Philip Larkin:
A Critical Study of the Poetry in Relation to Relevant Conventions and Traditions of Twentieth-Century Writing

by

Adrienne Elizabeth Brumage

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Note to the Text

The following abbreviations for the three volumes of Larkin's poetry I am considering appear where necessary in brackets in the text:

LD -- The Less Deceived

WW -- The Whitsun Weddings

HW -- High Windows

In the appendix I include a copy of "Aubade," which has not been published in any widely-circulating collection.

Abstract

My approach in this thesis has been thematic rather than chronological: I attempt to treat Larkin's poetry in detail and as representatively as possible, but the discussion takes place in relation to dominant figures and movements in the poetic practice of the twentieth century. I have chosen to concentrate on Larkin's mature poetry, for the break with the method of The North Ship is so unusually distinct that the inclusion of this earlier volume would, for my purposes, be distracting rather than informative. Within the three later volumes I do see some signs of development though no major shift of emphasis.

In my first chapter I examine the relationship, suggested by Larkin's own remarks, between his mature poetry and that of Thomas Hardy: although frequent references have been made to Larkin's debt to Hardy, this connection has not, as far as I know, received sustained critical attention. My analysis initially centres on selected poems from Hardy's "Poems of 1912-13" which seem specifically to engage Larkin, but then broadens out to consider the central stimulus provided Larkin's work by the questions raised here, such as the status of the past and the flawed nature of memory, particularly as revealed in the context of loss. I furthermore indicate that Hardy's influence is not exclusively thematic but also formal and technical.

Taking the lead from Larkin's own remarks I then consider his hitherto unexamined relation to the Georgian poets whom he sees as continuing the tradition of Hardy in the early part of the twentieth century. Aspects of Larkin's work such as his emphasis on the local

and everyday, his use of colloquial expression, and the lucidity engendered by a concern for a popular audience, are both highlighted and clarified by a comparison with the Georgian method, as I attempt to show in close analysis of works by both Larkin and certain Georgian poets. At the same time Larkin cannot be comfortably confined within this tradition, as in particular my concluding comparison with John Betjeman shows, for the wide range of his poetic achievement suggests other literary forbears.

In my final chapter I argue that Larkin's relation to the Georgians' modernist successors is more complex than might be assumed from his criticism of Modernism in the arts, and that an examination of his poetic practice reveals significant areas where he is indebted to early modernist writing. A Symbolist influence has been suggested by various critics, and after expanding on this possibility, offering, I hope, new insights, I broaden the discussion to include aspects such as Larkin's poetic syntax, the notable quiddity, relating to questions of determinism, of much of his verse, and his sharing of other preoccupations central to early modernist writing. In this I find that the poetry of T.S. Eliot offers a particularly useful standard of comparison. Although there are manifest and undeniable differences between Larkin and his modernist precursors, it is his eclecticism which enables him to achieve his poetic stature.

I

LARKIN, HARDY, AND THE POETRY OF LOSS

The opening of Calvin Bedient's chapter on Philip Larkin in Eight Contemporary Poets aptly captures the view of Larkin as an invariably gloomy and pessimistic poet which has gained hold in the minds of so many modern critics of his poetry:

> English poetry has never been so persistently out in the cold as it is with Philip Larkin -- a poet who (contrary to Wordsworth's view of the calling) rejoices not more but less than other men in the spirit of life that is in him. Frost is a perennial boy, Hardy a fighter, by comparison. The load of snow, soiled and old, stays on the roof in poem after poem and, rubbing a clear space at the window, Larkin is there to mourn once again a world without generative fire. Well, it is just as he knew it would be, though now and then something surprising -- a sheen of sunlight, some flutter of life -- almost makes him wish for a moment that he could frolic out of doors. (69)

A close examination of the eighty-odd poems collected in Larkin's three mature volumes, The Less Deceived, The Whitsun Weddings and High Windows, would of course reveal the element of distortion in Bedient's strictures, but in fairness one should say that this reputation must to a large degree be earned by the strong and persistent awareness of loss which informs much of Larkin's poetry. One would be inclined, as a means to understanding, to place such poems in the category of elegy: yet whereas elegy not only rehearses mourning but also dispels it, most elegies involving some kind of resurrection myth in which the past is redeemed, Larkin insists on an ultimate discontinuity between present and past. He seems to debunk

the elegist's concern with consolation, his emphasis on letting go of the past being in many cases so harsh that one feels one is not dealing with elegy at all. Furthermore, his concern with loss is by no means limited to death, but takes in a wide range of experience in which transience is of central significance, so that is is often not possible to draw a line between traditional elegiac topoi and questions of memory.

An important presence in this poetry is Thomas Hardy. Whereas Yeats may be considered to be the dominant influence in Larkin's first collection, The North Ship, Larkin himself sees the discovery of Hardy's poetry as dramatically influencing his subsequent work:

> When I came to Hardy it was with the sense of relief that I didn't have to try and jack myself up to a concept of poetry that lay outside my own life -- this is perhaps what I felt Yeats was trying to make me do. One could simply relapse back into one's own life and write from it. Hardy taught one to feel rather than to write -- of course one has to use one's own language and one's own jargon and one's own situations -- and he taught one as well to have confidence in what one felt. ("Philip Larkin Praises the Poetry of Thomas Hardy" 111)

One of the immediate outcomes of this new-found confidence is Larkin's direct treatment of death and transience, as opposed to the self-conscious managing of these subjects in The North Ship. Despite clear differences -- to some extent those of "own language ... own jargon and ... own situations" -- many of the poems of his three mature volumes which share this central preoccupation relate closely to Hardy's work, sometimes as distinctly as to suggest a submerged debate with the earlier poet. It is interesting that in one of his most extended appreciations of Hardy Larkin moves immediately to the question of Hardy as an elegist:

> But it surely cannot be denied that the dominant emotion in Hardy is sadness. Hardy was peculiarly well equipped to perceive the melancholy, the misfortunate, the frustrating,

> the failing elements of life. It could be said of him as of Little Father Time that he would like the flowers very much if he didn't keep thinking they would all be withered in a few days. ("Wanted : Good Hardy Critic" 177-8)

Larkin goes on to argue that as Hardy, because of this awareness of loss, placed great value on the "intensely maturing experience" of suffering, the presence of pain in his work

> ... is a positive, not a negative, quality -- not the mechanical working out of some pre-determined allegiance to pessimism or any other concept, but the continual imaginative celebration of what is both the truest and the most important element in life, most important in the sense of most necessary to spiritual development. (178)

In his enthusiasm here Larkin perhaps transposes his own concerns, in particular that with "truth," to Hardy and underplays the movement from grief towards consolation in Hardy's poetry, for Hardy frequently attempts to quell his pain through a recovering of the past, of the flowers before they were withered. It is this activity which Larkin constantly and forcefully questions in his own poetry of loss.

In "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album," the poem with which Larkin opens his second volume The Less Deceived, his preoccupation with the process of decay and dying, with the consequences of being timebound, is focused in an exploration of memory. This pre-eminently human faculty is shown, too, to be inherently flawed, the perspectives it offers being deceptive and its tempting consolations illusory. The young man who is the speaker in "Lines ..." is "sent distracted" (line two) by the young lady's photographs of herself when young. He is at first inclined to ascribe the intense feeling which looking through the album inspires in him to photography's convincing realism, its suggestion that by its faithful reportage it establishes and retains as present what is past:

> But o, photography! as no art is,
> Faithful and disappointing! that records
> Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds,
> And will not censor blemishes
> Like washing-lines, and Hall's-Distemper boards,
>
> But shows the cat as disinclined, and shades
> A chin as doubled when it is, what grace
> Your candour thus confers upon her face!
> How overwhelmingly persuades
> That this is a real girl in a real place....

Then what Larkin sees as an unavoidable search for a more accurate explanation leads him to:

> Or is it just the past? Those flowers, that gate,
> These misty parks and motors, lacerate
> Simply by being over; you
> Contract my heart by looking out of date.

The photographs move the speaker not because they allow the past to "live again," but because in their exactness of detail they deny the possibility of re-connection, of any mediation between the subject (himself) and the object in the past. The insight which follows on from this is profound:

> ...but in the end, surely, we cry
> Not only at exclusion, but because
> It leaves us free to cry.

What is being forced is a full acceptance of the "pastness" of the past.

These last-quoted lines seem to be specifically a development on the position reached by Thomas Hardy in his poem "The Voice." Here the poet is left crying at his exclusion, an exclusion caused by the death of the woman who is the subject of the poem (Hardy's wife Emma). She is transformed, in the poet's mind, into a kind of ghostly presence, hence tantalisingly suggesting the possiblility of a relationship which the fact of death must deny. In the first two verses the poet

attempts to recall the dead person while in the third he begins to question the evidence of his senses:

> Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
> Saying that now you are not as you were
> When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
> But as at first, when our day was fair.
>
> Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
> Standing as when I drew near to the town
> Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
> Even to the original air-blue gown!
>
> Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
> Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
> You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
> Heard no more again far or near?

The progression here from "saying" in the first verse to "standing" in the second and "travelling" in the third traces a physical pattern of return, while the "call to me ... all to me" refrain of the first verse (echoed as variation on a theme in the second and third) invests the woman with a plaintive voice: she is thus to some degree embodied. The more assertive mood of lines four and eight respectively continues to establish her solidity, as it were, and concomitantly the positive note of the hope the poet harbours that this earlier, happier stage of their life together may be reinstated.

Yet the seeds of dissolution are already contained in the image representing the woman in her prime, the relationship at its peak of fulfilment: in a mingling of elements the "air-blue gown" of the second verse "dissolves" into the "breeze" and "wet mead" of the third, with "dissolved to wan wistlessness" containing further suggestions of the watery, while "wistlessness" itself yokes the element of air to the line through its rhyme with "listlessness" ("the breeze, in its listlessness"). The dissolution which the speaker himself suffers in the last verse where the poem's form is fractured is already prepared for in this third verse, in the necessity for the

ageing speaker to receive the breeze or ghost rather than to go out across the mead to meet it. The final collapse of form is further anticipated in this verse by its being the first in which the poet shows his doubts about the identity of the voice and by its being constructed almost entirely in participial form. This construction is continued in the last verse and highlighted by the rhymed line-endings on "falling" and "calling":

> Thus I; faltering forward,
> Leaves around me falling,
> Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
> And the woman calling.

The revelation here is that it is the poet himself who has been calling, the ghost being a projection of his mental state. The voice has been owned, "demythologized," thus allowing the reality of the situation, the conjunction of "woman's voice" and wind, to present itself.

Hardy thus attempts in this poem to reconstitute his relationship with his dead wife, but though he forces himself largely to reject the ghost his will creates, he is, as the last line shows, reluctant to relinquish completely the image of the woman. An abiding concern is implied on the part of the dead person, or at least some kind or degree of communication which does not leave the speaker, in Larkin's words, "free to cry." The past is allowed to become a compelling presence. The poet protects himself from the full realisation of the hopelessness of his suffering, a hopelessness implied in the last verse, by his creation of a quest for the past. Larkin, on the other hand, while acknowledging the force of the past, will allow it no such easy reinstatement.

Given Larkin's acknowledged debt to Hardy, poems such as "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" can be seen to be a conscious

development on questions raised in Hardy's "poems of memory," thus in particular the "Poems of 1912-13" subtitled Veteris vestigia flammae -- 'ashes of an old flame.' In poems such as "Your Last Drive," "The Haunter" and "The Spell of the Rose," the "ghost," a kind of displaced afterlife, is used as a device to control the dead woman : she is transferred to the world of object or artefact, but Hardy pretends for her the status of an autonomous individual. Emma becomes a ventriloquist's dummy : through putting the words he does into the dead person's mouth, with no possibility of refutation, Hardy is by sleight of hand able to satisfy his pressing need to create an impression of unity and affection in his and Emma's past relationship and sidesteps the task of investigating more deeply his present suffering and remorse.

In "Your Last Drive" the direct speech given Emma in the fourth verse enables the poet to reply to her in the fifth and, conveniently, last verse, to exonerate himself and to be consoled in the knowledge that he has been "heard." As it continues the verse contradicts the initial troubling assertion "True : never you'll know":

> True : never you'll know. And you will not mind.
> But shall I then slight you because of such?
> Dear ghost, in the past did you ever find
> The thought 'What profit', move me much?

