absolute is not an abstract system of relations between its appearances. It is actual experience, which is an all-inclusive unity. In the Absolute, there is nothing finite or imperfect, but there is perfect unity. Bradley says that it is impossible for finite beings to fully understand the existence of Absolute reality.

Appearance is nothing without reality, and reality is nothing without its appearances. Thus, a degree of reality is found in all appearances, and Bradley concludes that reality is an all-inclusive unity. Out of these ideas came Fascism and totalitarian regimes, in addition to two world wars. This caused the decline of Hegelianism.

With the decline of Hegelianism came the reign of natural science and materialism, and the temporary eclipse of Hegel's philosophy.

Under these circumstances, it was natural that philosophers should again take up the problem of knowledge, to which Kant had given such careful and sober attention, and subject the various intellectual tendencies of the age to critical examination. The critical philosophy, writes Thilly, became the rallying-point for all those who opposed both the methods of the Hegelians and the progress of materialism, as well as for those who distrusted metaphysics altogether.

At the beginning of the 1960s, however, the ideas that combined to

shape the Post-modernism stemming from Kant found their way into English thought. What is the essence of Kant's thought about appearance and reality? Kant argues, "We cannot transcend our experience or have a priori knowledge of the supersensible, of things-in-themselves, of things as they are, apart from the way they affect consciousness. Knowledge involves perception, but things-in-themselves cannot be perceived by the senses: in sense perception, we know only the way things appear to consciousness, not what they are in themselves. Nor can they be perceived or intuited by the intellect; we do not possess intellectual intuition, we cannot see things face to face, at one glance, in the mind's eye, as it were; the intellect is discursive, not intuitive. If we apply categories to such a thing-in-itself, we cannot justify their claim to validity: we cannot prove, for example, that behind every existing thing there is a substance in an intelligible world. We can, however, think of such a thing-in-itself, speak of it as something to which none of the predicates of sense perception applies, and say that it is neither in space nor in time, that it does not change, and so on. Not a single category, however, can be applied to it, because we have no means of knowing whether anything corresponding to it exists. We should never know whether anything existed corresponding to the category of substance if perception did not furnish us with a case in which the category is applied. In the case of the thing-in-itself, however, perception can afford no evidence of the application of the category" (Thilly, 427-8).

The thing-in-itself, as Thilly writes in his review, is essentially unknowable, but the concept of a thing-in-itself is not self-contradictory, for we surely cannot maintain that the phenomenal order is the only possible one. We can have sensible knowledge only of sensible things, not of things-in-themselves; the

senses cannot presume to know everything the intellect thinks. The concept of the thing-in-itself or *noumenon* is at least thinkable, as something not knowable by the senses, but as something capable of being known by intellectual intuition. It is a limiting *concept*; it says to the knowing mind: here is your limit; you can go no further, for here is where your jurisdiction ceases. You can know only phenomena; the non-phenomenal, the noumenal, the intelligible is beyond you. To this effect, Thilly says:

"I know things not as they are in themselves, but only as they appear to me. Similarly, I do not know myself as I am, but only as I appear to myself. I am conscious of my existence, of my activity, of my spontaneity. But, consciousness of oneself is not knowledge of one's *self*. To know is to have percepts. I do not perceive my self, my ego, nor do I possess an intellectual intuition of my self; I see myself through the glasses of inner perception, that is, through the time-form, as a succession of states. But, though I cannot know the ego in the sense of perceiving it, I can think it. Indeed, Kant's whole theory of knowledge is based on the supposition of such an ego: the synthetic unity of apperception is nothing but the self-conscious self. There can be no knowledge without a self-conscious, unifying self; but this self itself cannot be known in the sense of being perceived directly" (Thilly, 428).

It is evident, therefore, that we cannot have universal and necessary or a priori knowledge of anything that is non-perceivable. Hence, we cannot have a metaphysics that transcends experience, the metaphysics of things-in-themselves, a metaphysics that can offer us genuine knowledge of a non-phenomenal world in which reside free will, immortality, and God.[9]

Why is this study of Hegel's metaphysics and Kant's metaphysics

important for our study of Larkin's poetry? One believes that a literary technique always relates back to the writer's metaphysics. The critics' task is to define the latter before evaluating the former. Now, it is immediately obvious that Larkin's metaphysics, being Postmodern, is the metaphysics of Kant.

The question is, ‘what is the style that can give expression to such the metaphysics as appearances and reality?’ The answer is irony, for what "irony" is but the discrepancy between appearance and reality. It is the incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs. It is the use of words to express something different from and often opposite to this literal meaning. It is an expression or utterance marked by a deliberate contrast between apparent and intended meaning.

Irony for Larkin is a literary style employing such contrasts for rhetorical effect and is, in fact, the essence of literature for him. As he put it once in a letter, "one might almost say that it's the mixture of truth and untruth that makes literature."[10]

Irony helps Larkin to organize his poems according to a rough dialectic of thesis and antithesis and to resolve this conflict into a synthesis, though sometimes he does not give this resolution and, thus, his poems create a sense of frustration. Larkin is good at showing contradictions in the poems themselves. Irony helps the reader to see how contraries and oppositions are contained within the poet's own language. Irony helps Larkin to be able to deny by affirmation or to affirm by denying, "it is at least, the negative qualification of the positive which is central to Larkin's irony."[11]

Another thing that justifies this long introduction about Hegel and Kant is that the writer believes that a poetic theory always relates back

to the prevailing philosophical systems of the age. Thus, one thinks that the Modernists' poetics relate back to Hegel's philosophy and aesthetics. Thus, for Modernists art is a mental activity whereby the artist brings certain contents of the world into the realm of objectively valid cognition. According to this view, therefore, the function of art is not to give the reader any kind of pleasure, but to acquaint him with something that he has not known before. T.S. Eliot's poetry is a good witness to this poetics. This caused a gap between poetry and the public, a gap experiment and obscurity of modernism have widend.

The Poetics of Larkin relates back to the poetics of Post-modernism, which relates to Kant. Thus, Larkin writes that "the poet is really engaged in recreating the familiar; he's not committed to introducing the unfamiliar" (*Required Writing,* 55). Again, he writes "the essence of his [poet's] gift is to re-create the familiar, and it is from the familiar that he draws his strength" (*Required Writing,* 90). He adds that "writers should work for the effects they want to produce, and not wheel out stale old Wardour Street lay figures" (*Required Writing,* 70). This suggests, "Modernists' poems are born of other poems rather than from personal non-literary experience" (*Required Writing,* 89). Larkin says, "That I write poems to preserve things I have seen, thought, felt, it is that I may so indicate a composite and complex experience, both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake." (*Required Writing,* 89)

For Larkin, form and content are indivisible. What he meant by content is the experience the poem preserves, and what it passes on.

There is another important difference between the poetics of

Modernism and the poetics of Post-modernism. The poetics of modernism pays most attention towards the sign, while the poetics of Post-modernism pays most of the attention towards the signification. What is the difference? The word sign, according to the dictionary, means something that suggests the presence or existence of a fact. This in postmodernism, as well as in the philosophy of Kant, is doubtful. Significance means expressive, eloquent, and meaningful. The central, meaning shared by these adjectives is "effectively conveying a feeling an idea, or a mood." Thus, Lyotard the philosopher of Postmodernism, in his essay "The Tensor" (1989), pays most of his attention towards the sign. A thing can be treated as a sign, which substituted signification. Without signification, he writes, we cannot get anything. Thus, Philip Larkin writes "If [poetry] has living significance, then let us attend to the poetry of our time in the hope that it will give our own lives significance". (*Required Writing*, 88).

So far, I have tried to show the importance of dealing with the philosophy of Hegel and the philosophy of Kant; but the reader might ask: why, of all the philosophical ideas of both philosophers, I have chosen the theme of 'appearance and reality? The answer is that appearance and reality in philosophy are, in poetics, the same as form and content, denotation and connotation (concept), sign and significance, literary meaning and aesthetic meaning.

In fact, reality or truth can be approached from different angles, some of them philosophical, others are literary. Irony is common between them. I shall take the literary approach, which finds that human consciousness manifests itself at three levels: "God, nature and human life." I shall take these levels as an organizing principle for this paper.

## On God and Faith

This part of the paper will try to show that England in the seventies, thirty years after the World War, remained entangled in a deep malaise, i.e. the lack of true and deep emotion.

Philip Larkin seems to correlate the lack of faith with the lack of emotion and the incomprehension of tradition. In Larkin's "Church Going", it is the institution as well as the building that displays:

A shapeless recognisable each week,
A purpose more obscure.

He has neutral response in this poem:

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

In the dramatic action of the poem, the speaker's initial detachment and irony give way, and though he remains essentially outside the life he observes, he responds with deep emotional sympathy to the values he finds there. The conflict between appearance and reality in the *persona* of "Church Going" shows a practical attitude creating an ironic atmosphere. The first stanza is an ironic presentation in short phrases of a church or "another church", an idea which suggests that all churches are identical. His first perception is material, which is a temporary one, as the words

"sprawling", "cut" and "brownish" suggest. Yet, there is another important unseen presence, which is permanent and unchangeable that represents the Kantian noumenon, i.e. a thing that can be intuited only by the feeling or the heart and not perceived by the senses: "a tense, musty, unignorable silence".

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Larkin's irony is not always based on pretending ignorance, but requires an aesthetic and contemplative attitude. He seems to say that church-going makes of any person more than just an observer of the external environment, i.e. an observer of inner transformation.