Set against the purely rhetorical questions in "Lines ..." ("Or is it just the past?") Hardy's challenges seem more like disguised direct questions, allowing an old domestic argument to continue into the present. The implicit establishing of dialogue thus allows a modification of the past, rupturing what is for Larkin its essential inviolability, as expressed in "Lines ...":

So I am left
To mourn (without a chance of consequence)
You, balanced on a bike against a fence;
To wonder if you'd spot the theft
Of this one of you bathing; to condense,

In short, a past that no one now can share....

Larkin further suitably, if consciously, recognises the hiatus between past and present in the placing of the break between the seventh and eighth verses of the poem:

We know what was
Won't call on us to justify
Our grief, however hard we yowl across

The gap from eye to page.

The expression "yowl" suggests not only the desperation of our attempts to seek consolation, but also their pitifulness. The justification which Hardy seems to be seeking is what Larkin here explicitly eschews.

Examining "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" within the framework provided by these two poems of Hardy's lends cohesion to a poem which might otherwise seem somewhat disjointed. In particular the transition in verses five and six from "overwhelmingly persuades / That this is a real girl in a real place, / In every sense empirically true!" to "Or is it just the past?" is clarified by the suggested comparison with Hardy's relatively easy reconstitution of the past as present. Larkin's poem moves with the speaker's pattern of thought as he flips through the pages of the album and enacts in its tonal inconsistencies (the wry self-mockery of the first three verses, followed by sober but emotional reflection and then serious philosophising) the impetus towards "truth-seeking" which leads him to a thorough investigation of his emotional state.

"Love Songs in Age," a poem from Larkin's 1964 volume The Whitsun

Weddings, can be read as an answer to Hardy's "The Haunter." In "The Haunter" the ghostly Emma flits in Hardy's shadow attempting to establish with him some of the communication she seems not to have enjoyed while alive. She assures him of her love:

> How shall I let him know
> That whither his fancy sets him wandering
> I, too, alertly go?-

The figure from the past is made to cry out for reconciliation:

> What a good haunter I am, O tell him!
> Quickly make him know
> If he but sigh since my loss befell him
> Straight to his side I go.
> Tell him a faithful one is doing
> All that love can do
> Still that his path may be worth pursuing
> And to bring peace thereto.

The ghostly characteristic of hovering is used, perhaps touchingly, to indicate the closeness of the couple, but carries the picture of doting faithfulness to the point of absurdity: this verse, the last in the poem, becomes conspicuously open to the charge of mawkishness, the last four lines having the consoling but lulling intonation of a hymn. This hymnlike repose is no accident, for in the suggestions of heavenly love the poet is absolved of responsibility for his fate -- "love" and the ghost will ensure a smooth passage. Emma is there constantly to soothe and console the poet, her love must outweigh the injuries done to her (implied earlier in the poem in "Now that he goes and wants me with him / More than he used to do") and for which Hardy castigates himself -- the remorse is evident -- only immediately to be offered consolation.

What is actually involved here is a denial of the poet's past. The whole relation between Hardy and Emma, and particularly their separation by death, is recast in heightened pathos, Hardy's usual

awareness of the attrition of love and all human feelings by time, everyday life, Fate, being suppressed. In the last verse of "The Haunter" he asserts confidently the healing absolutes which Larkin continually questions, thus exposing the myths by which we live, as in the concluding verse of "Love Songs in Age":

> But, even more,
>
> The glare of that much-mentioned brilliance, love,
> Broke out, to show
> Its bright incipience sailing above
> Still promising to solve, and satisfy,
> And set unchangeably in order. So
> To pile them back, to cry,
> Was hard, without lamely admitting how
> It had not done so then, and could not now.

Here old songbooks perform a similar function to that of the photographs in "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album": they reawaken in the middle-aged woman the sense of youth, freshness and hope with which they were once intimately connected, but again, though they may be allowed to be symbols, they have no real, present power. Larkin leads the subject of the poem to take a step further than the self-indulgence and deception of nostalgic remniscence, "lamely" forcing the facing of "the truth." The pettinesses of the everyday must demean and diminish and render the healing power of love a fiction:

> She kept her songs, they took so little space,
> The covers pleased her:
> One bleached from lying in a sunny place,
> One marked in circles by a vase of water,
> One mended, when a tidy fit had seized her,
> And coloured, by her daughter -
> So they had waited, till in widowhood
> She found them, looking for something else....

In his exploration of the relation between present and past Larkin seems preoccupied with the photograph. The simplification which the

photographic image entails, despite its precision, is used in "Whatever Happened" (LD) as an analogue for the obscuring effect of memory. The fictionalising process is seen to set in without delay:

> At once whatever happened starts receding.
> Panting, and back on board, we line the rail
> With trousers ripped, light wallets, and lips bleeding.
>
> Yes, gone, thank God! Remembering each detail
> We toss for half the night, but find next day
> All's kodak-distant....

The verse-by-verse recession of the incident experienced is enacted by the terza rima form (a.b.a. b.c.b. c.d.c. d.e.d.) in which each stanza leads out of the preceding one, as well as by the metaphor provided by the literal movement of the agents ("we") from the shore back to the boat and thence away from the continent where the "incident" took place. The eventual products of the compulsion to control the unsettling experience are "yarns," the acknowledged fabrications by means of which the community of travellers entertains, and snapshots:

> 'Perspective brings significance,' we say,
> Unhooding our photometers, and, snap!
> What can't be printed can be thrown away.

It is decidedly a "perspective" and not a true image which the camera affords, as the disposability of the non-printable emphasises.

The "significant perspectives" with which memory colours experience preoccupy Larkin throughout the three volumes I am considering. This concern emerges most explicity with the "long perspectives" which "link us to our losses" of "Reference Back," a poem from The Whitsun Weddings; however its genesis can be traced in the earlier volume. It achieves its most accomplished embodiment in poems such as "Sad Steps" and "High Windows" from the final volume High Windows.

Perhaps one can discern a Hardyesque "ghost" in "Maiden Name" (LD), one of the few poems (most of them early) in which Larkin deals directly with the relation between a particular man (the speaker) and a woman in his past. The addressee's maiden name becomes a shadowy presence, intimately connected with her, yet also clearly distinct, almost autonomous, made so by her disowning act of marriage:

> Marrying left your maiden name disused.
> Its five light sounds no longer mean your face,
> Your voice, and all your variants of grace;
> For since you were so thankfully confused
> By law with someone else, you cannot be
> Semantically the same as that young beauty:
> It was of her that these two words were used.

The idealisation which typifies Hardy's memories is present here, yet it is qualified, firstly by the poem's predominantly playful tone. The wit is not unlike Donne's in quality, tough and teasing, its harshness only just muted by nostalgia ; an entranced and by implication deceived subsidence into the married state is suggested by the phrase "thankfully confused" which is conveniently isolated by the line-ending; then there is the slight taunting in the rhythmically enforced emphasis on "her" in the last line of the verse; and the self-conscious delight in the skills of versification and rhetoric in the second and third lines:

> ˘ ˘ / ˘ — / ˘ — / ˘ — / ˘ —
> Its five / light sounds / no longer / mean / your face,
> ˘ — / ˘ — / ˘ — / ˘ ˘ / ˘ —
> Your voice, / and all / your variants / of grace.

The movement here as it were through a half-rhyme from "face" to "voice" to "grace" is, coupled with the repeated "your," particularly satisfying.

The clever play around "used" in this verse however brings it closer to Hardy than Donne. A touch of pathos is introduced by the

negative "disused" in the first line and this is drawn through the verse by the associated "confused" (line four) and "used" (line seven), thus modifying the offhand, slightly satirical tone of, for example, the last line, or perhaps even introducing a touch of bitterness on the part of the speaker. The sense of loss or abandonment in "disused" is sustained by an inconspicuous procession of negatives ("no longer mean," "you cannot be") which continues in the second verse to culminate in the emphatic series which forms the turning point of the poem:

> Then is it scentless, weightless, strengthless, wholly
> Untruthful? Try whispering it slowly.
> No, its means you. Or, since you're past and gone,
>
> It means what we feel now about you then....

Each word here revives the particular quality while contradicting it. Yet, as the last line quoted above shows, Larkin is unlike Hardy able to bring the speaker to a truthful assessment of his position at the same time as allowing this "recalling" full force. The gap between past and present is further recognised in the division within this line created by the antithesis of "we" and "you," "now" and "then," as well as by the emphasis given "past and gone" by its terminal position in the second verse.

That the speaker, in his "faithfulness" to the "old name," is consciously choosing to distort and is in no danger of losing his awareness of the true effect of the passing of time is indicated by the closing lines of the poem:

> So your old name shelters our faithfulness,
> Instead of losing shape and meaning less
> With your depreciating luggage laden.

The suitably bathetic quality of this last line results primarily from

its clumsy syntactic and metrical construction, the woman in the present being "weighed down" by a clogging of syntactical procedures: the chimes of "losing," "meaning," "depreciating" combine with the difficult rhythm passage of "luggage laden" to snag up the movement of the whole line, while the length of "depreciating" has in its syntactical position a delaying and emphatic effect. This sense of something winding down is sustained by the construction of the final line as, simply, a single participial phrase.

Larkin does not deny that at least an impression of bridging the gap between present and past by means of the sympathetic imagination is possible. The emotional understanding in "Deceptions," the poem which from its third last line gives the volume its title ("For you would hardly care / That you were less deceived, out on that bed, / Than he was...."), links the speaker to the tricked and suffering nineteenth-century woman[1]:

> Even so distant, I can taste the grief,
> Bitter and sharp with stalks, he made you gulp.

His identification with her is seen in his imaginative reconstruction of her state of mind, the sense of loss being refracted through images of exclusion:

> The sun's occasional print, the brisk brief
> Worry of wheels along the street outside
> Where bridal London bows the other way,
> And light, unanswerable and tall and wide,
> Forbids the scar to heal, and drives
> Shame out of hiding.

For the woman even the conventionally benign, because life-giving, sunlight becomes accusing, partaking in society's judgement upon her. Yet however strong the force of sympathy in this case, its ability to realise a past event, Larkin remains firm on the impossibility of any

actual communication:

> Slums, years, have buried you. I would not dare
> Console you if I could.

The passage of time renders consolation inconceivable.

The preoccupation with the processes of time in relation to human awareness of loss is dextrously exploited in another early poem, "Triple Time" (LD). The poem contains, as it were, three beats to one bar: the "present" of the first verse is the "future" of the second, "the future furthest childhood saw," and becomes the "past" of the third. In the first verse the suspension of time's movement which seems to occur in the present is suitably suggested by means of a static image:

> This empty street, this sky to blandness scoured,
> This air, a little indistinct with autumn
> Like a reflection, constitute the present....

When seen from the perspective of a time past this image becomes imbued with activity:

> This is the future furthest childhood saw
> Between long houses, under travelling skies,
> Heard in contending bells--
> An air lambent with adult enterprise....

Flatness is lost to effects of length and depth; a sense of mobility is created by the open-endedness in the use of present participles as opposed to the "completed" past participles of the first verse ("scoured," "soured," "unrecommended"). The element of fantasy which any projection into the future must entail is then recognised in the third verse by the superimposing of a metaphor on the more literal image of the preceding verses, making this perspective, fittingly, the most fictional of all: this "empty street" will on another day

...be the past
A valley cropped by fat neglected chances
That we insensately forbore to fleece.
On this we blame our last
Threadbare perspectives, seasonal decrease.

The closing image of impoverishment intensifies the sense of loss already awakened by the contrast between the dull and empty present of the first verse and its enticing aspect as it had been seen with the optimism of youth in the second. The season of this final verse is, by virtue of its passing on from the "autumn" of the "present," implicity winter. "Threadbare" suggests "cold" as well as poor, and hence wintry, while it also reflects on "to fleece," driving the force of the moral home. Thus the concluding "seasonal decrease" is justified, and the traditional correlation of winter and old age given particular force. However these "last / "Threadbare perspectives" are not only memories of the past, the view back faded owing to age's failing powers, but grim anticipations of the future, or the wearing away of it as death approaches. The "valley cropped" suggests not only a luxurious greenness of growth now out of reach, but the biblical "valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23). These gloomy overtones are to a degree supported by intimations of sin, or rather its secular, humanist equivalent, in "neglected" and in the intensity of "insensately forbore." This verse as a whole thus displays what one could call a falling emotional rhythm, as opposed to the "rising" note of the previous verse. Though one would expect this pattern to reinforce the sense of the seasonal or cyclical the emphasis remains so overwhelmingly on "decrease" that the "seasonal" of the last line suggests linear movement (by the season) rather than cyclical (every winter) and the poem offers little hope of redemption.