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation – marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these – for whom was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;
A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all out compulsions meet,

Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

Through his poetry, Larkin shows us that common things and ordinary life can be poetic. Materiality is a good host for a spiritual transcendent silence. Larkin's aim should be to save experience and its significance from obliviousness: 'I write about experiences, which somehow acquired some sort of meaning for me.' Thus, for Larkin, poetry has a mnemonic function.

One of the aspects of Larkin's religious sentiment and thinking is that he makes a correlation between eros/love and spirituality in man. The natural instinctive powers seem to underlie the traditional religion, art and the way of life it grew from.

Thus, Larkin's "Faith Healing" and "An Arundel Tomb" deal with the subjects of religion and romantic love, respectively.

In "Faith Healing", Larkin takes women as an objective correlative for feeling and emotion. In this poem, Larkin appears to develop a higher conviction of sympathy towards women, vividly evoking a moment of truth in some working-class women's lives, presenting a moving portrayal of their distressed psyches as they are afflicted by the absence of love from their lives. They are compelled, therefore, to seek consolation through faith that may heal them at the hands and the "deep American voice" of a preacher.

The poem opens with a very evocative image of those spinsters

slowly "file to where" the American preacher stands, and how they are "tirelessly" persuaded by the "stewards" to line up. They appear as innocent, pure and faithful worshippers longing for love, bless, and grace. This image of sincerity, on the part of the women, stands in contrast to the image of the American evangelist whose depiction evokes a sense of fraud pretension as suggested by his showy attitude and appearance:

….. he stands
Upright in rimless glasses, silver hair,
Dark suit, white collar …..

The faith healer is dressed for a T.V. talk show -- a typical charlatan. He has the "voice of a lover, hand of a doctor, the words of a mother, and the approved power of God"; a symbol of all their love-ideals in one person. This showy attitude, on the part of the American preacher, enhances as he stands on the altar as a Christ-like figure, while "Stewards tirelessly / Persuade them onwards to his voice and hands." The irony enhances as the reader comes to know that each woman is permitted to enjoy the priest's "warm spring rain of loving care" only for "some twenty records". Instead of compassionately approaching his children's pain, the faith-healer roughly demands to know "what's wrong". Without listening to their distressing complaints, he proceeds directly "into a prayer", "directing God" to cure the troubled parts of those women such as "this eye, that knee". All these attitudes, on the part of the preacher, reflect and confirm his fraud and superficiality. He is not concerned with the deeply rooted troubled souls of those spinsters. Holding the women's heads passionately for blessing, he "clasps" them "abruptly." The "deep American voice" does not pray to show God's power, but to show his own artificial ones, a fact that has been enhanced by the faith healer being American. For most Europeans,

America is seen as a symbol of artificiality.

The women's impulsive reaction to the preacher's ostentatious act of grace is very sensitive, underlying a profound meditative attitude and reflecting the poet's empathy with them:

> Like losing thoughts, they go in silence; some
> Sheepishly stray, not back into their lives
> Just yet; but some stay stiff, twitching and loud
> With deep hoarse tears, as if a kind of dumb
> And idiot child within them still survives
> To re-awake at kindness, thinking a voice
> At last calls them alone, that hands have come
> To lift and lighten; …..

In the images of those shuddering moaning and pathetic women, Larkin manages to draw a minute description of the human need for love and affection. Moreover, the narrative technique of this stanza properly depicts the workings of those women's unconsciousness. The psychological image of "losing thoughts" reflects their confusing hopelessness as they leave the evangelist's presence. While "some / Sheepishly stray, not back into their lives / Just yet" feeling a sort of relief, others still can feel the relief they come for, that is why they are "twitching" with their loud and "deep hoarse tears". This combination of audio-visual images affirm the women's distress, which is further enhanced by the image of how they childishly and idiotically burst into tears in the hope that they can be alone with the faith healer for a longer period of time to be lifted and lightened. They are ultimately released once they are deceived into believing that the divine hands are about to uplift their spirits and relieve their anxious souls. Consequently, those women become overwhelmed with joy at the thought that they would

be cured of their ailments and psychological distresses:

… and such joy arrives
Their thick tongues blort, their eyes squeeze grief, a crowd
Of huge unheard answers jam and rejoice -

The auditory image of onomatopoeia evoked by the word "blort", that is to bellow like an animal, conveys a sense of release of the controlling feelings of distress and pain that irritate those women's souls. The image "of huge unheard answers" which both "jam and rejoice" signifies a distressed mental condition in which one feels both the suffocation of emotional congestion as well as the relief of deliverance.

The poem ends with the speaker's reflections on the psychic temperament of those tormented spinsters. The poet shifts from the descriptive details of the women's experience at the church with the faith healer, to meditation, a technique that Wordsworth uses in his poem: Tintern Abbey. Ironically, the speaker's persona echoes the healer's question "What's wrong?" raised in the first stanza. His answer to the faith healer's enquiry is expressively "all's wrong". It is a durable awareness of an arid life devoid of love "that nothing cures". The religious impact of the healer's touch or magical cast, Larkin believes, gives only a momentary relief:

An immense slackening ache,
As when, thawing, the rigid landscape weeps,
Spreads slowly through them – that, and the voice above
Saying *Dear child*, and all time has disproved.

It is true that an ironical tone can be easily discerned throughout the poem. At the surface, the women's depiction may appear ugly as their "moustached" faces and "flowered frocks" indicate. They may, also, appear to be vulnerably foolish with their total submissive attitudes to the rituals of faith healing. Yet, at a deeper level, the speaker's treatment

of the women portrayed in the poem is certainly compassionate. For Larkin, those spinsters are victims to social circumstances. Their negligence of their external appearance is a spontaneous response to the negligence of men they suffer from. So, their picture of ugliness is very realistic and very natural. Moreover, those women are victims of a big illusion and are subjected to exploitation at the hands of a fraud evangelical preacher. The readers are touched by the women's plight because they are "either unloving or unloved" [13]. What the poet really attempts to mock is the evangelist himself - his practice of hocus pocus in the name of faith. Larkin tries to uncover his pretensions and how he manipulates the distress of those poor women's hunger for love by his extravagant claims of possessing supernatural, divine powers to cure the sick.

The third aspect of Larkin's attitude to religion is, as M. Enani has observed, the need to conform. This conformity could give meaning to existence.

"The same ironic situation occurs again and again in the mature Larkin. “Dockery and Son” is a good example of the irony. I have called it ironic because the poet, through his favourite middle-aged persona, gives us the 'normal' attitude of rejection while deep down he yearns to conform, to be like everybody else as though conformity could give meaning to existence."[14]

Another aspect of Larkin's poetic argument about faith is the degeneration of love into a mere sex devoid of any emotion or feeling. In "High Window", it is clear that the poem moves from a sardonic and profane bitterness about sex and religion to a final wordless perception of high windows.

I know this is paradise

Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives-

Bonds and gestures pushed to one side
Like an outdated combine harvester,
And everyone young going down the long slide
To happiness, endlessly. I wonder if
Anyone looked at me, forty years back,
*And thought, That'll be the life,*
*No God and more, or sweating in the dark*
*About hell and that, or having to hide*
*What you think of the priest. He*
*And his lot will all go down the long slide*
*Like free bloody birds. And immediately*
Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
The sun-comprehending glass,
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.

In the poem, Larkin establishes a parallelism between young people of the poem's present and himself, "*and his lot"* an earlier generation. He and members of his generation had liberated themselves from religion but not its moral constraints. Young people today have freed themselves from those constraints: the "Bonds and gestures" of marriage and courtship, which are "pushed to one side / Like an outdated combine harvester".

I would like to argue that when a poet talks about death, he is in fact drawing our attention to life. There is a feature which is common to literature and philosophy, that is, words do not exclude each other. Thus, life implies death, and vice versa. Larkin's poetry is pervaded by negative elements: "shuttered houses", "dead flowers", "dying flames", and "ancient sadness"; furthermore, a frequent use is made of the negative prefix and suffix, un- and –less: "unwoven", "unstrung", "unrest", "unswept", "leafless",

"fruitless", "loveless", "hopeless", "anchorless", "birdless".

Where there is no exclusion of opposites, there is also, strictly speaking, no negative implication. In non-verbal arts this is obvious; omissions may be significant, but never as negatives. In literature, the words, "no," "not," "never", etc., occur freely; but what they deny is thereby created. In poetry, there is no negation, but only contrast. Consider, for instance, the last stanza of Swinburne's "The Garden of Proserpine," in which almost every line is a denial:

Then star nor sun shall waken,
Nor any change of light:
Nor sound of waters shaken,
Nor any sound or sight:
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal;
Nor days nor things diurnal;
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night.

Sun and star, light, sounding waters, leaves, and days all appear even as they are denied; out of them is woven the background that sets off the final assurance:

Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night.

The long process of denial, in the meantime, has furnished the monotonous "nor-nor-nor" that makes the whole stanza sink to sleep almost without the closing lines; the negative word, thus, is exercising a creative function. The literal sense, furthermore, being a constant rejection of the emerging ideas, keeps them pale and formal-faded, "gone" – in contrast with the one positive stated reality, Sleep.

Thus, alternatives are simply co-present as "the import" in art. This makes it possible to fuse even two contradictory effects in one expression. To this effect, Susanne Langer writes: "The primal Joy-Melancholy of which Tillyard speaks is exactly such a content, which cannot be carried through in any symbolism bound to the logic of discourse, but is a familiar content to the poetic mind. Freud calls this the *principle of ambivalence*. I believe the power of

artistic forms to be emotionally ambivalent, springing from the fact that emotional opposites - joy and grief, desire and fear, and so forth - are often very similar in their dynamic structure, and reminiscent of each other. Small shifts of expression can bring them together, and show their intimate relations to each other, whereas literal description can only emphasize their separateness." [15]

These ideas can be illustrated in Larkin's poetry, especially "At Chiming of Light upon Sleep", "Whitsun Wedding", and finally "Aubude".

"At the Chiming of Light upon Sleep" provides a poetic account of an epiphany of death at the heart of life. The poem is a translation of Larkin's visionary experience of his enthusiastic effort to attain the ultimate truth at such an early age – the true meaning and value of death. The first stanza provides a vivid portrayal of the powerful, damaging effect of autumn, as a symbol of death, on the natural world:

> … It was a green world,
> Unchanging holly with the curled
> Points, cypress and conifers,
> All that through the winter bears
> Coarsened fertility against the frost.

As he notices the deadening effect of winter on the natural scene, the poet begins to wonder about the value of death, taking into consideration his stance as part of the natural world: "Was it myself walking across that grass?" He reaches the conclusion that "Nothing in such a sanctuary could be lost." Then follows a glimpse of transcending revelation, where the poet is suddenly caught into an eternal light of illumination:

> Morning, and more
> Than morning, crossed the floor.
> Had I been wrong, to think that breath
> That sharpens life is life itself, not death?

Death quarrels, and shakes the tree,
And fears are flowers, and flowers are generation,
And the founding, foundering, beast-instructed mansion
Of love called into being by this same death
Hangs everywhere its light.

As long as death is just one part of the cycle of life, it must be regarded as an impetus to renewal and regenerating life. Larkin's poetic genius is displayed most evidently in his use of images of light when referring to death. In other words, morning, light, and even the sun are always at the background when describing the true value of death, a fact which highlights the essence of the poet's genuine transcendental experience.

Larkin's critics have invariably attached Larkin's poetry with the theme of death. They argue that Philip Larkin demonstrated an artistic fascination with death throughout his career and, especially, in the last poem he wrote, "Aubade". Death for Larkin was a constant presence in his life. He feared the oblivion of death.

Larkin's critics have invariably attacked his tone, which *seems* to be 'uniformly depressed' but is hardly so, in fact, as Andrew Motion has shown. The tone may appear to be depressed but is never uniform, thanks to irony.

Begun in 1974, finished in 1977, and first printed somewhat ironically in the Christmas issue (December23, 1977) of the Times Literary Supplement, 'Aubade' was the last substantial lyric Larkin wrote. The work has received much commentary for a modern poem. 'I remember reading it', Marion Shaw disclosed to Andrew Motion, Larkin's biographer, 'and it upset me so much it nearly ruined my holiday. A lot of us felt like that'.

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.

In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
Till then I see what's really always there:
Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
Making all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die.
Arid interrogation: yet the dread
Of dying, and being dead,
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.
The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse
- The good not done, the love not given, time
Torn off unused – nor wretchedly because
An only life can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;
But at the total emptiness for ever,
The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,

And soon, nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

If one fears death, one must love life; and this was not, for Larkin, an easy love. Yet, in the state of death-fear, the love of life comes tumbling out in a catalogue of deprivations:

This is a special way of being atraia
No trick dispels. Religion used to try,
That vast moth-eaten musical brocade
Created to pretend we never die,
And specious stuff that *says No rational being*
*Can fear a thing it will not feel*, not seeing
That this is what we fear – no sight, no sound,
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
Nothing to love or link with,

The anaesthetic from which none come round.

Here, Larkin enumerates the pleasures he must, in oblivion, be forever without. What 'flashes a fresh' in 'Aubade' is not just the terror of death, but its opposite: the love of life.

> Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape.
> It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,
> Have always known, know that we can't escape,
> Yet can't accept. One side will have to go.
> Meanwhile telephones crouch, getting ready to ring
> In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring
> Intricate rented world begins to rouse.
> The sky is white as clay, with no sun.
> Work has to be done.
> Postmen like doctors go from house to house.

The "fixation of belief" is not the poet's purpose; his purpose is the creation of a virtual experience of belief or of its attainment.

So, this poem is not about death but about life, and it should give pleasure. Larkin says to this effect that:

> "All this is true enough. But at bottom poetry, like all art, is inextricably bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet loses his pleasure-seeking audience he has lost the only audience worth having, for which the dutiful mob that signs on every September is no substitute. And the effect will be felt throughout his work. He will forget that even if he finds what he has to say interesting, others may not. He will concentrate on moral worth or semantic intricacy".[16]

The last line says:

> "Postmen like doctors go from house to house".

The last line, to my mind, is full of connotations: human relations, communication; one receives letters from friends and relations, so one is not alone. And if "postmen" are like doctors, then they bring relief from pain.

The main significance of the poem is that Larkin suggests two ideas for salvation: work and love, love is important because human relationship, in Britain, after the war, was remote yet intense, and is like people sharing a raft after a shipwreck.

In conclusion, for Larkin, faith and love are correlated. The idea was anticipated by Matthew Arnold who writes: "Leave the Cross but keep the fire within". Later on, it was found that there is reciprocal relationship between "Justice" and "love", for you cannot be just to someone you do not love. Also, the ethical question, whether "love" as kindness is more valuable than "justice", is raised.

In fact, the erotic feeling – or let us say love – is the leaf of all human aspirations which still maintain its claim to be absolute. And in so doing it proves its own impossibility. That is why Larkin correlates love and faith.

## *Nature*

Philip Larkin positively gives nature life-affirming qualities, beauty and hope. His concept of nature shows that he has a cyclical view of history. This, in itself, implies hope. He deals with nature in many poems such as: "Spring," "First Sight", "Here", "The Trees", "To the Sea", "Cut Grass", "Forget What I Did", "Show Saturday", "Dawn", "Like a Train Beat", and "One Man Walking a Deserted Platform".

One of the numerous poems mentioned above which clearly substantiates that particular aspect of Larkin's personality that is preoccupied with the beautiful and

with intense emotions is "First Sight". It has to do with the sacred, divine beauty of natural elements, figuratively implied in the detailed description of ewes and lambs:

Lambs that learn to walk in snow
When their bleating clouds the air
Meet a vast unwelcome, know
Nothing but a sunless glare.
Newly stumbling to and from
All they find, outside the fold,
Is a wretched width of cold.
As they wait beside the ewe,
Her fleeces wetly caked, there lies
Hidden round them, waiting too,
Earth's immeasurable surprise.
They could not grasp it if they knew,
What so soon will wake and grow
Utterly unlike the snow.

However, transience is explored in a more subtle way in "Show Saturday", a piece usually read as an affirmative paean to traditional English country life and ritual. The setting is a country show around which the narrator is wandering. The poem is not overtly bleak or damning. It represents social gatherings where all generations are represented, rather than a relaxed seaside landscape. The viewpoint starts at the cars jamming the lanes, moves swiftly to the prize animals' races through quick sketches of various characters and reaches the horseboxes moving out of the show equally fast. Despite being one of Larkin's longer poems, the pace with which it moves along gives the impression of being over with great ripidity. There is also something slightly grotesque and sinister about the descriptions, which come within this – for example the little details such as:

wired-off
Wood tables past which crowds shuffle, eyeing the scrubbed spaced
Extrusions of earth.

Andrew Motion describes it as moving “towards its climax with an intensely affectionate deliberation, cataloguing the events of the show, transforming precise observation into a long, rapt epiphany".[17] But some of the imagery in the poem seems determined to prevent any such moment of clarity. The chaotic mass of animals squeezed into the first stanza and the lack of interaction between the people staring 'different ways with incurious faces', whilst their children fight, seem to remove any illusion that this is in any way an idealized picture. The inadequacy of the produce on display is also pointed out by Larkin – the 'Needlework, knitted caps, baskets' are all 'well done', but less impressive than the bee-made honeycombs, in the same way that the eggs and scones 'enclose / A recession of skills'. Motion argues that the Show represents an ideal of 'familiar Englishness'.

Larkin admits in the final stanza that there are 'much greater gestures' by which he means significance, made by humanity than the Show, but they are not necessarily seen through time's 'rolling smithy-smoke'. Like the ideal of the seaside in 'To the Sea', the concept of the show transcends mutability – every year it returns, unchanged. This is a cyclical view of history. It is surely this that causes the climactic comment 'Let it always be there', rather than it being caused by a value-judgement on the contents or qualities of the show itself. It is the concept of ritual that is unchanging, and it is this that is praised by the poet. While humankind is constantly whirled around the circumference of Mutability's wheel, Larkin seems to suggest that there are limited ways of escaping this awful sense of doomed impetus. One seems to be through memories – those snapshots of the past which remain unchanged in memory, such as in 'High Windows'; another memory is the process of ritual – those who

enact the ritual may change, but in spite of anything that mutability might do, the ritual remains. What is important here is the significance of the situation, the more significant, the more moving, then the more beautiful.