The intricately worked pattern of associations in "Triple Time" provides evidence of Larkin's considerable technical skill in this

relatively early volume. Another poem from The Less Deceived, the somewhat more light-hearted "I Remember, I Remember," shows a technical dexterity remniscent of Hardy's in "The Voice," though the subject, the speaker's memories of childhood, is given treatment rather different from any one could imagine by Hardy. The poem seems to be more specifically a reaction against the idealisation of childhood found in Dylan Thomas' "Fern Hill," for example: Larkin acknowledges Thomas as an early influence (Introduction, The North Ship 8) but later came to share his comtemporaries' vigorous opposition to the work of Thomas and his followers. Yet Larkin has never missed an opportunity to denounce the myth of "childhood," as he does most tellingly in "The Savage Seventh" -- "[i]t was that verse about becoming again as a little child that caused the first sharp waning of my Christian sympathies" (713) -- so although lines from "I Remember, I Remember" such as "Our garden, first: where I did not invent / Blinding theologies of flowers and fruits" may suggest Thomas to the unsympathetic it would perhaps be truer to describe the poem as a general debunking, in the sardonic manner one comes to consider typical of Larkin, of a common romanticisation.

Larkin constructs the poem on well-tried elegiac techniques. Hardy and other elegists frequently use the negative form as a way of exploring the poignancy of loss, for in the process of apparently cancelling the memory it is at the same time brought back, transferred from life to the page, and the past is thus redeemed. However with the series of negatives which runs through the third to eighth verses Larkin is clearly recalling and cancelling not his memories, but deliberate falsifications, the collective mythology springing from the human weakness for making "something" of "[n]othing":

'Was that,' my friend smiled, 'where you "have your roots"?'
No, only where my childhood was unspent,
I wanted to retort, just where I started:

By now I've got the whole place clearly charted.
Our garden, first: where I did not invent
Blinding theologies of flowers and fruits,
And wasn't spoken to by an old hat.
And here we have that splendid family

I never ran to when I got depressed,
The boys all biceps and the girls all chest....

A further elegiac device is at work here in the sophisticated rhyme scheme, comparable to the terza rima form of "Whatever Happened." The pattern, in the verses quoted above is as follows -- a.b.c. c.b.a.d.e. f.f. -- and continues e.d.d. Each verse is linked to the preceding one by at least one rhyme, this having a kind of "throwback" effect suggesting the echoes of memory, the lingering of an experience in the mind. The linking process can be seen as a throwing forward to the following verse as well: the associative nature of memory is thus enacted poetically. The irony is of course that it is, throughout, the unmemorable or unremembered which is being grudgingly recalled.

With "Reference Back," from the following volume The Whitsun Weddings, Larkin moves from suggestion by means of technique to explicit statement, the discursive conclusion of the poem forming its imaginative centre:

Truly, though our element is time,
We are not suited to the long perspectives
Open at each instant of our lives.
They link us to our losses : worse,
They show us what we have as it once was,
Blindingly undiminished, just as though
By acting differently we could have kept it so.

The speaker is listening to records in his room at home and his musings are prompted by the "sudden bridge" formed by the blowing of notes through the air into the jazz-player's "huge remembering

pre-electric horn," where they are recorded, and by their then flowing out through the air, three decades later, to his and his mother's ears. The passage of the musical notes through the air is repeated in the call from room to room:

> That was a pretty one, I heard you call
> From the unsatisfactory hall
> To the unsatisfactory room where I
> Played record after record, idly,
> Wasting my time at home, that you
> Looked so much forward to.

The son's present listening thus suddenly and powerfully recalls a past, irrecoverable age, that of this mother's prime; at the same time their joint enjoyment of the piece "bridges the generation gap" (the cliché seems unavoidable), linking two sets of feelings which otherwise do not meet. The temporary nature of the connection is emphasised in the airiness of the musical bridge ("The flock of notes those antique negroes blew / Out of Chicago air ..."), this being comparable to Hardy's use of the elements of air and water to suggest dissolution in "The Voice." Repetition of "unsatisfactory" points to the mutual frustration of son and mother at the conditions of their existence, while the skilful transition from "[w]asting my time" in the first verse to "our element is time" in the third reveals the underlying reason for this sense of failure. In the poem's concluding lines Larkin recognises the tantalising closeness of consolation ("just as though / By acting differently"), but also its illusoriness.

In those poems from his last volume, High Windows, which explore the themes of memory and loss Larkin frequently introduces something like a note of uncertainty to the characteristically discursive concluding lines, thus allowing them an open-endedness which his preceding work more often lacks. One can take as an example the conclusion of "Sad Steps," where the "[b]lindingly undiminished" of

"Reference Back" is reworked in the description of the moon's "stare":

> One shivers slightly, looking up there.
> The hardness and the brightness and the plain
> Far-reaching singleness of that wide stare
>
> Is a reminder of the strength and pain
> Of being young; that it can't come again,
> But is for others undiminished somewhere.

The shiver here is not only for the reminder of loss, of diminishment, that "being young ... can't come again": it is equally a complex reaction to the nature of "being young," a shiver incorporating awe and perhaps a touch of horror, as well as a thrill of excitement. Youth demands a courage and strength which, it is implied, the speaker no longer possesses. That this decrease is not entirely for the worse is suggested by the speaker's observation of qualities both negative and positive in the scene before him. The "hardness and the brightness" suggests the metallic (anticipated by "[m]edallion of art!" in the previous verse) as well as vigour, confidence, and a kind of glory, the glory of the ideal as depicted in "Love Songs in Age" -- the "glare of that much-mentioned brilliance, love...." The "plain / Far-reaching singleness" of the moon's stare is a recognition of that undivided, hence undiminished, vision which youth enjoys, a vision which enables scope or achievement ("[f]ar-reaching") because of its very narrowness. The splintered vision which experience imposes is a sign of weakness, not strength, though the decreasing intensity of feeling brings the advantage (clearly shown to be double-edged) of reduced pain. A sense of relief therefore co-exists here with the suggestion of loss. The speaker's comfort comes both from his escape from the pain of youth and from the knowledge that these peaks of feeling continue to be experienced, that despite his individual loss, the pattern of human existence has not been interrupted: through others

"somewhere" (the vagueness here characteristically muting any over-confidence) rebirth is possible.

The equivocation seen in these concluding lines is prepared for in in the poem's earlier verses. Whereas "Love Songs in Age" presents the pain in the perceived falling short of an ideal, here the ideal itself is "demythologised" directly, shown as flawed or at least questionable. This demythologising process is aided by the debunking allowed through the reference to Sidney's sonnet, "With how sad steps, Oh Moon, thou climb'st the skies": in Larkin's poem the moon is accorded no such reverential treatment and the "sad steps" ironically, and movingly, become those of the observer and speaker. However Larkin does not introduce the moon, with its wealth of symbolic association, only to debunk it in the style of the "Movement" of the fifties : a subtle balance of opposing forces is achieved throughout the poem, allowing the co-existence of deep feeling and unrepentant mockery and a consequent increase, rather than muting, of the pathos. A comparison with earlier poems which use satirical techniques, such as "I Remember, I Remember" and "If, My Darling," (LD) shows how much is gained, for the unremitting harshness of tone makes particularly the latter poem flat and uninteresting.

This play of opposites that leads to the complex conclusion of "Sad Steps" begins in the first verse with the setting off of the mundane, vulgar world of the speaker ("Groping back to bed after a piss"), weighted down by "earthiness" (the "thick curtains" he draws must be heavy) and implicitly dirty, against the ideal lunar world which the apparent removal of a boundary reveals:

> I part thick curtains, and am startled by
> The rapid clouds, the moon's cleanliness.

However the "other" the speaker is jerked into an awareness of is not

allowed to remain untouched for, moving from spontaneous wonder to detached cynicism, he begins to play with what he sees. A "cavernous ... wind-picked" sky, while duly suggesting an imposing vastness, is also unpleasantly suggestive of a gaping mouth with attendant toothpick. The moon, traditionally female, then becomes (suitably) hysterical and flustered, she "dashes through clouds ... to stand apart," the speaker here implicity mocking her fussy attempts to separate herself from all defiling contact. Yet the next verse's "[h]igh and preposterous and separate," describing the moon's chosen position, reintroduces a sense of awe and incomprehension along with the ridiculous. The exclamations of the following two lines --

> Lozenge of love! Medallion of art!
> O wolves of memory! Immensements!

-- are as much attempts at comprehension, the traditional obeisances due to the moon, as debasing challenges shouted at it very much in the style of the line "A Grecian statue kicked in the privates" from the early "If, My Darling" (LD). In tone the exclamations move from the contemptuous ridicule of "[l]ozenge" to the somewhat melodramatic and opaque "wolves of memory!" and "[i]mmensements!", expressions which could suggest either awe or ridicule, or which are possibly also conscious failures to describe the scene. In support of the latter possibility come the faintly symbolist overtones of "wolves of memory," and the French-sounding plural of an abstract noun in "[i]mmensements," a word which also seems to be constructed on French rather than English principles (the addition of - ment to an adjective).

The decisive "No" which concludes the verse indicates that the speaker moves beyond this half-careless attempt to draw on associations from literature and art to the more profound realisation

of the last two verses. His literal position becomes metaphorical and the moon moves out of his grasp; he capitulates (though he will never admit it) and returns to and intensifies his initial reaction, thus joining the common lot of humanity, the common myth-making. The moon becomes a symbol of youth, or the speaker's memory of youth. Of youth's intense emotions love, suggested by the "pain / Of being young" as well as by associations with Sidney's sonnet and with the moon-like image in "Love Songs in Age," is the strongest. Yet the feeling in "Sad Steps" is not violent and assertive as in the exclamations of love poetry, but has the quiet pathos of resignation, is calmed by the diluting perspective of age.

The open-endedness of "High Windows," the title poem of this collection, derives largely from the opacity of its concluding image:

> 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.

We have here a further mutation of the "brilliance" looked to for an answer in "Love Songs in Age" and "Sad Steps," as well as the third in the series of perspectives which form the poem, each "view" posing urgent questions for the speaker.

The implicity middle-aged or elderly speaker is linked to his losses, to adapt a line from "Reference Back," through his observation of a pair of young lovers:

> When I see a couple of kids
> And guess he's fucking her and she's
> Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm,
> I know this is paradise
>
> Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives....

His assumption that they enjoy blissfully a total freedom he himself never had is however partly unsettled as memories of his own youth intrude and suspicions of the way his behaviour might have been seen by a previous generation. The falsification involved in both his view and that of his predecessors is exposed by the structural juxtaposition as the lines quoted above continue:

> 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 any 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.

The two views balance each other, each occupying roughly the same amount of space (one-and-a-half verses), so neither is to be considered absolute. However this is not the only technique by means of which a critical context for each perspective, and in particular for the ideal of "paradise" , is created. The throwaway quality of the language in the second and third lines in particular ("And guess he's fucking her and she's / Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm") degrades the young couple's lovemaking : the speaker has chosen the most mundane and mechanical descriptions available, the "common coinage." The harshness of the words could however be a deliberate cover for emotions of longing evoked in the speaker by what he witnesses, an interpretation suggested by the degree of prurience in "[a]nd guess...." His suffering from "sour grapes" would tend to reinstate "paradise," yet it is undermined again, more thoroughly, by the touch of condemnation in the insultingly incongruous simile in

"Bonds and gestures pushed to one side / Like an outdated combine harvester"; by the incipient menace in "down the long slide ... endlessly"; and by the air of bravado in the flippancy of "[n]o God any more," "hell and that," and the opinions attributed the earlier generation on the priest and his associates.

A more profound questioning of "I know this is paradise" occurs in the last verse with the final perspective of and through "high windows." The image contained in these lines seems to provide no answer to the questions the poem raises. After the manner of Symbolist poetry it seems to spring from "free association" rather than from some clear rational connection: it both "shows / Nothing" and seems to be telling the reader something. The "high windows" with their glass that "comprehend[s]" the sun would suggest the Church and its role as a repository of wisdom through the ages, the function Larkin appreciates in "Church Going,"; the last clause "and is endless," given the heavy stress on "is" and the emphasis of a concluding position, would seem to negate the "endlessly" of "down the long slide ... endlessly" and say "this is true endlessness." However the associations are by no means only positive. There is a wealth of ambiguity here, and possibly the most useful method of reaching an appreciation of the possible implications is to draw on other poems in Larkins <u>oeuvre</u> which use comparable images in their treatment of transience and loss.