The same ideas are echoed in two poems: "The Trees" and "Cut Grass." In the former, while the poet sensitively contemplates the natural cycle or "recurrences", he is suddenly beatified with a mystical moment. This moment is in which, to quote Terry Whalen, "the observer and the observed merge in a momentary recognition of living relationship".[18] The poetic persona wonders at the mysterious power of nature which manifests itself in Autumn when "trees are coming into leaf" prematurely "like something almost being said". They are, therefore, not more immortal than their human observer: "No they die too". These short-lived leaves, however, usually put those observers to shame when they fearlessly discard their past and start each new natural cycle afresh. As "the recent buds relax and spread / Their greenness is a kind of grief" because they mark the passing away of the old leaves that have withered away. Death, accordingly, must not be regarded as an occasion of despondency, rather it should be viewed as a sign of a fresh start for something better that will begin "afresh, afresh, afresh." Nature, thereby, appears to be sending an illuminating message to man: to look at the potential aspect of these trees to drown whatever happened in the past in an attempt to rejoice the present or the actual and to look forward to the future. Decay and death should be taken as a source of fresh endeavours. The regenerational or rather reincarnating potentialities of the trees and the mysterious natural cycle of renewal are expected to inspire man's potentialities for a better existence.

"Cut Grass", similarly, mediates the natural cycle of life, offering an

insightful view of how life would feel like if man could achieve a union with nature and both abandon their own awareness of time.

The poem offers a comprehensive awareness of the workings of the universe that leads to a vision where all correspondences of life, such as death and life, sadness and happiness, beauty and ugliness, dissolve into an integrated existence.

In "Forget What I Did", the poem essentially communicates another nature experience, i.e. the close relationship between nature and art. The poet begins to describe a moment when he suddenly decides to stop writing his diaries. It is a moment of startling uniqueness and illumination. Terry Whalen sees such moments of revelation as quite common in almost all poems in *High Windows*. For him, these poems are "centrally concerned with the registration of moment of perception in time that seems to transcend our more ordinary awareness of life" (Whalen, 1990). The poet feels incompetent to put such exulting moment in words. However, he shows a desire to forget "such words, such actions / As bleakened waking" that lead him to a state of exhaustion, regret and sadness. He is resolved to attune his imagination to the cycles of nature, its events and rituals instead:

And the empty pages?
Should they ever be filled
Let it be with observed
Celestial recurrences,
The day the flower come,
And when the birds go.

The poet makes up his mind: if the remaining pages of his diary are ever to be filled, they will contain a detailed description of such tranquil moments of natural cycles. It is these "celestial recurrences", a phrase that shows a cyclical concept of history, that would help him to experience the bliss of intimate moments of inspiration where he enjoys reciprocal relations with natural elements. This experience, which the poet records in the poem,

is further developed in two other poems that portray similar moments of inspiration.

Larkin's early decision, as he embarks on his journey towards isolation as a necessary pose for his callings and vocation as a poet, is evident. Edward Picot explains that what the poet portrayed in these poems usually gives the image of someone isolating himself from human companionship, and turning his attention instead towards Nature. This attitude as described, "seems to arise from a feeling that the natural world possesses a simplicity and perfection which are missing from human life … In Larkin's poetry, the beauty and simplicity of the natural world are compared with the shallowness and inadequacy of the human world to expose the tawdriness of the latter. This gives rise to an impulse to break away from human society and move into an isolation from which nature can be contemplated more freely".[19]

These characteristics of Larkin's early experiences can be discerned most clearly in two poems from *The North Ship*: "Dawn" and "One Man Walking a Deserted Platform". In "Dawn", the poet is isolated in his room, contemplating the natural world around him, while other people enjoy their lives. To console himself, the poet turns to nature for illumination and clarity, and in return, nature bestows upon him a moment of deep feeling for life and being alive:

To wake and hear a cock
Out of the distance crying,
To pull the curtains back
And see the clouds flying – how strange it is
For the heart to be loveless, and as cold as these.

"One Man Walking a Deserted Platform" portrays a moment of alienation that reinforces the poet's preference to be isolated from the human world in favour of enjoying the tranquility of the natural world:

Who can this ambition trace,
To be each dawn perpetually journeying?
To trick this hour when lovers re-embrace
With the unguessed-at heart riding
The winds as gulls do? What lips said
Starset and cockcrow call the dispossessed
On to the next desert, lest
Love sink a grave round the still- sleeping head?

The poem "Here" is a rapid panorama of the north of England seen through the windows of a speeding passenger car:

Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows
And traffic all night north; swerving through fields
Too thin and thistled to be called meadows,
And now and then a harsh-named halt, that shields
Workmen at dawn; swerving to solitude
Of skies and scarecrows, haystacks, hares and pheasants,
And the widening river's slow presence,
The piled gold clouds, the shining gull-marked mud,

Gathers to the surprise of a large town:
Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster
Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water,
And residents from raw estates, brought down
The dead straight miles by stealing flat-faced trolleys,
Push through plate-glass swing doors to their desires –
Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies,
Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers –
A cut-price crowd, urban yet simple, dwelling

Where only salesmen and relations come
Within a terminate and fishy-smelling
Pastoral of ships up streets, the slave museum,
Tattoo-shops, consulates, grim head-scarfed wives;
And out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges
Fast-shadowed wheat-fields, running high as hedges,
Isolate villages, where removed lives

Loneliness clarifies. Here silence stands
Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,
Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,
Luminously-peopled air ascends;
And past the poppies bluish neutral distance
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach
Of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:
Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.

The situation is like visiting an art gallery, where the window frames offer a tableau of the scene. There are two aesthetic situations here: the first in the choreographic or cinematic scenes unfolded in successive moments, while the elements of the scene, pictorial, sculptural, or architectural work are seen in their entirety in a single instant. This situation triggers metaphysical contemplation.

In conclusion, one can say that the concept of nature in Larkin's poetry is different from that in Romantic poetry, for Larkin never thinks of regarding the landscape as a sentient being whose outward aspect "expresses" the mood it contains subjectively. The landscape does not express the mood, but *has* it.

## On Human Life

There are three aspects in human life: Love, work, and knowledge. These will be the organizing principles for the rest of the paper. Of these aspects, James Thomson writes:

> Give a man a horse he can ride,
> Give a man a boat he can sail;
> And his rank and wealth, his strength and health,
> On sea nor shore shall fail.
> Give a man a pipe he can smoke,
> Give a man a book he can read:
> And his home is bright with a calm delight,
> Though the room be poor indeed.
> Give a man a girl he can love,
> As I, O my love, love thee;
> And his heart is great with the pulse of Fate,
> At home, on land, on sea.

## The Theme of Love in Larkin's Poetry

Most of the time, Larkin, like most people, has to live, work, and try to love. Those elements of experience, in consequence, are what predominate in his poetry. Love in particular is central, though 'unsatisfactory'. In his life, Larkin loved more than one woman. But Larkin knows "that anyone who thinks he has loved more than one person has simply never really loved at all".[20] Love in this case is erotic.

After his death, two women, each of which, believed that the poem "When first we face, and touching showed …" was meant for her alone. In fact, one of them, Maeve Brennan (who worked with Larkin for thirty years and whose affair with him lasted for seventeen), said to Motion, "I wonder whether I really knew him at all. He had feet of clay, didn't he? Huge feet of clay".

At the same time, his letters provide a means of unleashing comments of a purgative nature:

"My relations with women are governed by a shrinking sensitivity, a morbid sense of sin, a furtive lechery and a deplorable flirtatiousness – all of which are menaced by the clear knowledge that I should find marriage a trial. 'One hates the person one lives with: So much for me".[21]

It seems, then, that Larkin, as far as emotion is concerned, has a divided self, divided between Apollonain forces and Dionysian ones, between Thanatos and Eros.

It is customary that a work of literature appears that attempts to blow up some preconceived idea. *The Way of All Flesh* tried to explode filia affection; *Man and Superman*, the idea that men chase women (oddly enough, both date from 1903). Their effect was minimal: children went on loving their parents; man continued to propose. Yet, seventy-five years later, no doubt for quite other reasons, family ties have become psychologically suspicious and women are claiming the same sexual freedom as men. The books, in some obscure way, have come true.

Thus, Larkin tries to give us a poetic interpretation of this situation.

In poem after poem of the mature Larkin, a self-critical, self-skeptical persona explores the possibility of both relationship and solitude. Love remains a possibility, no doubt, but the more successful poems question its meaning. It is not exactly 'the failure of love' he laments, but the irony of love.[22]

In Larkin's poem, love is at once aspired to as an inevitability but ridiculed as inadequate, or, at best, never fully attainable. We have been brought up to consider love as a permanent possibility, and to be disappointed if it recedes as a life

force or is distorted by the cynics. The distortion here seems to engender a kind of positive disappointment through which the poet aims at revealing a 'Postmodernist reality', namely that life subsumes a 'great negative order of ideas'[23], and that the only means of being positive is to be continually conscious of this 'negative order'. Side by side with the life-making power of love there is the negative power of death, which looms large in Larkin's poetry as a gaping vacancy – 'the saving emptiness' of 'Ambulances' (*The Way of All Flesh*, 69-70).

Larkin thought of marriage as a "revolting institution," and his intense physical and emotional needs were countered by an equally intense fear of connection and commitment. He was convinced that women used sex to snare men into marriage, which he thought of in the most conventional domestic terms. In the cartoonish situation of "Self's the Man," for example, poor, emasculated Arnold is run ragged because of his "selflessness":

Oh, no one can deny
That Arnold is less selfish than I.
He married a woman to stop her getting away
Now she's there all day,
And the money he gets for wasting his life on work
She takes as her perk
To pay for the kiddies' clobber and the drier
And the electric fire,

Here again, the intended irony is that the poet's self-justification – his sneering at Arnold's marriage – is only a pose, that his real mood is one of fear, a fear that his own sanity is, after all, no securer than Arnold's. But, in order to convey this irony, Larkin again depends on a series of clichés about the other man's choice. Arnold is presented as one who:

… when he finishes supper
Planning to have a read at the evening paper

It's Put a screw in this wall –
He has not time at all,
With the nippers to wheel round the houses
And the hall to paint in his old trousers
And that letter to her mother
Saying *Won't you come for the summer*.
To compare his life and mine
Makes me feel a swine:
Oh, no one can deny
That Arnold is less selfish than I.
But wait, not so fast:
Is there such a contrast?
He was out for his own ends
Not just pleasing his friends;

The poem "An Arundel Tomb" raises three issues, 1- a strong but tentative sense of love and power. This is because Larkin thinks that the malaise of the age is the lack of feeling, 2- the rule of literature in preserving and moving human emotions, 3- the issue of appearance and reality: though the tomb itself has remained fixed and unchanging, it has become commonly perceived as something entirely different. As Larkin puts it in one of his letters, "one might almost say that it's the mixture of truth and untruth that makes literature".[24]

As for the theme of love, the poem lays strong stress on human souls that yearn to be joint with the loved ones by an everlasting love, as the earl and countess's gesture is interpreted as a symbol of unending love. As Larkin describes the earl and countess, it becomes apparent that whatever the degree of their happy success or defective failure in intimacy, sex, understanding, or experience is, while alive, ultimately their fate is immortal love beyond the gates of this world of traffickings. Moreover, Larkin discloses his point that what one needs and seeks, as human, is love and union with his/her beloved, regardless of the worldly nature, position and attitude of the earl and countess, or even the visitors to Chichester Cathedral.

Larkin, therefore, keenly draws the reader's attention to human longing for signs of the durability of love and union through time. In the first stanza, he minutely portrays the main features of the stone figures, their clothing, the earl's armour, the "little dog under their feet" symbolizing fidelity. These details do not have significance that attracts the visitor's eyes; "Such plainness of the pre-baroque / Hardly involves the eye".

Side by side, their faces blurred,
The earl and countess lie in stone,
Their proper habite vaguely shown
As jointed armour, stiffened pleat,
And that faint hint of the absurd –
The little dogs under their feet.
Such plainness of the pre-baroque
Hardly involves the eye, until
It meets his left-hand gauntlet, still
Clasped empty in the other; and
One sees, with a sharp tender shock,
His hand withdrawn, holding her hand.

Larkin reveals the pure meaning that may attract the eyes of the visitors: a gesture that symbolizes the earl and countess love for each other: "One sees, with a sharp tender shock, / His hand withdrawn, holding her hand". For the earl and countess, their earthly affection was private, as acknowledged in the interpretation of their image, which they thought that only their close friends would see and understand.

As language falls into misuse with the passing of time, the couple's carved "names around the base" and their identity have been worn away. Even the earl's armour is no longer significant. What the "endless altered people" do comprehend and notice, hundred years later, is the earl and countess's gesture of love and fidelity, his hand clasping hers.

What matters is the evidence of love. This is what remains significant to all who visit the tomb, despite the cruel facts of our lives which might prove differing facts. One must keep the hope that love will ultimately ever last:

Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stone fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.

"An Arundel Tomb" raises, in itself in fact, the whole issue of the relation between life and art, appearance and reality, truth and fiction, which is the subject of this section of the paper. The sculptor's work has added to (as the poet sees it) the original intention of his patrons.

A sculptor's sweet commissioned grace
Thrown off in helping to prolong
The Latin names around the base.

It is worthy of notice that the detail of the linked hands, since the original sculpture had been damaged, was added by another sculptor:

Washing at their identity.
Now, helpless in the hollow of
An unarmorial age, a trough
Of smoke in slow suspended skeins
Above their scrap of history,
Only an attitude remains:
Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stone fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.

Larkin in this poem refines life into general truth.

As I mentioned before, Larkin believes that literature is a mixture of truth and untruth. He used irony as a technique to give expression to this idea. This helps him to present affirmation through negation. "An

Arundel Tomb" illustrates the issue of appearance and reality, thus John Saunders points out that "the tomb may not really mean what it seems to mean, that what we would like to take as a beautiful, comforting 'truth' about love, is in fact a deception"[25].

In conclusion, one can say that the scrupulous uncertainty and sense of irony (like that of exploration of the tension between the reality and the appearance) finally lead to a finely-won positive statement. As one has shown, Larkin vacillates between sensuous love and the ideal love, as thesis and antithesis, and ends up in a synthesis of social love, i.e. the significance of marriage.

## Work

In the formulation of Psychologist Abraham Maslow, work functions in a hierarchy of needs: "first, work provides food and shelter, basic human maintenance. After that, it can address the need for security and then for friendship and belongingness. Next, the demands of the ego arise, the need for respect. Finally, men and women assert a larger desire for self - actualization. That seems a harmless and even worthy enterprise, but sometimes degenerates into self-infatuation, a vaporously selfish discontent that dead-ends in isolation, the empty face that gazes back from the mirror."[26]

For Larkin, work does not achieve any of these functions. Larkin gives us an objective picture of the moral state of work in his time that reminds us of the picture T.S. Eliot gives to workers in his poem "The Waste Land":

Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many.

Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,

And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,

To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours

With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.

Because of the fact that Eliot is a Modernist, like Hegel, he sees the individual only as a small entity in a big system, i.e. the state. Larkin is different; he gives the individual its due importance.

Larkin takes one of these workers, Mr. Bleaney and writes the poem "Mr. Bleaney". The poem shows the displaced working-class hero, a theme that was the characteristic landmark of the British post-war novel. It is essentially a poem about a circumstantial situation. The poem is a dramatic monologue, and rather like a drama, telling a story. There are two distinct scenes in the poem, the first occupies the first three stanzas of this seven-stanza poem. A landlady is presented, showing a prospective lodger of a room that is vacated by her previous tenant, Mr. Bleaney.

The new tenant learns that:

'This was Mr. Bleaney's room. He stayed

The whole time he was at the Bodies, till

They moved him.' …

Bleaney is such a helpful and sensitive lodger that he takes her "bit of garden properly in hand", taking very good care of her small garden, which, since his departure, reverts into a "strip of building land, / Tussocky, littered". It seems that Mr. Bleaney is a dedicated, friendly tenant in the most modest, unpretentious way. He "egged her to buy" a new television set that, one can imagine, both of them spend the bachelor's evening watching it. The landlady knows every single detail of Mr. Bleaney's private life. She remembers "His preference for sauce to gravy", and talks about his "summer holidays, / And Christmas at his sister's house in Stoke."

This openhearted, welcome presence of Mr. Bleaney in the landlady's life is completely missed by the new tenant who happens to be one of the speakers of the poem. He measures Mr. Bleaney by externals. For him, Mr. Bleaney enjoys a very limited taste and has no idea about the comfort and leisure which life can afford. What the speaker sees is:

> Flowered curtains, thin and frayed,
> Fall to within five inches of the sill,
> Whose window shows a strip of building land,
> Tussocky, littered. …
> Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook
> Behind the door, no room for books or bags-

Throughout the poem, the contrast between the two men is heavily stressed. They are two distinct figures who are, nonetheless, identified with each other because they are both measured by the 'one hired box' of the rented room. This presents a deep-seated fear for the lodger, the fear of being trapped in the same cyclic world as the previous tenant. Unlike Mr. Bleaney, the new tenant leads a life of isolation. He is determined to keep away from the company of the landlady, "stuffing [his] ears with cotton-wool, to drown / The jabbering set he egged her on to buy" so that he would not be obliged to socialize with her. He is very jealous about his isolation.

The assumptions raised in the final stanza are, therefore, mere speculation on the part of the new tenant and do not apply to Mr. Bleaney. This becomes clear in the conclusion to the poem when the lodger asks not only himself, but also, by implication, everyone else: is this how we evaluate our lives? In other words, Our sense of worth is reflected by our surroundings:

> That how we live measures our own nature,

And at his age having no more to show
Then one hired box should make him pretty sure
He warranted no better, I don't know.

The speaker assumes that Mr. Bleaney would agree with him that "how we live measures our own nature" and that Bleaney must be haunted by the dread of how his life would be rated since it is lived in "one hired box." The negation of these assumptions comes in the final line as the new tenant admits, "I don't know", which reflects how isolated, exhausted its speaker is, and how he fails to achieve any of Mr. Bleaney's social triumph. This sense of failure pushes the significant impression Bleaney leaves for his landlady to the foreground: memories of his company, the garden that turns into ruin since Bleaney's absence, and the warm evenings spent with him watching television. All these nice memories nourish the landlady's comfort at a time her new tenant keeps at a distance. It is a universal appeal to all human beings not to be deceived by the external tenor of man's life. Larkin's poems tell us that man must be evaluated according to his nature and character not by his external appearances. We must not judge Mr. Bleaney through the details of his room, ignoring the compassionate remarks of the landlady, to reach the conclusion that "the featureless room" where Mr. Bleaney used to live and the dullness of his life show him as an indifferent person: "Mr. Bleaney's belongings, poor as they are, serve as witness to his shabby personal life. None of them can be looked for to give a sort of meaning to his life. On the contrary, they show it as empty and meaningless as well as sad … Mr. Bleaney's existence, without meaning as it is, becomes a problem to which he finds no solution other than nihilism. To sit

and do nothing to solve his problem is an attitude, it is true, but it is a passive and ineffective one … More important is to find the way out and the better alternative."[27]

Bleaney is really far from being dull or indifferent. It is the speaker's own use of the projection mechanism, to objectify his own internal feelings and thoughts, that reflects on his vision of Mr. Bleaney's character.