The quality of the light in "Deceptions" (LD) seems similar to that suggested in the image from the concluding verse of "High Windows":

> And light, unanswerable and tall and wide,
> Forbids the scar to heal, and drives
> Shame out of hiding.

Yet here "light" is a moral imperative, accusing, all-seeing and all-revealing, to the victim's frenzied mind, itself demanding answers. The conclusion of "High Windows" is not so clear-cut, vacillating between suggestions of a positive moral standard -- the present "laxity" is both envied and implicity deplored, for there seems to be some nostalgia for a time when people did reach for enlightenment on these matters -- and "nothingness." What is looked to for answers does not seem able to give any.

The tradional association of the sun with the godhead is a subject dwelt on more fully in "Solar," the concluding four lines of which provide a gloss at least on "endless":

> Our needs hourly
> Climb and return like angels.
> Unclosing like a hand,
> You give for ever.

The "[u]nclosing" or endless quality of the "deep blue air" of "High Windows" could thus imply an eternal giving, responsive to our needs : yet this does not adequately account for "shows / Nothing, and is nowhere," unless an equation of transcendence and the enigmatic is implied.

A more ominous interpretation is suggested by a comparison with the use of light in the uncollected "Aubade," ostensibly, as the title indicates, a poem to the dawn. Here the speaker's sense of the omnipresence of death renders the dawn sky "white as clay, with no sun," "clay" conveying a cloying opacity rather than the illumination one would expect at dawn, and "white" connecting with the suggestion of white-coated doctors in the concluding "[p]ostmen like doctors go from house to house" to hint at an illness. Significantly there is no actual light for most of the poem. The coming of light in the last verse, which would conventionally provide relief, is itself part of the

trap:

> 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....

The transition within the poem from "soundless dark" in the second line to the "sky as white as clay, with no sun" in the third last is but the illusion of change, on a par with the essential hypocrisy of our daily lives:

> In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
> Till then I see what's really always there:
> Unresting death, a whole day nearer now....

Throughout the poem the conventional associations of light are undermined: it is the "glare" of death, not dawn or the sun, that the "mind blanks at" (the blindless implied here being taken up in "so it stays just on the edge of vision, / A small unfocused blur" and in the blankness of the dawn), while the "dread / Of dying ...[f]lashes." The cruel, unpleasant quality of the light in "Deceptions" is intensified, and at the same time light's usual comforting associations are used to increase, through the stress on their absence ("with no sun"), the repellent aspect of the scene.

Clearly the light in "High Windows" is of a very different kind. The conventional associations of sunlight are allowed much fuller play than in "Aubade," the "sun-comprehending glass" and "deep blue air" suggesting the warm, rich light of mid-morning. Robert Frost, who finds a place in Larkin's small library of poets[2], uses the colour blue to signify perfection or the ideal, as in for example "Fragmentary Blue":

> Why make so much of fragmentary blue
> In here and there a bird, or butterfly,

> Or flower, or wearing-stone, or open eye,
> When heaven presents in sheets the solid hue?
>
> Since earth is earth, perhaps, not heaven (as yet)-
> Though some savants make earth include the sky;
> And blue so far above us comes so high,
> It only gives our wish for blue a whet.

This symbolism is hinted at in Larkin's poem. If the view through the high windows is of the ideal, as the "long perspectives" on the past of the "[b]indingly undiminished" in "Reference Back," then the poem as a whole vividly embodies Larkin's preoccupation with loss in the sense of a falling short of an ideal aspired to. Here this would be the consequence of the inevitably finite bounds to human knowledge testified to by the disorientating final "shows / Nothing" and "is nowhere." This awareness of the limits of human knowledge can be brought into the context of "fallen man" suggested by the double entendre of "down the long slide / To happiness, endlessly": the word "long" in "long slide" renders the speaker's tone faintly suspicious, as if he cannot help remembering what a religious tradition has taught him -- this must be a fall -- though his remembrance does not have the status of belief. By association with "nothing" and "nowhere" "endlessly" becomes a threat, "without end" suggesting not unlimited freedom but a bond from which the subjects cannot escape: one cannot go back up a slide.

However the slightly alarming note to the negation "shows / Nothing, and is nowhere," the sense of a blindness, a dead end like that caused by the glare of death in "Aubade," should warn one against too fixed an interpretation of the concluding image of the poem.

In "Aubade" Larkin develops on the "nothing" and "nowhere" of "High Windows" to produce his most unflinching confrontation with the end result of transience, death:

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.

The bitter and vigorous affirmations of nothingness give way to a plethora of negatives, rising to a crescendo in the following verse:

...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.

The perspectives that "link us to our losses" can in this context be seen as a source of protection, for though they reveal imperfection they still keep death from us in proving that it has not yet come : the terror of no links is overwhelming. The echo of "Nothing to love or link with" to lines in the earlier "Ambulances" (WW) is striking:

Far
From the exchange of love to lie
Unreachable inside a room
The traffic parts to let go by
Brings closer what is left to come....

Yet the extreme despair of "Aubade," the stubborn refusal to offer any form of "cheap relief," is only highlighted by this comparison. The tone of "Ambulances" has none of the almost hysterical urgency of the later poem; it is gentler, more measured, perhaps dulled in the face of shock, the "sudden shut of loss":

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

And sense the solving emptiness
That lies just under all we do,
And for a second get it whole,

So permanent and blank and true.
The fastened doors recede. Poor soul,
They whisper at their own distress;

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

At last begin to loosen....

Here "[m]ay go" and "nearly" qualify respectively and restrain the "sudden shut of loss" and "at an end," as does "for a second," in the previous verse, "permanent and blank and true." The children, women, and "smells of different dinners" in the first verse quoted have a similar function, muffling the shock the presence of ambulance and victim creates, though they of course also throw the disturbance into relief. That the unlinking process is gradual is suggested by "loosen" and emphasised in the pause occasioned by the appropriate verse division. Even the impact of "the solving emptiness / That lies just under all we do" is relatively muted, "solving" implying not only dissolution but also a final solution. The touch of moralising on the speaker's part in "Poor soul, / They whisper at their own distress" increases this sense of distance -- the end is inescapable, but there is still time.

The last four lines quoted above closely parallel those in "Church Going" (LD) where the speaker focuses on the "link" the Church used to provide, giving further resonance to the "[n]othing to love or link with" of "Aubade":

Or will he be my representative,

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...?

Here "held unspilt" is set against "separation," and by extension, dissolution (the spilling contained in "unspilt" suggesting wastage, loss). As for the speaker, clearly placed in the secular twentieth century, belief is impossible, these links no longer exist leaving him, to use the metaphorical interpretation of lines from an earlier verse, "much at a loss .../ Wondering what to look for," and bringing him, inevitably, face to face with death in the poem's concluding lines:

> ....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.

The tones adopted here are, like those of "Ambulances," measured, for the speaker is trying to be reasonable about the irrational pull which the Church exerts on him. This stance results in the force of the wry last line only gradually making itself felt: the "solving emptiness ... just under all we do" translates unobtrusively into actual death literally under the speaker's feet.

The sense of there "still being time" also has some muting effect on the decisive, hard-hitting verse of "The Building" (HW), a poem which can be seen as developing on the preoccupations of "Ambulances" and, to a certain degree, "Church Going," and moving towards the dramatic intensity of "Aubade." The negatives which creep into the concluding verses create a restlessness while postulating a protectedness:

> Others, not knowing it, have come to join
> The unseen congregations whose white rows
> Lie set apart above - women, men;
> Old, young; crude facets of the only coin

> This place accepts. All know they are going to die.
> Not yet, perhaps not here, but in the end,
> And somewhere like this. That is what it means,
> This clean-sliced cliff; a struggle to transcend
> The thought of dying, for unless its powers
> Outbuild cathedrals nothing contravenes
> The coming dark, though crowds each evening try
>
> With wasteful, weak, propitiatory flowers.

Perhaps in the twentieth century world where the "one inevitable unifying intellectual force ... is that of natural science" (Hough 316) the hospital can perform the functions formerly the domain of the Church and give the promise of eternal life, though the prognosis is gloomy: "a struggle," "unless," "nothing contravenes," "wasteful ... flowers." Similarly the emphatic contradictions "but in the end" and "somewhere like this" overwhelm the "[n]ot yet" and "perhaps not here" they follow. The plight of the "white rows" which lie "set apart above" is dramatised earlier in the poem in an image which takes up "inside a room / The traffic parts to let go by" from "Ambulances" and increases its intensity as it were in a nightmarish geometric progression:

> They're quiet. To realise
> This new thing held in common makes them quiet,
> For past these doors are rooms, and rooms past those,
> And more rooms yet, each one further off
>
> And harder to return from....

The patients are trapped in a maze (the central metaphor of "Myxomatosis" (LD) springs to mind as well as the "endless" slide of "High Windows"); the usually redemptive bonds with other human beings are here in an ugly irony a confirmation of their fate, an awareness indicated in the subdued menace of "[t]hey're quiet." As a collection of these rooms the building is itself a massive trap, its size being emphasised throughout the poem, as in its depiction as a "clean-sliced

cliff."

It is the speaker's choice of perspective -- he is looking from inside the building out -- which gives death its immediacy in the poem:

> For the moment, wait,
> Look down at the yard. Outside seems old enough:
> Red brick, lagged pipes, and someone walking by it
> Out to the car park, free.

The hypothetical spectator in "Ambulances," though implicitly involved in what he witnesses, sees from the perspective of those "safe" outside: the "wild white face that overtops / Red stretcher-blankets momently" lies itself "[u]nreachable." In "The Building" the position of the speaker is ambivalent -- he moves towards the hospital in the first verse and is gradually drawn more deeply into it, as an observer, but possibly also as a patient. The climax of the poem comes in lines which metamorphose "Far / From the exchange of love to lie/ Unreachable inside a room":

> O world,
> Your loves, your chances, are beyond the stretch
> Of any hand from here!

The exclamatory form here introduces a greater emotional charge, suggestive of woe if not of despair, while "stretch" adds poignancy with its involvement in the trapped subject's consciousness.

"The Building" displays an altogether greater sense of urgency and menace than the earlier "Ambulances." The slightly panicky questions and gestures ("who knows / Which he will see, and when? For the moment, wait...") imply that time is shorter, so that we are moving towards the imminence of death in "Aubade." Lines in "Ambulances" such as "All streets in time are visited," the measured tone here almost implying a "just reward," are developed in "The Building" into

something more hesitant and cautious, suggestive of a greater arbitrariness, the disruption of a pattern rather than the completion of one:

> It must be an error of a serious sort,
> For see how many floors it needs, how tall
> It's grown by now, and how much money goes
> In trying to correct it. See the time,
> Half-past eleven on a working day,
> And these picked out of it....

The impersonal, rapacious "picked out" combines with the hint of the plaintive in the speaker's tone created by his continual appeals ("see...", "See...") to create a timid sense of injustice, the sense of powerlessness in the face of wrong which assumes such explosive proportions in "Aubade."

Resonances from "Aubade" and related poems should inform a reading of "High Windows." The "total emptiness for ever" of "Aubade" reflects on the view through the windows as "endless," suggesting an eventual equation of the "deep blue air" and death. Although this is less likely than the earlier interpretation offered of the blue, sun-filled air as the ideal, the two can be reconciled : the fall from paradise damned man to mortality and hence imperfection. The point is neatly made in "As Bad as a Mile" (WW), where the speaker morosely derives profound significance from the everyday situation of attempting to throw an object, in this case somewhat ominously an apple, into the wastepaper-basket and missing:

> Watching the shied core
> Striking the basket, skidding across the floor,
> Shows less and less of luck, and more and more
>
> Of failure spreading back up the arm
> Earlier and earlier, the unraised hand calm,
> The apple unbitten in the palm.

The linked lovers seen by the speaker in "High Windows" are thus set against both the ideal and death, that brings nothing "to love or link with." It has been the function of the Church to lead humanity to face this nothingness, albeit, in the twentieth century, by means of an unconscious reflex, and to attempt, unsuccessfully, to overpower it.

The open-endedness of "High Windows" also enables comparison with a poem of very different nature, though of similar theme. The tendency of memory to distort, to see the past as both worse and better than it may have been, provides the basis for the satirical treatment of changing sexual mores in "Annus Mirabilis" (HW). The second verse creates a picture of the apparently degrading process of courtship and marriage suffered by the generation to which the speaker belongs, this being set against the "quite unlosable game" enjoyed by the young of the sixties:

> Up till then there'd only been
> A sort of bargaining,
> A wrangle for a ring,
> A shame that started at sixteen
> And spread to everything.

This received idea of the past is to some degree ridiculed by the playfully jingling rhythm of "[a] sort of," "[a] wrangle for," "[a] shame that," as well as by the presumptuously exact "sixteen" and the hyperbole of the last line (its vagueness suggesting something inapposite like measles or a rash). However the repeated use of the indefinite article in parallel constructions at the same time gives the statement a hedging quality which also reflects critically on that past, an unwillingness to "call a spade a spade," as someone young in 1963 might see it. The vigorous but jingling rhythm is sustained throughout the poem and reveals a cheaply cynical persona:

> Sexual intercourse began
> In nineteen sixty-three
> (Which was rather late for me)-
> Between the end of the Chatterley ban
> And the Beatles' first LP.

The speaker delights in his challenging absoluteness of statement (aided in the first line by the convenient line-ending on "began"), in its pomposity, as evinced for example in the spelling out of 1963 so as to occupy a whole line, and in the outrageous flippancy of his dating. Yet whereas in this verse the parenthesis could sound self-congratulatory, when it is more or less repeated in the last verse there is enough of a tinge of regret to complicate the satirical picture:

> So life was never better than
> In nineteen sixty-three
> (Though just too late for me)....

Perhaps the speaker has "missed out" in having been too old to take part in the "new age" heralded, with mock-grandiosity, by the "end of the Chatterley ban": he at least seems to retain a nagging curiosity about it, though again one could, if unsympathetic, simply ascribe this to a prurience shared with the speaker in "High Windows." Though "Annus Mirabilis," with its at times viciously satirical edge, lacks the profundity of the latter poem, it is token to Larkin's skill that within these self-prescribed limits he manages to have it both ways and fall short of a final judgement.

"High Windows" lacks the harshness seen in poems such as "Aubade" and "Annus Mirabilis," as well as in earlier poems such as "I Remember, I Remember," "Spring" (LD) and "If, My Darling" (LD), and here it has much in common not only with "Ambulances" and "Church Going," but also with the more purely lyrical elegies found mainly in Larkin's last volume. This lyricism would seem less suited to his earlier more

sardonic, moralising moods, qualities loosely defined by the literary editor of the Spectator as those of "The Movement" -- "anti-phoney ... anti-wet; sceptical, robust, ironic" (Spectator 1 October 1954) -- being most apparent in The Less Deceived.

"Dublinesque" (HW) focuses on a funeral procession and is thus an elegy in the strictest sense. Here Larkin seems concerned to construct a completely finished tribute, to compose a song of lamentation, and the usual "rumblings" of his reflective persona are absent, the speaking voice being tightly controlled by the form. The poem's lyric quality is in part derived from the shortness of the lines and verses, with consequent rhythmical effects: there is simply no space for the kind of ruminating that characterises "Church Going," "The Building," and many of the other longer poems which make skilful use of the extended sentence. It is evidence of the range of expressive mediums that Larkin can command that he can also work skilfully in the shorter verse form, demonstrating in "Dublinesque" a technical dexterity remniscent of Hardy's:

> Down stucco sidestreets,
> Where light is pewter
> And afternoon mist
> Brings lights on in shops
> Above race-guides and rosaries,
> A funeral passes.

The first line, with the melodiousness of the long vowel in "[d]own", the brittle lightness of "stucco" and the softening s-sounds allied with the sustained modulation of the vowel pattern (d[aʊ]n st[ʊ]cc[əʊ] s[ɑɪ]dest[iː]ts), is particularly beautiful, and recalls lines such as "Saying that now you are not as you were" and "Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then" from "The Voice" where Hardy modulates vowel sounds in alliance with the lightness of the dactylic metre to give the verse a touching, haunting quality. Larkin's shorter lines

and clipped consonants (for example, the repeated t sounds) have some of the effect of Hardy's while avoiding any suggestion of speed which would be unsuited to the subject; the rhythm must be slow and sustained, but not ponderous. Detailed visual images arise from the ellipses ("stucco sidestreets," "light is pewter") created by the short lines, the suggestion of a softened silvery colour in "pewter" being sustained both by the light stress on its short vowel (pewter), a metrical uplifting, and by the "afternoon mist" in the next line. The "pewter" light even seems capable of reflecting the yellowish (a muted golden) tinge of the "lights on in shops." These evocative touches combine with the subtly song-like cadences of the lines to create a scene of delicate beauty.

The speaker's observations are recorded so briefly that in for example the second verse they become a series of glimpses, thus giving the impression of a procession passing:

> The hearse is ahead,
> But after there follows
> A troop of streetwalkers
> In wide flowered hats,
> Leg-of-mutton sleeves,
> And ankle-length dresses.

Implicit in his attempt to catch each detail is a recognition of his own involvement in the scene, of his own mortality. Death is here very much incorporated into life: the hearse is surrounded by signs of joy and celebration such as the "wide flowered hats" of the "streetwalkers," the latter expression suggesting pleasure rather than the grimness of a funeral procession. Yet the actual death which is the focus of the procession is never forgotten. One could thus define the mood of the next verse as delicately lively:

> There is an air of great friendliness,
> As if they were honouring

> One they were fond of;
> Some caper a few steps,
> Skirts held skilfully
> (Someone claps time)....

The sonorities of "As if they were honouring / One they were fond of" recall the lines from "The Voice" mentioned above, while the second three lines of the verse show the deft touch of "Down stucco sidestreets," the liquid l's of "skilfully," carried over from "friendliness," being counteracted by an array of consonants which could be heavy and hard (as stucco and pewter actually are too) were this effect not restricted by the skimming of the dactyls -- "Skirts held skilfully / (Some claps time)" -- and the cutting short of the lines into what is almost a dance rhythm.

In the context of powerful emotion these short lines must also make for a particular delicacy or tact in that the speaker never "says too much." Despite the extreme difference in verse form here from that in "Church Going," Larkin is able to create the same sense of a speaker or observer tentative in his judgements, attempting to be open to the scene before him and thus to preserve it as fully as possible. The integrity of the observed object is respected, one feels that the speaker does not attempt to manipulate a scene from which he is at present excluded. This lack of presumption is reflected in the "[a]s if" of "As if they were honouring" which could further suggest, if taken in conjunction with the emphatically placed "honouring," some awe or wonder in the speaker. However "[a]s if" also testifies to some deception, an implication intensified by its repetition in the poem's concluding lines -- "As if the name meant once / All love, all beauty" -- for the subject of the adulation is dead, not alive, as the mourners' behaviour might suggest. The process of transforming the past has already begun, and the softening of a potential harshness

seen throughout the poem mirrors the ability of the funeral rite to transmute death.

The last two verses of the poem are carefully counterbalanced, "There is an air of great friendliness" at the beginning of the third verse leading on to "And of great sadness also" at the beginning of the fourth. While this pattern further demonstrates the withholding of judgement remarked on above, it also implies a close, perhaps arbitrary, relation between life and death. The heavy stress on the "sad" of "sadness" forces one to dwell on this simple, direct word, causing an increase in intensity as the poem approaches its poignant conclusion:

> And of great sadness also.
> As they wend away
> A voice is heard singing
> Of Kitty, or Katy,
> As if the name meant once
> All love, all beauty.

The voice's being disembodied here gives it the elusive, tormenting quality of Hardy's "woman calling"; this, and the echoing, slightly nasal resonance of "singing," contribute to the "song's" plaintive tone. "Of Kitty, or Katy" suggests in its slight confusion the physical distance of the procession from the speaker, adding a touch of local colour if one wishes to see it as the Irish brogue that is making the vowel sounds difficult to distinguish, and also has the slightly impersonal air of "[a] voice is heard" and of the "Some caper ... Someone claps" construction in the previous verse. In a sense, as Larkin shows in "The Building" -- the hospital catching its inmates "On ground curiously neutral, homes and names / Suddenly in abeyance" -- it does not matter what the dead woman's real name was. The alternation of Kitty and Katy ("Of ... or") also superbly evokes the swaying movement of the procession as it winds its way along, with the

comma after "Kitty" preventing the mechanical by fractionally interrupting the rhythm. The archaic "wend away" (an expression Hardy would happily use) brings out the quaintness in the scene and thus stresses its "pastness," the metaphorical distance of the once living person as well as the passing of the procession of mourners. "As if the name meant once" then captures the quickness and completeness of death, for Kitty has (presumably) just died, yet she is already a vague and distant memory. The gently wry tone here suggests sympathy for the human failing revealed in the next and last line -- idealisation of the dead woman -- and conveys the speaker's sadness at the loss involved in our never being able to reach this ideal of "All love, all beauty."

A lyrical beauty is achieved in "Cut Grass," another poem from High Windows, through the use of techniques similar to those deployed in "Dublinesque." Here short lines and a skilful use of assonance and alliteration combine to create effects of abruptness and brevity, which extend the theme the title suggests, at the same time as a softness and delicacy underscoring the frailty of all life. However Larkin uses a longer line in the final poem of the volume, "The Explosion," which is also, fittingly, an elegy -- for the victims of a pit disaster. This length allows for syntactical constructions close to those of prose when necessary to characterise precisely the ambience in which the miners had lived. For example, there is the slight colloquialism, catching the tone of the speaking voice, in the reaction of the wives to the sermon for the dead men:

> Plain as lettering in the chapels
> It was said....

This semblance of lifelikeness is crucial to Larkin's purpose: as in "Dublinesque," he attempts to record each detail of the procession he

witnesses, it is his responsibility as elegist to give as full and true a picture as possible if this is what will form other people's memories as well as his own:

> Down the lane came men in pitboots
> Coughing oath-edged talk and pipe-smoke,
> Shouldering off the freshened silence.
>
> One chased after rabbits; lost them;
> Came back with a nest of lark's eggs;
> Showed them; lodged them in the grasses.
>
> So they passed in beards and moleskins,
> Fathers, brothers, nicknames, laughter,
> Through the tall gates standing open.

Here even the men's mannerisms are captured, as in "[s]houldering off" -- which also suggests an unconscious defensive action, the sounds they make, and their light-hearted actions. The pipe-smoke takes on an almost tangible quality from its place in the construction which follows "[c]oughing," as does "laughter," in the last verse quoted, from its collocation with fathers, brothers and nicknames. The series of semi-colons makes for the instant, varied and concrete impressions one would associate with the photograph, thus implying, to the reader, an accuracy of description, while the whole procession is "framed" by "[d]own the lane" and "Through the tall gates standing open."

However this truthfulness of representation is, as in the case of the photograph, only apparent. From the first verse onwards there is evidence that some distortion of "the truth" is taking place: there is the slight stiltedness resulting from the syntactical inversion in "In the sun the slagheap slept"; the lilting song-like cadence of "[d]own the lane" and "[s]o they passed"; the touch of formality in "Through the tall gates standing open." The poet is not simply recounting an event, but composing a tribute to the dead men, a poem in remembrance. There is here thus a tendency towards the

melodramatic, for with hindsight coincidences can be spotted and connections drawn. "On the day of the explosion / Shadows pointed towards the pithead," the poem's opening lines, might seem unduly portentous were they not to be taken as the beginning of a funeral song, while the passing of the men through the "tall gates," obviously suggestive of a yawning trap, is similarly justifiable. The actual recording of the explosion ("At noon, there came a tremor") obtains a faintly biblical overtone from the archaism of the construction, suggesting both the gravity and the pomposity of an "important announcement," though the explosion itself, the source of the community's present pain, is if anything underemphasised, a "tremor" only briefly disturbing the daily round ("cows / Stopped chewing for a second"). Greater disruption is shown in the dimming of the sun, which is described as "scarfed," but this is still muted by its incorporation into the everyday feature of a "heat-haze" ("as in a heat-haze"). Exact memory is not possible, a realisation which remains deceptively understated for the first half of the poem.

It is with the church rite in the sixth verse that the process of myth-making emerges most obviously:

> The dead go on before us, they
> Are sitting in God's house in comfort,
> We shall see them face to face....