But, Larkin draws our attention to the problem of modern man and living in big cities. The big city and the tangible problem, which it presents, confront the writer with an entirely new situation. Post-modernist writers show us man in a tenement house where the inmates of the different flats are captives of a fate that condemns them to loneliness and isolation, i.e. the loss of organic character.

As a consequence of its loss of organic character, an open society may become, by degrees, what I would like to term an 'abstract society'. We could conceive of a society in which men practically never meet face-to-face – in which all business is conducted by individuals, in isolation, who communicate by e-mail or by internet and who go about in closed motorcars. (Artificial insemination would allow even propagation without a personal element.) Such a fictitious society might be called a 'completely abstract or depersonalized society'. Now, the interesting point is that our modern society resembles, in many of its aspects, such a completely abstract society. There are many people living in a modern society who have no, or extremely few, intimate personal contacts, who live in anonymity and isolation, and consequently in unhappiness.[28]

## *Knowledge Philip Larkin and the Poetics of Postmodernism*

"I look on human knowledge as consisting of our theories, our hypotheses, our conjectures; as the *product* of our intellectual activities. Knowledge in this sense is *objective*: and it is hypothetical or conjectural."[29]

Thus, this part of this paper deals with the nature of art, and especially the relation of art to actuality; the processes of artistic creation, and the function of art.

Larkin was not in favour of theorizing about poetry: "I find it hard to give any abstract view on poetry and its present condition as I find theorizing on the subject no help to me as a writer. In fact it would be true to say that I make a point of not knowing what poetry is or how to read a page or about the function of myth. It is fatal to decide, intellectually, what good poetry is because you are then in honour bound to try to write it, instead of the poems that only you can write" (*Required Writing*, 79).

However, one can abstract a theory of poetry from Larkin's poetry and his general comments on other poets and writers. Generally speaking, there are two prevalent, apparently quite opposite, opinions on the nature and function of art. According to one, the ultimate function of art is to express convincingly some process or condition of the inner life; according to the other, its function is to create images that, by clarity and harmony of form, fulfill the need for vividly comprehensible appearance, which is rarely satisfied by reality. Actually, neither clear representation of external form, nor the expression of an inner life or experience, however achieved, is in itself sufficient to create art; rather, each depends on the other. In the living work of art, the two concepts can be separated only by means of an

abstractive process, and hence, neither one by itself can be judged aesthetically. Form and content are unequivocally coordinated, and any change in one necessarily entails a change in the other. Critical judgment will indeed always be restricted to pointing out individual traits of the inward content or the external appearance of a work. Thus, one or the other still seems to determine the evaluation of the whole. But, even though in criticism we can extract and fix only single elements, in direct artistic judgment, we do not lose their interrelation, or forget the whole from which we separate them. The Dionysian and the Apollonian elements, as deified basic forces of human existence, lead to art only conjointly: the deepest fullness of life must be made apprehensible to sense, and, at the same time, the clearly apprehensible must sensibly express the truest vitality, if real art is to come into being.

Larkin tried to combine and balance between the two elements. Of poetry, Larkin notes, "… poetry consists in expressing … old and well worn ideas and emotions in new and exciting forms so that the emotion or idea emerges new again". In addition, he prefers poems written in "… total explicit style. No obscurities." In a letter to John Betjeman, Larkin defines his criteria in selecting poems for the *Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*: "I have tried in the main to keep to poems that make me laugh, cry, or shiver and keep off the ones that make me feel I am at school or need a drink" (T.J. Ross, 293).

Larkin, here, seems to support the theory that the ultimate function of art is to express the inner life, i.e. emotion. But, he supports the view that the function of art is to create images too. To this effect, he writes:

"If something must be said, it should be about the poems one

writes not necessarily being the poems one wants to write. Some years ago I came to the conclusion that to write a poem was to construct a verbal device that would preserve an experience indefinitely by reproducing it in whoever read the poem. As a working definition, this satisfied me sufficiently to enable individual poems to be written. In so far as it suggested that all one had to do was pick an experience and preserve it, however, it was much oversimplified. Nowadays nobody believes in 'poetic' subjects, any more than they believe in poetic diction".[30]

There is another way of defining the nature of a subject, it is by comparing it with other subjects. Aristotle does that in his *Poetics*. When he tries to define the nature of poetry, he compares it with history and philosophy. Larkin, to define the nature of poetry, compares it to the novel:

"I think it is harder to write a good novel than a good poem. The poem, or the kind of poem we write nowadays, is a single emotional spear-point, a concentrated effect that is achieved by leaving everything out but the emotion itself. But, the novel can't do this" (*Required Writing*, 79). In the novel, the emotion has to be attached to a human being, and the human being has to be attached to a particular time and a particular place, and has to do with other human beings and be involved with them. In the last analysis, I do not think that the novelist and the poet are trying to do different things: "they are both using language to say something about life in emotional rather than analytic terms. But, whereas the poet relies on the intensity with which he can say it, the novelist relies on the persuasiveness with which he can show it. The poet says old age is sad; the novelist describes a group of old people" (*Required Writing*, 79).

Aristotle's method shows that he identifies "nature" with "function". Also, Plato identifies "Nature" with

"origin". So, whether it is the function or the origin, Larkin's poetics is based on "emotion", thus he is like the romantic poets, in general, and Wordsworth in particular. Thus, Larkin states that 'poetry should begin with emotion in the poet, and end with the same emotion in the reader'.

The poet has only to say he is in love, or miserable; the novelist has to supply for his character's circumstantial evidence of love and misery. The novelist, therefore, has to not only feel emotion and devise a human situation to express it, but has to evaluate its causes and its objects in his readers' terms, as well as in his own (Required Writing, 79).

Larkin is serious because he has produced an original and moving poetry of persons and surroundings in which neither predominates: each sustains the other. Of the function of poetry, he writes, "I write poems to preserve things I have seen / thought / felt (if I may so indicate a composite and complex experience) both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake. Why I should do this, I have no idea, but I think the impulse to preserve lies at the bottom of all art. Generally, my poems are related, therefore, to my own personal life, but by no means always, since I can imagine horses I have never seen or the emotions of a bride without ever having been a woman or married" (*Required Writing,* 79).

Thus, poetry for Larkin has a mnemonic value; Larkin knows that visions and values are projection of memories, i.e. memories are projected to form visions and values. On the other hand, in Larkin's poetics, the function of art is to import the emotional content of the poem to the reader. The value of the content of the subject of the poem lies in its significance - an idea that brings to the mind the act

of hermeneutic and contemplation. So, there is a relation, in Larkin's poetics, between the significance of the artistic content and the artistic expression, and both contribute to beauty. Again, Larkin writes, "Writers should work for the effects they want to produce, and not wheel out stale old Wardour Street lay figures" (*Required Writing*, 70).

Can we appreciate the full beauty of a painting without a period of contemplation wherein successive reactions take place? Baudelaire went so far as to say that the period of contemplation and the prolongation of its effects in the memory constitute a sufficient criterion of artistic value, hence his formula: "Art is the mnemonics of the beautiful." This applies to Larkin. Without going that far, one sees at least that in all the arts there is a "time of contemplation", filled with successive psychic facts, more or less prolonged, and of which the aesthetic and litrary contents are important.

Thus, in Larkin's theory, beauty is feeling, and this makes Larkin a Postmodernist poet, because the idea that beauty is a feeling is discredited by those whose aesthetic experience testifies that beauty is objective, such as the Modernists, since feelings are certainly subjective.

Otto Baensch, defining the Modernist poetic theory writes, "That art, like science, is a mental activity whereby we bring certain contents of the world into the realm of objectively valid cognition; and that, furthermore, it is the particular office of art to do this with the world's emotional content. According to this view, therefore, the function of art is not to give the percipient any kind of pleasure, however noble, but to acquaint him with something that he has not known before. Art, just like science, aims primarily to be understood. Whether that understanding which art transmits then pleases the feeling percipient, or whether it

leaves him indifferent or elicit repugnance, is of no significance to art as pure art.[31]

In his comment on Auden, he writes: He has become a reader rather than a writer, and the 'Notes' – eighty-one pages of James, Kierkegaard, Chehkov, Rilke, Nietzsche, Goethe, Milton, Spinoza and so on against fifty-eight pages of text – gave warning on how far literature was replacing experience as material for his verse.

Some critics might think this legitimate. The likely consequences, however – loss of immediacy, a tendency to repeat themes already existing as literature, a certain abstract windiness – were very much the criticisms Auden now invited. "His first three American books were long, ambitious, and stylistically variegated, yet held the reader's attention only sporadically if at all".[32]

He blames T.S. Eliot for that: "[It] was Eliot who gave the Modernist poetic movement its charter in the sentence, 'Poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*.' And it was Betjeman who, forty years later, was to bypass the whole light industry of exegesis that had grown up round his fatal phrase, and proved, like Kipling and Housman before him, that a direct relation with the reading public could be established by anyone prepared to be moving and memorable" (*Required Writing,* 129)

Then, he attacks Eliot: "a critic; he may insensibly come to embrace what I think of as the American, or Ford-car, view of literature, which holds that every new poem somehow incorporates all poems that have gone before it and takes them a step further" (*Required Writing,* 89).

Larkin's theory of poetry deals with the relation between actuality and poetry, but it also gives us an insight into the creative process that takes place. He talks of the influence of art on life itself, the

formulating of actual feeling by its image in poetry. In an interview about writing poetry, he says, "If you rationalize it, it seems as if you've seen this sight, felt this feeling, had this vision, and have got to find a combination of words that will preserve it by setting it off in other people. The duty is to the original experience. It doesn't feel like self-expression, though it may look like it" (*Required Writing,* 85).

But, it is unhappiness that provokes a poem. "Being happy doesn't provoke a poem. As Montherlant says somewhere, happiness writes white. It is very difficult to write about being happy. It is very easy to write about being miserable. And I think writing about unhappiness is probably the source of my popularity, if I have any – after all most people *are* unhappy, don't you think?" (*Required Writing,* 47).

Thus, at one point, he writes, "I am always very puzzled when I hear a poem condemned as 'mere personal emotion'. It seems to suggest that emotion can be impersonal, can exist in the abstract with nobody to feel it, which of course cannot possibly be true … To me, now as at any other time, poetry should begin with emotion in the poet, and end with the same emotion in the reader. The poem is simply the instrument of transference" (Quoted in Dan Jacobson, "Towards Arrogant Eternity", *New Statesman*, October 22, 2001).

There is no need for any large-scale system of belief, any such circumambient framework as Yeats constructed, within which to fashion his work.

Larkin seems to have gone through the apprenticeship of following different poets for their styles, music, etc. "I spent three years trying to write like Yeats, not because I liked his personality or understood his ideas but out of infatuation with his music (to use

the word I think Vernon used). In fairness to myself, it must be admitted that it is a particularly potent music, pervasive as garlic" (*Required Writing*, 29).

I read Betjeman, Kingsley again, and Gavin Ewart (who I think is extraordinarily funny). Among the illustrious dead, I read Hardy and Christina Rossetti, and Shakespeare, of course. Poetry can creep up on you unawares. Wordsworth was nearly the price of me once (*Required Writing*, 13).

In short, one can say that Larkin's poetry comes from his reading and personal experience, unlike Eliot who draws inspiration from sources which are named in the history of literature. For Larkin, experience means "The beauty". "Thoughts, feelings, and language are cohered and jumped. They have to do that. Of course they are always lying around in you, but they have to get together" (*Required Writing*, 68).

Of the poetic process, he writes: "It is sometimes useful to remind ourselves of the simpler aspects of things normally regarded as complicated. Take, for instance, the writing of a poem. It consists of three stages: the first is when a man becomes obsessed with an emotional concept to such a degree that he is compelled to do something about it. What he does is the second stage, namely, construct a verbal device that will reproduce this emotional concept in anyone who cares to read it, anywhere, any time. The third stage is the recurrent situation of people in different times and places setting off the device and re-creating in themselves what the poet felt when he wrote it. The stages are interdependent and all necessary." (*Required Writing*, 80)

Larkin's concept of the "self" is typically Postmodernist; the "self" is not one, like the Modernist concept of the self, but many. He notes, "Looking back in the poems,

I find not one abandoned self but several. I find the ex-schoolboy, for whom Auden was the only alternative to 'old-fashioned' poetry, the undergraduate, whose work a friend affably characterized as 'Dylan Thomas, but you've a sentimentality that's all your own, and the immediately post-Oxford self isolated in Shropshire with a complete Yeats stolen from the local girls' school. This search for a style was merely one aspect of a general immaturity" (*Required Writing*, 78).

Larkin finds his subject-matter in life. It is, variously, faith, nature, human life, love, work and knowledge. "The poet is really engaged in recreating the familiar; he's not committed to introducing the unfamiliar" (*Required Writing*, 55). His poems are triumphant evidence that it is possible to make "a silk purse from a sow's ear". He, himself says, "the essence of his [poet's] gift is to re-create the familiar, and it is from the familiar that he draws his strength" (*Required Writing*, 90).

To take an example, in "The Whitsun Weddings", the key poem in Larkin's third collection of verse, the subject is marriage, though the cycle of birth and death is also suggested. The poem gives an account of a Whit-Saturday train journey to London, and it draws heavily on an industrialized landscape. The poem is about people, as well as places and nature. This is what appears to us. Appearances reach us through the eye, and the eye with a unique and unrepeated facet of appearance.

Now, one comes to the last topic of Larkin's poetic, i.e. his concept of form. Larkin, as I noted above, was at heart an aesthetic who believed that every poem must be its own sole freshly created universe, an organic whole made by "construct[ing] a verbal device that would preserve an experience indefinitely by reproducing it in whoever read the poem" (*Required Writing*, 83).

But, one cannot ignore the impact of his modernist predecessors such as Auden, D.H. Lawrence, and T. Hardy.

Concerning the question of the discrepancy between appearance and reality, Larkin seems to correlate "reality" with "actuality". In fact, semantically, there is a correlation between them. The term "reality" means: true and actual i.e., existing objectively in the world. While the term "actuality" means the state or fact of being real. Actuality is an actual account of the accident. It is achieved through visualization, in itself a manifestation of one of the key concepts in Aristotle's thought: energeia (actuality, actualization, vivication).

Philip Larkin seems to belong to the main tradition of philosophical empiricism which developed from Locke's theory of knowledge, where existence is identical with perception: esse = percipi. Thus, George Berkeley (1685-1753) says "To be is to be perceived".

Recognizing the importance of sight in human knowledge, Aristotle opens the first book of the *Metaphysics* by establishing a link between understanding and seeing. "All men by nature desire understanding," he claims, and finds proof in "their liking of sensations, for, even apart from the need of these for other things, they are liked for their own sake, and of all sensations those received by means of the eyes are liked most. The eyes hold such a prominent position because seeing makes us know in the highest degree, and makes clear many differences in things. Seeing, in other words, is conducive to learning and it brings about clarity, which encourages Aristotle to put it forward in the *Rhetoric* as the core of the art of rhetoric, and art in general".[33]

Central to Aristotle's philosophy, actuality is a concept linked with the first principles laid out in the *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*. Opposed to potentiality – as form is opposed

to matter, or soul to body – actuality is of necessity associated with what Aristotle terms a first mover, since the first thing which exists as *actuality* is the cause of all. Actuality has a dynamic aspect to it, as it is related to motion, or activity of changing from one state to another. Translating these notions into a stylistic and artistic discourse, Aristotle develops, the metaphysics of a literary universe: "the nerve centre of lifelike-ness in art is the invocation of actuality, what breathes life into a piece of text is the creation of an activity. Thus, in the *Rhetoric*, he praises Homer for managing to make the lifeless seem living through being actualized with the help of the metaphor. Homer makes everything move and live, and *energeia* is motion. While Aristotle singles out vivid metaphors and similes as tools in bringing about actuality in texts. A more general statement with which he opens this Chapter in Book 3 is one especially worthy of our attention. Attempting to define bringing-before-the-eyes, Aristotle says, "I call those things 'before the eyes' that signify things engaged in an activity". Visualization understood in this way, therefore, presupposes not only the existence of a visual stimulus or object, but also a process, an activity, a dynamic" (Stojkovic, 313).

The importance of visual elements in literary art has been recognized for centuries, as they assist both cognition and imagination in the reading process. Poetry in particular has been understood as a genre very closely associated with imagery. "But what exactly constitutes an image, and is this arguably static poetic notion the only manifestation of visualization? A close examination of visuals in poetry, and specifically, in the poetry of Philip Larkin, can be made more sensible if we consider a few very useful insights provided by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*, and a few other texts. Aristotle stresses the

need for art to come alive before an audience, and he regards visualization as a stimulus to this end" (Stojkovic, 312).

Dynamic representation of visual elements is a poetic technique, which actualizes the text and, in a sense, embodies the meaning in some of Larkin's poems. However, even at his most abstract treatment, Larkin often retains a concrete and visual footing. Thus, "the musings on death in the cerebral Aubade are contextualized within the concrete physical space of the speaker's room; the consideration of the state of religion in the modern world in "Church Going" is affected through a series of particular details and images; the speculations on fate and time in Dockery and Son are masterfully derived from a sharply outlined specific occasion which brings on such thoughts in the speaker. Most other major poems rely even more crucially on the visual, and on visualization, earning Larkin the label of the poet of observation *par excellence*" (Stojkovic, 313-314).

In "Whitsun Weddings", Larkin sticks closer to actuality:

> Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and
>
> Canals with floatings of industrial froth;
>
> A hothouse flashed uniquely: hedges dipped
>
> And rose: and now and then a small of grass
>
> Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth
>
> Until the next town, new and nondescript,
>
> Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

The passage itself is representative, for characteristically, in his most recent work, it is upon the everyday things, the usual, that Larkin relentlessly focuses on. To a certain extent, one could call it a "list poem," since much of the

description consists of an accumulation of visual details:

> Of skies and scarce crows, haystacks, hares and peasants,
>
> And the widening river's slow presence,
>
> The piled gold clouds, the shining gull-marked mud …

In conclusion, one returns to the main problem that triggered this research : appearance and reality.