However stale and hollow these comforting beliefs may sound, their unequivocal statement has immediate effect:

> ...and for a second
> Wives saw men of the explosion
>
> Larger than in life they managed-
> Gold as on a coin, or walking
> Somehow from the sun towards them,
>
> One showing the eggs unbroken.

Any seeing of what is past must, for Larkin, involve seeing larger than is managed in life. The doctrines of the Church may seem to lead to a particularly distorted view -- "[g]old" suggests not only the preciousness of a loved one but perfectability and indestructability, while "as on a coin" implies an attempt to fix the memory of the dead men and "walking / Somehow from the sun towards them" haloes the miners -- but they are seen to answer to a basic human need. The last three lines of the poem may seem like a collection of as many clichés as Larkin could muster, but, as well as according with the element of melodrama, they are, it is implied, the common stock of our subconscious, to which we reach in times of great shock.

Both "Dublinesque" and "The Explosion," if considered in relation to Larkin's earlier work, move in their last lines towards a tentative note of consolation: the effect of the emphasis accorded "All love, all beauty" and "One showing the eggs unbroken" on account of their terminal position must be acknowledged and can be contrasted with, for example, the almost brutal "It had not done so then, and could not now" which ends the earlier "Love Songs in Age." In concluding this chapter I will examine a poem which seems at first to be something of an exception and to have more in common with Hardy's poems of memory than any other of Larkin's treating the subject of loss. In its last line "An Arundel Tomb" (WW) seems to offer some consolation: "What will survive of us is love." This statement is uncharacteristically positive, and even though it has already been qualified by the immediately preceding line ("Our almost-instinct almost true"), its emphatic position and its isolation as a unit -- it is introduced by a colon -- must give it some weight. Yet Larkin's route to this note of resurrection is complex and devious, and provides the context in which it must be read.

The speaker, observing the recumbent stone figures of "earl and countess," remains uninterested until he sees what he instinctively assumes to be a symbol of love:

> 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.

A sceptical, corrective reaction immediately follows: "They would not think to lie so long." Such enduring love is surely not possible. For the rest of the poem the speaker can be seen as seeking an explanation for this sculptural feature.

Initially it seems that he is attempting to belittle the posture, calling it "faithfulness in effigy," implying some diminishment; a part of the social game ("just a detail friends would see"); an artistic frill indulgently bought (a "sculptor's sweet commissioned grace"). However the echo of "[t]hey would not think" in the first line of the following verse has less the tone of calling for reassurance and thus gives the speaker's attitude of unbelief more basis:

> They would not guess how early in
> Their supine stationary voyage
> The air would change to soundless damage,
> Turn the old tenantry away;
> How soon succeeding eyes begin
> To look, not read....

With this shift to an emphasis on transience, objections to a message of eternal love become more understandable: if one could question the speaker's "would not think," the "would not guess" is undeniably true, for our awareness of the passing of time is never sufficient for us to imagine accurately our future. The spiritual attrition of changing

social structures and customs parallels the physical process of wearing away by the elements, the effects of which are given in the description of the statues in the first verse -- their faces are "blurred," their "proper habits vaguely shown." The fate of the Latin inscription "around the base" summarises that of these effigies, for it is firstly not comprehensible, the universal language having lost its currency, then unreadable because eroded. In their attempts to counter this attack earl and countess are attributed with some distortion, persisting "[r]igidly ... linked, through lengths and breadths / Of time." Though the two are joined to each other, they are isolated by the continual change around them, and in particular by the strangeness of the twentieth century:

> And up the paths
> The endless altered people came,
>
> Washing at their identity.
> Now, helpless in the hollow of
> An unarmorial age....

Here "helpless" captures the old aristocratic couple's frailty, their inability to have any influence over what they come to represent, to "fix" their memory.

The scepticism of the third verse now seems justified. What was possibly simply an extra touch has become the dominant feature of the sculpture: viewed from the present the past is inevitably distorted:

> 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.

The word "hardly" points to the small element of truth which has been grasped on and unduly highlighted; "stone" to the fixing of a meaning

as well as, through its incongruous application to a spiritual quality, to the distortion involved. The tentative step in "almost true" does not deny the last line so much as expose its accidental, rather than absolute, nature. We are not used to cling to faintly-felt half-truths for guidance, but this is what Larkin here asks us to do.

Thus, unlike the songbooks in "Love Songs in Age," the symbol which the linked pair unconsciously form does have some present power: the importance of the connection between the two human beings, however arbitrary its survival, offers some kind of consolation. The consciousness which informs all the other poems I have discussed in this chapter is here too, but as if in a mood of tolerance, of warm fellow-feeling, Larkin has chosen to end this volume on a fractionally hopeful note. This humanity suggests how his fruitful appreciation of Hardy's poetry can persist despite such manifest differences of temperament and approach.

II

LARKIN AND THE "ENGLISH TRADITION"

Questioned by Anthony Thwaite on the strong presence of the Georgian poets in his Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse, Larkin gives his reasons for wishing "to look at" the Georgians:

> I had in my mind a notion that there might have been what I'll call, for want of a better phrase, an English tradition coming from the 19th century with people like Hardy, which was interrupted partly by the Great War, when many English poets were killed off, and partly by the really tremendous impact of Yeats, whom I think of as Celtic, and Eliot, whom I think of as American. ("'A Great Parade of Single Poems'" 473)

Larkin's attempt to reassert a local English tradition should be seen in the light of the vigorous criticism of Modernism in the arts that he makes in his preface to All What Jazz, a collection of his articles on jazz:

> I am sure there are books in which the genesis of modernism is set out in full. My own theory is that it is related to an imbalance between the two tensions from which art springs: these are the tension between the artist and his material, and between the artist and his audience, and that in the last seventy-five years or so the second of these has slackened or even perished. In consequence the artist has become over-concerned with his material (hence an age of technical experiment), and, in isolation, has busied himself with the two principal themes of modernism, mystification and outrage.....
> I dislike such things not because they are new, but because they are irresponsible exploitations of technique in contradiction of human life as we know it. This is my essential criticism of modernism, whether perpetrated by Parker, Pound or Picasso: it helps us neither to enjoy nor endure. (23,27)

To the collocation "Parker, Pound or Picasso" he adds the caustic footnote that "these pleasantly alliterative names" are used "to represent not only their rightful owners but every practitioner who might be said to have succeeded them."

Elsewhere Larkin has made similar criticisms of the obscurity of poetry written in this tradition claiming that the business of poetry is to communicate and that given this "poetry is an affair of sanity, of seeing things as they are" ("Big Victims" 368). Both the above excerpts and these comments suggest the direction his own work will take, as well as the place he sees for it. It would not be unreasonable to see Larkin's "English tradition" as leading from Hardy through the Georgians to the work of Auden and his associates of the thirties, who, with their return to clarity and communicability after some of the excesses of the twenties, in turn provided a model for the poets of the fifties who appeared in Robert Conquest's anthology New Lines and were journalistically grouped as "the Movement". Even so apparently dissimilar a poet to Larkin as John Betjeman could be included in this tradition: Larkin blames the "aberration of modernism," the "emergence of English literature as an academic subject," and the "culture-mongering activities of the Americans Eliot and Pound" for destroying "the strong connection between poetry and the reading public that had been forged by Kipling, Houseman, Brooke and Omar Khayyam," and argues 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 ..." ("It Could Only Happen in England" 217).

In attempting to consider how exclusively Larkin's work fits into the "English tradition" he has discerned I will concentrate on his relation to an area of it which has not drawn much attention, that is

the work of those English poets of the second decade of the century who were neither leading figures in the literary establishment, nor aligned with the ultra-rebellious Imagists, Futurists and Vorticists, but who have been roughly grouped as the "Georgians." I will also look briefly at aspects of John Betjeman's work that are relevant to the discussion.

Strictly speaking the poets referred to as "Georgian" can be taken to be those whose work appeared in Edward Marsh's anthology Georgian Poetry which ran into five volumes from the years 1911 to 1922. This working definition should however be expanded, for the sake of accurate representation, to include poets such as Edward Thomas and, as regards his early work, Robert Frost, both of whom were working in close association with the other Georgian poets (Ross 131)[1]. Much of the opprobrium which has since fallen on the Georgian "movement" can be ascribed to its narrow identification with the no longer innovative work of the poets appearing in the later volumes of Marsh's anthology, Georgian Poetry 1918-1919 and Georgian Poetry 1920-1922: Robert Ross distinguishes "Georgian" and "neo-Georgian" in order to do full justice to the vigorous and, in its time, adventurous poetry of Brooke, Masefield, Davies, de la Mare and others, whose poems in the first two volumes of Georgian Poetry "were essentially products of the pre-war temper, even though the second [volume] was not published until fifteen months after the outbreak of war" (136). These original Georgians, most notably Rupert Brooke and Isaac Rosenberg, were among the war poets Larkin mentions; Sassoon's poems written from the trenches appeared in Georgian Poetry 1916-1917; and though Wilfred Owen did not appear in the anthologies, he associated himself with the movement by letter (Stead 89). One further reason for the critical unpopularity of the Georgians is to be found in the radical revision

of literary critical taste occasioned by the work of Pound and T.S. Eliot, so that it is only with an historical appreciation that the nature of their particular achievement can be grasped (Stead 81).

Using the terms which Larkin chooses in the passage quoted above -- "the two tensions from which art springs ... the tension between the artist and his material, and between the artist and his audience" -- C K Stead explains exactly in what the Georgians' innovation consisted. Drawing on M.H. Abrams Stead expounds a scheme in which a poem

> may be said to exist in a triangle, the points of which are, first, the poet, second, his audience, and, third, that area of experience which we call variously 'Reality', 'Truth', or 'Nature'. Between these points run lines of tension, and depending on the time, the place, the poet, and the audience, these lines will lengthen or shorten. (11-12)

Victorian poetry had taughtened the relationship betweeen artist and audience at the expense of the relationship between the artist and his material. A primary feature of the "new" poetry was its revolt against the "lushness" of Victorian, especially Tennysonian, verse and enervated fin de siècle poetry, both felt to signal the end of the Romantic tradition (Stead 81-82; Ross 141). Thus though today the Georgians may seem to continue the Victorian tradition in opposition to Modernism, and were even in their day seen by unsympathetic critics such as the pro-Imagist Rebecca West as "mere belated Victorians" (Ross 72), they formed part of the general rebellion against Victorianism which gained most notoriety with Pound's various pronouncements (Stead 62). The Georgians wished to readjust the balance between artist, audience, and material, and interestingly enough the terms they chose for this -- if not their actual practice -- resemble those of the "Movement" in the fifties in their reaction against what was felt to be the extreme romanticism of Dylan Thomas

and his contemporaries (Morrison 43), though in neither case was any theoretical position stated in the sort of manifesto form favoured by Pound, for example (Ross 138).

The tension between artist and material was adjusted by an insistence on poetry's "truth to life," that is, everyday life (an echo of Larkin's "human life as we know it"):

> The real achievement of the Georgians was in the attempt to confine poetry within the limits of what had actually been experienced. It is a negative achievement perhaps, but it resulted in poems rather than ... versified argument... (Stead 82).

The emphasis was therefore on the specific, the details of English daily life or the English countryside. It was taken that no subject was intrinsically outside the limits of poetic treatment, with the result that "realism" could be considered characteristic of this poetry (Ross 146). The sentimental and the insipid were to be attacked, and this occurred to such an extent that the Georgians were accused of an "affected and self-conscious brutality" (qtd. in Ross 146), as were likewise the "Movement" poets of the fifties. Concomitant was a return to natural speech in poetry, an endeavour which might from our present perspective seem commonplace, but which succeeded the bombast of much late Victorian poetry. This direction was shared by early modernist poetry, but the Georgians never went as far as Pound in his attempts to record the rhythms of speech with his "cadences" or to the extremes of the verslibrists. Whereas the modernist concentration on purification of technique so as to achieve, in Pound's words, "a <u>precise</u> rendering of the impulse" led to a rejection of "symmetrical" schemes, the Georgians found themselves able to accommodate their material within the more traditional forms (Ross 48).

In adjusting the tension between "art" and "audience" the Georgians similarly stopped well short of Pound's "the public can go to the devil" (The Letters of Ezra Pound 48): they wished to revitalise a public taste considered somewhat debased, but at the same time believed that poetry "could and ought to be popular" (Stead 59). The Georgians thus attempted to steer a middle course again comparable to that chosen by the "Movement" poets. Edward Marsh in particular was opposed to obscurantist tendencies in some of the groupings of his time, holding strongly that "poetry is communication, and that it is the poet's duty, to the best of his ability, to let the reader know what he is driving at" (qtd. in Ross 108).