In his Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces, 1955-1982, Larkin himself refers to moments of revelation as "complex experience":

"I write poems to preserve things I have seen / thought / felt (if I may so indicate a composite and complex experience) both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake. Why should I do this I have no idea, but I think the impulse to preserve lies at the bottom of all art" (p. 79).

The question is: what is preserved? Is it meaning? Is it significance? But what do the terms "significance" and "meaning", as used in literature, imply? If we separate them, then, one will find two kinds of meaning: literary meaning and aesthetic meaning.

That works of art may possess a meaning is as readily assumed in some quarters as it is vigorously denied in others. There are those who define "art appreciation" as apprehension of the art object's meaning, and in their hands the term "meaning" receives an honorific connotation as referring to that experience, the grasping of which is the highest goal of aesthetic aspiration. There are others who look with profoundest suspicion on any attribution of meaning to an art work, on the grounds that such attribution does violence to the aesthetic purity and unity of the art experience. In the presence of such sharp divergence of opinion, one is naturally led to suppose that these

two groups are employing the term "meaning" in somewhat different senses. It may be instructive to examine, with a view to determining their legitimacy, some of the senses in which meaning has been predicated of works of art.

Meanings of works of art may be divided roughly into three main kinds. First of all, there are those cases in which by "giving the meaning" of a work of art is meant offering something in the nature of *iconographic explanation or symbol interpretation*. It will here be taken for granted, without further discussion, that concern with the understanding of such matters as the symbolic signification of a lion or the religious import of an ecclesiastical gown or a pontifical gesture is extra-aesthetic. The second kind of *non-aesthetic meanings* of works of art may be termed descriptive or "historical." This meaning has to do with the significance of the work of art as related to its author, with its revelation of the psychological forces, biographical incidents, and special motivations that determine the character of the product. It has to do with the significance of the work of art in its relation to the social and ideological milieu from which it springs and whose currents and characteristics, both manifest and latent, it registers. Again, the tracing out of such meanings is the concern rather of the biographer, the moralist, the psychoanalyst, the cultural historian, than of the aesthetic contemplator. It is not, of course, claimed that the classes of meanings just described are mutually exclusive, for they are not determined by a single *fundamentum divisionis*.

The third is the *hermeneutic meaning* of an *aesthetic* datum. It is similar to the metaphysical meaning in that the datum "implies", in a metaphorical sense, what is beyond itself. It is the apprehending subject that is immediately qualified by the influence of what lies beyond it.[34]

The aesthetic meaning of a datum is determined neither by an objective system of propositions, nor by practice, but by the values which happen to be effectively relevant to the aesthetic datum of the moment. In speaking of effective relevance one must be clear – and it is of the utmost importance – that one's contention is not that it is *mere* feeling which is enjoyed in aesthetic experience. It is things which are felt, expressive forms which can be apprehended only with some effort. Feeling is but the subjective side of a whole subject-object concrete experience, and there is, in what one has said, no implication either of hedonism or of emotionalism. But aesthetic meaning is determined and controlled subjectively by feeling, and the affective value of aesthetic symbols conditions their aesthetic relevance in any given aesthetic unity. Aesthetic contemplation is also the receptive scene which allows the new spirit of the times to become manifest. To give an example, if one looks at the intricate design of a carpet, one is first of all conscious of the carpet as an object. One gazes at it with pleasure and calls it beautiful. One may go no further than this opinion; one's relation to the carpet may remain quite simple. It may also happen, though, that one reads himself into the pattern on the carpet and discovers in the multitude of interwoven lines an image of infinity passing from one's normal, unidimensional time into a labyrinthine time. In this case, the capret no longer exists independent of the perceiver as an object, neither is one's own attitude towards it completely impartial. One's relationship to it becomes one of progressive realization in which one advances along or a path which now leads the perceiver to the heights of complete identification with the pattern, only to plunge down again into the depths of estrangement, without ever allowing the perceiver to grasp the pattern as

a whole. Although one can never expect to grasp the substance of this whole in its entirety, in searching after it, one hopes to discover an explanation of one's own existence. The imaginative selection of Larkin is based upon a desire to produce a whole with an affective value in it.

It follows that meanings in the poem will be aesthetic meanings insofar as they are part of the total field of aesthetic regard. That is, insofar as they are attended to, not with a view merely to understanding, which is the focus of Modernism, or using or proving them, but with a view to contemplating them for what they may contribute to the aesthetic import of the whole to which they belong.

At another level, the distinction between "appearance" and "reality" corresponds with the distinction between the "how" and the "what". But, in our appreciation of the poetry of Larkin, one should not try to make such distinction. Most of Larkin's poems, that is to say, have subject matter. But such subject matter or meaning, when treated aesthetically, is not, in strictness, the meaning of the poem in the sense that it is something external to the poem that the poem symbolizes. It is the very stuff of the poem; not the whole stuff, but a part which enters into and fuses with the phrases and words and their assonances and rhythms to constitute the poem as an aesthetic organism.

Larkin is concerned with the evocative uses of the language. The "evocation of feelings" is unquestionably the primary preoccupation of Larkin, but feelings are associated with the "what" as well as (or, better, as fused with) the "how", with meanings referred to by the poetic medium. If it may be objected that such meanings, even if admitted as elements within the art object, are not the aesthetic, but the logical referents of the language symbols, the reply is that they are aesthetic just to the extent that they are treated aesthetically.

For the sake of argument, one shall take the "what" to refer to "significance" and the "how" to refer to the "beautiful".

The case which I have tried to defend is that significance is not an extra-aesthetic consideration, but that it enters, if properly regarded, into the very tissue of beauty, and constitutes half – and the dominant half – of its nature.

With Larkin's poetry, one can say the more significant, the more evocative and the more beautiful. One must not say "more significant and more beautiful", as if significance and beauty were separate units to be added, any more than one must say "more expressive and more beautiful." One must say, "more greatly beautiful because more *significant*," or "more perfectly beautiful because more perfectly *expressive*," measuring by the ideal, which is the profoundest significance embodied perfectly through expression, bearing in mind that the meaning of single words, such as "dead!" or "found!" or "ice!", used in perceptual propositions, lies in their repercussions, not in a system of abstract thought, but in the system of our practical life.

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## Notes:

(1) M.M. Enani, *Varieties of Irony: An Essay on Modern English Poetry*. (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1986), p. 16.

(2) Philip Larkin, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces* 1955-1982. (London: Faber, 1983), p. 297.

(3) Quoted by John Press, A Map of Modern English Verse. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 259.

(4) James Naremore, Philip Larkin's "Lost World", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Summer, 1974), 3.

(5) Larkin, *Required Writing*, p. 129.

(6) Ibid, pp. 216-217.

(7) A.V.C. Schmidt, 'Darkness

Echoing': Reflections of the Return of Mythopoeia in Some Recent Poems of Geoffery Hill and Seamus Heaney", *The Review of English Studies, New Series*, Vol. 36, No. 142 (May, 1985), 200.

(8) See Frank Thilly, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, (New York, London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), 1964, pp. 562-66.

(9) Ibid, pp. 427-429.

(10) Quoted in Martin Scofield, "Refining the Life: Philip Larkin's Poetry Reconsidered", *English Studies* (1998), p. 46.

(11) Philip Larkin, Collected Poems, (ed.). With Introduction by Anthony Thwaite, London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988. All Poetry quotations are taken from this edition.

(12) Tamer Tawfik Saudi, Jungian Viens in Philip Larkin's Poetry. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Banha, 2011, p. 162.

(13) Andrew Motin, *Philip Larkin: A Writer Life*. (London: Faber, 1993), p. 64.

(14) Enani, p. 78.

(15) Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*. (England: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 242.

(16) Larkin, *Required Writing*, p. 81.

(17) Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin*. (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 63.

(18) Terry Whalen, *Philip Larkin and English Poetry*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p. 70.

(19) Edward Picot, *Outcasts from Eden: Ideas of Landscape in British Poetry since 1945*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), pp. 44-45.

(20) Larkin, *Required Writing*, p. 265.

(21) Quoted in T.J. Ross, "Getting to Know Philip Larkin: The Life and Letters", *The Literary Review*, p. 294.

(22) Enani, p. 69.

(23) Ibid, p. 69.

(24) Martin Scofield, p. 46.

(25) John Saunders, "Beauty and Truth", in *Critical Essays on Philip Larkin: The Poem*. (Essex: Longman, 1989), p. 43.

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(27) Salem Hassan, *Philip Larkin and his Contemporaries*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 45.

(28) K.R. Popper, The Open Society and its Enemies: The Spell of Plato (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1945, rpt. 1974), p. 14.

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(30) Larkin, *Required Writing*, p. 83.

(31) Otto Baensch, "Art and Feeling", in *Reflection on Art*, (ed.) by Susanne K. Langer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 10.

(32) Larkin, *Required Writing*, pp. 125-126.

(33) Tiojana Stojkovic, "Larkin in the Cinema: Dynamic Visualization in "Show Saturday" and "Here". *English Studies*, Vol. 86, No. 4. (August, 2008), p. 313.

(34) See M. Sh. El-Komy, *Theories of Criticism: Philosophical Approach* (Cairo: Egyptian General Organization for Books), 2004. Shebl suggests a tripartite critical process: description, interpretation and hermeneutics.

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