The weaknesses of Georgian poetry derive largely from its strengths. Writing in the Egoist in September 1917 T.S. Eliot lights on deficiencies inherent in the Georgian method:

> One of the ways by which contemporary verse has tried to escape the rhetorical, the abstract, the moralising, to recover (for that is its purpose) the accents of direct speech, is to concentrate its attention on trivial or accidental or commonplace objects. ("Reflections on Contemporary Poetry")[2]

The charge of triviality is coupled with a criticism of the "littleness" by an insistence on which the Georgians "unconsciously reduced their subjects to honest proportions" (Stead 88), Eliot remarking in the same article that "it is not unworthy to notice how often the word 'little' occurs; and how this word is used, not merely as a piece of information, but with a caress, a conscious delight." Though these unsympathetic comments may involve some distortion when applied to the poems published in Georgian Poetry 1911-1912 and Georgian Poetry 1913-1915, they are undoubtedly true of the majority

of the poets represented in the later anthologies. Poets such as Squire did not follow the vigour and rebelliousness of Brooke, for example, but tended increasingly to triviality and escapism (Ross 186-7). This degeneration affected even the original Georgian poets, who "slipped too comfortably into the undemanding neo-Georgian temper" (Ross 246): John Drinkwater's "Moonlit Apples" shows a tendency to lushness that gives evidence for a reaction against Georgian realism, and "[e]ven in the hands of its most outstanding pre-war practitioner, W.H. Davies, the Georgian nature lyric had gone stale by 1920" (Ross 248). Yet the defects of the declining movement should not blind one to the Georgians' real achievement in creating a poetry which "though ... limited in its application and often inadequate in technique, though ... fail[ing] to achieve ... universality ... was nevertheless honest, personal, direct ... its values ... humane" (Stead 90).

A poem such as Ralph Hodgson's "The Bull," which appeared in the second volume of Georgian Poetry and was in its time immensely popular (Ross 217), both validates the criticisms of Eliot and others and displays the humanity Stead praises. However to post-modernist taste the poem seems sentimental, its feeling misplaced: humanity therefore seems to be achieved at the expense of honesty. Yet it must be granted that in comparison to, for example, Bridges' "Testament of Beauty" the subject is recognisable, of graspable proportions, and that in this sense the poem is honest, direct, certainly personal.

This poem of thirty verses describes (perhaps only too appropriately) the fate of the leader of the herd once a younger bull has taken his place. In an attempt (then evidently successful) to evoke readers' sympathies for the banished bull Hodgson resorts to a degree of anthropomorphism ridiculous rather than pitiful in its effects:

Pity him, this fallen chief,
All his splendour, all his strength,
All his body's breadth and length
Dwindled down with shame and grief,
Half the bull he was before,
Bones and leather, nothing more.

See him standing dewlap-deep
In the rushes at the lake,
Surly, stupid, half asleep,
Waiting for his heart to break
And the birds to join the flies
Feasting at his bloodshot eyes....

The expression "half a man" is customary enough for its metaphorical meaning to predominate, but in the case of "[h]alf the bull" the literal unfortunately has at least equal force, particularly when taken in conjunction with "his body's breadth and length," thus forcing concentration on the process of physical reduction and on the rather ludicrous image of a half-size bull to the exclusion of any spiritual qualities the poet might be intending to convey. A similar absurdity arises from the distractingly practical perception of the bull as bones and "leather," inclining the reader to think of a useful and desirable end-product rather than of the bull's present piteous state. The detail of the last two lines quoted -- a good example of the "realism" which characterised the earlier Georgian work -- is more convincing, though a slight exaggeration here is highlighted by the emotionalism of the line before, the transference of a catch-phrase for extreme human emotion to the animal world being particularly incongruous.

Although it is probably accurate to say that the body of Larkin's work is humanist in orientation -- Donald Davie going so far as to claim that "Larkin makes himself numb to the nonhuman creation in order to stay compassionate towards the human" (Thomas Hardy and British Poetry 66) -- it is nonetheless true that there are, from The

Less Deceived onwards, a number of poems which, focusing largely on the animal or natural world, can be seen as commenting on or developing on the Georgian method. "At Grass" (LD) has a theme comparable to that of "The Bull," the fate of racehorses "gone to grass." However Larkin more strongly resists the opportunities for anthropomorphism which animate nature provides, throughout the poem sustaining a tension between the observer's temptation to transfer wholesale to the horses human thoughts and emotions and an allowable, sympathetic curiosity. In the same way as Larkin's search for the "truth" leads him to leave the past inviolate, the horses become impenetrable, "anonymous" objects once removed from the human arena:

> The eye can hardly pick them out
> From the cold shade they shelter in,
> Till wind distresses tail and mane;
> Then one crops grass, and moves about
> -The other seeming to look on-
> And stands anonymous again.

The observer's hesitancy in ascribing to the horses any action beyond the physical, simultaneously coupled with his desire to interpret the scene, is reflected in "seeming to look on." The horses are only picked out when they do move, and this difficulty in making them out visually (their forms mingle with the cold shade) lends the verse more ominous overtones: the horses remain unknowable not only as a result of the poet's honesty, but because of their loss of individuality as they slope towards death, here symbolically presaged by the "cold shade."

This sense of declining individuality is maintained in the second verse, which looks back to the horses' past:

> Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps
> Two dozen distances sufficed
> To fable them....

From the human point of view, it is recognised, there is some pathos in the situation, "fable" suggesting then the glories of fame and now the haziness of myth, afternoons that are now "faint," having lost colour and definition, Junes now "faded" and "classic."

Some of the excitement of these past race meetings is recreated by the use of ellipsis in the third verse --

> Silks at the start: against the sky
> Numbers and parasols: outside,
> Squadrons of empty cars, and heat,
> And littered grass

-- only to give greater force to the "response" to the question which begins the concluding verses of the poem:

> Do memories plague their ears like flies?
> They shake their heads. Dusk brims the shadows.
> Summer by summer all stole away,
> The starting-gates, the crowds and cries-
> All but the unmolesting meadows.
> Almanacked, their names live; they
>
> Have slipped their names, and stand at ease,
> Or gallop for what must be joy,
> And not a fieldglass sees them home,
> Or curious stop-watch prophesies:
> Only the groom, and the groom's boy,
> With bridles in the evening come.

The speaker is tempted to see the horses' coincidental shaking of their heads as a sign of comprehension, of connection with human concerns, which it cannot be; however the action does also point to an answer for the speaker -- the intensity of memory is his own and cannot truthfully be transferred to the horses. Despite this implicit realisation he continues tentatively in the following lines in his attempt to reconstruct imaginatively the horses' world, for it is only from such urgings that the pathos of their situation emerges for a human audience. The fleeting movement of the dactyls in

— v v/— v v/— v/—
Summer by/summer all/stole away/

emphasises the transience of the "starting-gates," "crowds" and "cries," while "stole away" suggests something which has vanished gradually but without warning, either sneakily or perhaps, more pathetically, quietly, out of a sense of consideration, a desire not to hurt. The speaker sees the meadows as "unmolesting," implying some hardship or constraint in the earlier mode of life: the harshness of "[a]lmanacked" intensifies the unnaturalness, hence lack of feeling, of "artificed / To inlay" of the second verse and is taken up in the horses' slipping their names as they would their bridles if seeking freedom, as well as in the implied contrast in "stand at ease." This present relaxation is however qualified for the expression is conventionally used in the context of regimental drill -- hence this state too is transient. Qualification occurs again in the following line with "for what must be joy," here indicating the speaker's continuing unwillingness to ascribe particular human emotions to the horses. Too decisive a settling for "joy" would also be given an irony by the progression towards death in the poem's last four lines: the faintness of outline suggested in the first two verses is achieved here by a complete absence of visual ("not a fieldglass") and temporal, functional definition ("Or curious stop-watch prophesies..."). New "bridles" have replaced the "names," and although the evening returning of horses to the stable does have comforting associations, both the literal ones of warmth and food and those of repetition and ritual, the repeated long vowel of "groom," with its heavy stress and implicit echo of "gloom," gives the rhythm a ponderous finality as the poem moves towards its close. Together with the echo of "evening" to "cold shade" in the first verse and "[d]usk brims the shadows" in the fourth, this renders possible an equation of the groom, groom's boy and bridle with Death or the messengers of

Death, yet, in keeping with the delicacy of feeling shown throughout the poem, the symbolism is not forced. Again, though the general theme of retirement and ageing in "At Grass" can also be taken to refer to the human condition, the connections are never made explicit as they are in "The Bull," thus allowing Larkin's poem a wealth of suggestion which its predecessor altogether lacks.

"Myxomatosis" (LD), while using an animal as its subject, reflects more directly on the concerns of human beings, yet though the speaker's intense sympathy for the rabbit's plight causes him to break down the boundaries between subject and object the poem still avoids Hodgson's sentimentality. This can partly be attributed to the dramatisation of the incident, lending it the impact of immediacy --the emotion seems appropriate to the circumstances -- and to the brevity both of the poem as a whole and of formulations within it:

> Caught in the centre of a soundless field
> While hot inexplicable hours go by
> What trap is this? Where were its teeth concealed?
> You seem to ask.
> I make a sharp reply,
> Then clean my stick. I'm glad I can't explain
> Just in what jaws you were to suppurate:
> You may have thought things would come right again
> If you could only keep quite still and wait.

While the dialogue at the poem's centre shows the closeness of human and animal, the division between question and answer points up the opposition between them. The speaker's making a "sharp reply" (if one reads only to the end of the first line of the "answer") suggests that he feels some kind of guilt by association, for the assumption that the rabbit's fate is man-made is contained in the questions of the third line. However the continuation from "sharp reply" to "clean my stick" indicates that the sharpness is to be taken literally as the killing of the suffering animal; "sharp" is furthermore a gauge of the

speaker's own powerful but contained emotion, his pain both at the animal's plight and at his having to kill it. The intensity of the sympathetic involvement of the "I" with the "you" is also indicated in the precision with which the animal's condition is imagined: words such as "soundless" and "inexplicable," the awareness attributed to the rabbit of being in the "centre" of the field, the sweating suggested by "hot" and in the last line the phrase "keep quite still" capture exactly the terror felt. Though the frantic questionings in the first section of the poem do conclude with "You seem to ask" the hesitancy here is overwhelmed (as it is not in "At Grass") by the sense of urgency.

With "I'm glad I can't explain ..." in the second section of "Myxomatosis" the subject reasserts his separate identity: the direct communication between human and animal world implied in "The Bull" is not possible. This recognition is accompanied by a sense of relief: for the sufferer confrontation with the horrible facts, the harshness of "jaws" and "suppurate," can be avoided, as can any sustaining illusion. The pathos of the last two lines is fully justified by all that has preceded them, and their power as a conclusion is such that they readily gain the wider significance of being applicable to the lives of human beings.

It would be misrepresentative to judge the Georgian nature poem solely on "The Bull." An accomplished, if limited, nature lyric such as Harold Monro's "Thistledown" (a poem which might be regarded as fitting Eliot's criticism exactly with its concentration on the "little") on the whole uses anthropomorphism in a much more restrained, almost playful manner. The speaker watches the "[h]osts of bright thistledown" as they "begin / Their dazzling journey through the air...":

They grip their withered edge of stalk
In brief excitement for the wind;
They hold a breathless final talk,
And when their filmy cables part
One almost hears a little cry.

Some cling together while they wait
And droop and gaze and hesitate,
But others leap along the sky,
Or circle round and calmly choose
The gust they know they ought to use.

The potential mawkishness of "One almost hears a little cry" is kept at bay here by the brevity and simplicity of statement, though the relative lack of compression deprives the poem of the sharpness of visual delineation that characterises a work with an equally "fragile" subject such as Larkin's "Cut Grass" (which rather suggests an affinity with Imagist method). In the second verse quoted "droop and gaze and hesitate" again seems to approach absurdity, but is counterbalanced by the felicitous evocation of the concluding two lines. The main fault with the poem is however that Monro's sustained comparison between human and natural worlds forces him to draw it out beyond a length fitting the thinness of its subject matter -- it consists of five verses of tetrameter lines -- and that, though it does tentatively move in this direction with the last verse, it demonstrates an inability to move from particular incident to generalisation (the derivation of some wider significance) quite bathetic in effect.

Although Larkin has written few pure "nature lyrics," poems such as "First Sight" (WW) and "The Trees" (HW) both draw upon the Georgian method and go beyond the limits those poets set for themselves to achieve a universal significance. "First Sight" presents the same deliberate yet deceptive simplicity of diction and overall form that we find in "Thistledown," but Larkin's superior

mastery lends greater emotional trenchancy to his treatment of a very Georgian topic:

> 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 fro
> 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.

The high proportion of monosyllables in the poem highlights the dramatic departure in "immeasurable," suitably the longest word in the poem by two syllables (the next longest being the trisyllabic "unwelcome" which similarly gains some emphasis), the word thus enacting its meaning within the metrical line of traditional, as opposed to modernist, verse, and also suggesting some of the future bewilderment of a lamb faced with such a "mouthful." The relative length of the word also causes a change in intonation within the line which sets it against the iambic regularity of its predecessors and which indeed forcefully counteracts the basic iambic metre of the line itself. This complex interplay of metre and speech rhythms, characteristic of much of Larkin's work, is excluded from the rest of the poem, where the lack of rhythmical feature mirrors the daunting blankness of the natural scene; and it is to some degree prepared for by the rhythmical variation introduced by the two pauses in the line immediately preceding. Indeed it is by means of well-placed commas in both verses, such as that after "unwelcome" suggesting a different length of line, that the rhythm stops short of an alienating monotony.

"Earth's immeasurable surprise" is the emergence of life from that which seems so totally to contradict it, and this difference is portrayed in the complete departure from the iambic in the last line of the poem:

— ∨ ∨ / — ∨ / ∨ —
Utterly / unlike / the snow.

The symbolic overtones in the first verse are so muted that the lambs' actual plight is the focus of attention, as would be the case in a Georgian poem, yet in the light of what "will wake and grow" these overtones become clearer. The "sunless glare" recalls (once again) the white clay sky of "Aubade," the "glare" of death; in this context the snow's coldness takes on the ominous associations of the "cold shade" in "At Grass" -- it seems hostile to life, here the newly-born lambs. It is as a result of these resonances that the reader can deduce some kind of universal significance from the central experience of a poem which seems determined to veer away from any explicit statement: the fact of the lambs' survival in such adverse conditions is incorporated into the larger mysteries of existence, their projected wonder at which (they "could not grasp it") is shared by the poet, despite his greater, human, knowledge.

Larkin makes a similar attempt to capture "nature in itself" in "The Trees," a poem which again shows what one might call a Georgian simplicity, a simplicity deceptive in that it conceals a high order of technical mastery (Ross 145). It is necessary to quote the poem in full to do it justice:

> The trees are coming into leaf
> Like something almost being said;
> The recent buds relax and spread,
> Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too.
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May.
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

The tight formal control here is ensured by the iambic tetrameter also used in "First Sight" (it is a line length favoured by the Georgians); by the regular, though, owing to the skilful combination of end-stopped and run-on lines, completely unobtrusive rhyme scheme; and by the division of the poem into three similarly-proportioned brief verses, each avoiding complex syntactic structures. This masterly manipulation of traditional poetic conventions leaves a sense that neither part nor whole could be more briefly put, without the poet's having resorted to the ellipsis that characterises much imagist poetry -- the poem even contains the qualifications ("almost being said," "a kind of," "they seem to say") which one might more usually associate with prolixity.

The speaker, who provides as it were an audience for the trees, is engaged in an internal debate stimulated by the alluring fecundity of early summer and extended to the reader by the questions beginning the second verse. He will not let himself be deceived by the apparently endless vitality of the trees, he must set against this his greater knowledge of the temporal processes of dissolution and decay. This tension is evident in a line such as "Their greenness is a kind of grief," which is also characteristic of Larkin in its considered rejection, demanded by his preoccupation with loss, of conventional symbolic associations: the "greenness," traditionally a sign of life, points towards death from the simple fact of its being achieved, in

other words to the "grief" associated with the falling of autumn leaves in for example Hopkins' "Spring and Fall" ("Márgarét, áre you griéving / Over Goldengrove unleaving?") or in Frost's "A Leaf Treader," where the falling leaves seem to the speaker to have "tapped at [his] eyelids and touched [his] lips with an invitation to grief." The unwillingness of the speaker in "The Trees" to see the leaves committed to this process of decay can be seen in the use of the present continuous tense in the first two lines ("are coming," "almost being said") and set against this the finality of "relax and spread" in the third line suggests, at the same time as a warm expansiveness, an inadvised inner loosening.

In the second verse the line-ending on "born again" ("Is it that they are born again / And we grow old?") momentarily allows a suggestion of immortality, which is supported by the opposition necessitated in terms of the verse form between the clauses containing "born again" and "grow old." However this is decisively denied by the unqualified monosyllables of "No, they die too." As it were in support of the human claims to equality emphasised by the medial division of the line the deceptive appearance of the trees is then treated more disparagingly, "trick" and "new" bearing negative connotations in comparison with "fresh," for example. The elusiveness of "saying" is counteracted by the commitment of the "writing" which reveals this deception, the hardness implied by "grain" and the binding force of "rings" underscoring this permanence.

Yet as the initial prompting of the last verse indicates the question does not remain so firmly solved for the speaker. The comparison of the trees with castles, fortifications, while evoking their present fullness of leaf and appearance of solidity, also brings to them associations of durability the previous verse has attempted to

deny: the twist is characteristic of Larkin. The speaker, already made restless by the "unresting" quality of the trees, thus becomes more receptive to the "message" of the concluding lines. It is a natural temptation to hope that last year is dead (the implication, suitably pessimistic, being that it was a bad one) and the final almost incantatory repetition of "afresh" makes the point forcefully, crowding the line with rustling leaves, a suggestion of plenty which accords well with the rhyme-word "thresh" (the fulfilment of harvest, life-sustaining food). However "afresh" is at the same time undermined by the rhyme, for the harvest is also, conventionally, death: once again we have the tragic realisation, contained in the equation of "greenness" and "grief," of death in the fullness of life. "Begin afresh" remains thus a tantalising, but in the light of the poem ultimately deceptive, conclusion.

In this poem Larkin thus acknowledges the complexity of the relation between man and nature: while both are subject to the same processes of decay and death, attempts to establish too exact an equivalence, to interpret or understand nature in the light of man's own needs and wants, must remain unsatisfactory, for nature confuses through the strong appeal it exerts on the senses. Larkin likewise develops on the Georgians' practice as regards the extreme simplicity of expression seen in much of their nature poetry. Whereas in "The Bull" this leads to inanity, as it does too in lines such as "I hope the Sun shines bright; / "Twill be a lovely sight" from W.H. Davies's "The Rain," in "Days" Larkin approaches this borderline but manages to stop just short of it:

> What are days for?
> Days are where we live.
> They come, they wake us
> Time and time over.

They are to be happy in:
Where can we live but days?

Here the repeated monosyllables coupled with the shortness of the lines give the poem almost the rhythm of a nursery-rhyme: indeed the first line could record a child's artless question, the patient explaining of the next then forming an adult reply. It is this deliberate simplicity which lends this verse a slightly ominous quality, the sense that there would be more to be told if we were "old enough" to know. Repetition, as in "Time and time over," while possibly suggesting some kind of trap (as the expression "where we live" suggests being surrounded), has an obviously lulling effect. What is essentially the child's lack of knowledge and control leads to the panic of the second half of the poem, the facing of death.

The Georgian insistence on "simplicity" should be seen in terms of their call for "realism" in poetry. The best examples of what they intended by this emphasis come perhaps not from their nature lyrics but from poems with human subject matter, such as Wilfred Gibson's "The Ice":

Her day out from the workhouse-ward, she stands,
A grey-haired woman decent and precise,
With prim black bonnet and neat paisley shawl,
Among the other children by the stall,
And with grave relish eats a penny ice.

To wizened toothless gums with quaking hands
She holds it, shuddering with delicious cold,
Nor heeds the jeering laughter of young men-
The happiest, in her innocence, of all:
For while their insolent youth must soon grow old,
She, who's been old, is now a child again.

Many of the Georgian poets tended to equate, as Gibson does here, the "real" with the lives of the working-classes, and in this they unwittingly followed one of the very Victorians they were reacting

against, the Kipling of "Tommy" or "The Sergeant's Weddin'." However Victorian archaisms are absent from "The Ice," though at the same time the desired "naturalness" of the speaking voice is not quite achieved, the inversion in the second line being necessitated by rhyme, and the precise repetition in the third tending somewhat to a jingle. The physical details of the scene, the "paisley shawl," the "penny" ice and the workhouse mentioned, are however recognisably English and everyday rather than traditionally "poetic." Phrases or words such as "wizened toothless gums," "quaking hands" and "shuddering" share, though not to excess, in the early Georgian tendency to escape an untruthful "pleasantness" in poetry through an almost brutal emphasis on the ugly or morbid, this often being paralleled in diction (as in Masefield's "Everlasting Mercy") by a frequent use of oaths intended to shock the Victorian reading, that is middle-class, public (Ross 53). One might then finally make the criticism of Gibson's poem that despite some movement towards universal significance in the concluding lines, his subject remains a little slight: the fifth line, for example, is in its context unable to sustain the weight of "grave" and barely escapes the ridiculous.

Poems such as Rupert Brooke's "Channel Passage," "Menelaus and Helen" and "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" widen the scope of Georgian realism in their avoidance of either urban or rural working-class subjects. The first two poems mentioned caused some outrage when they first appeared on account of their almost brutally graphic detail (Ross 51). The lover in "Channel Passage" is literally lovesick:

> Do I forget you? Retchings twist and tie me,
> Old meat, good meals, brown gobbets, up I throw.
> Do I remember? Acrid return and slimy,
> The sobs and slobber of a last year's woe

> And still the sick ship rolls. 'Tis hard, I tell ye,
> To choose 'twixt love and nausea, heart and belly.

"Menelaus and Helen" first gives a conventional rendering of Menelaus' recapture of Helen and then debunks it:

> Menelaus bold
> Waxed garrulous, and sacked a hundred Troys
> 'Twixt noon and supper. And her golden voice
> Got shrill as he grew deafer.

Helen is further dismissed as "gummy-eyed and impotent," her "dry shanks twitch[ing] at Paris' mumbled name." Despite Brooke's denial (Ross 115), the desire to shock is there, and in this as well as in their vigour the poems look forward to some of the early work of Larkin and other poets associated with him in the fifties. An image from "If, My Darling" (LD) recalls the description of nausea in "Channel Passage": if "my darling" should "jump, like Alice" into the speaker's head, she

> ...would find herself looped with the creep of varying light,
> Monkey-brown, fish-grey, a string of infected circles
> Loitering like bullies, about to coagulate;
>
> Delusions that shrink to the size of a woman's glove,
> Then sicken inclusively outwards. She would also remark
> The unwholesome floor, as it might be the skin of a grave....

The unpleasant conjunction of brown and grey here is also implicit in Brooke's "brown gobbets" and "[a]crid return," Larkin's equal delight in sickening detail revealing a similarity of temper, as does the taunting tone employed by the speaker in each case, though in Brooke's sonnet -- the use of the sonnet form heightening the viciousness of the attack -- much of the mockery is directed at the "lovesick" speaker himself.

In "Next, Please" (LD) Larkin uses an image which recalls Brooke's treatment of the myth of Menelaus and Helen in its deliberate disharmony of diction and its upsetting of the conventional, almost automatic associations which the lines preceding it prepare for. The speaker, commenting on our "bad habits of expectancy," watches the "[s]parkling armada of promises draw near":

> Yet still they leave us holding wretched stalks
> Of disappointment, for, though nothing balks
> Each big approach, leaning with brasswork prinked,
> Each rope distinct,
>
> Flagged, and the figurehead with golden tits
> Arching our way, it never anchors....

Larkin's deromanticisation of sex and the female, a reaction to the poetry of the forties which he shared with his contemporaries, parallels Brooke's earlier revolt against Victorianism.

Whereas in the examples discussed above Larkin does seem to be trying to shock complacent sensibilities, his use of swear-words seems less gratuitous -- it should be seen in the context of the movement, beginning with Wordsworth, revitalised by the Georgians, and continuing through the twentieth century, to incorporate everyday speech into poetry. Masefield's "colloquial poetic diction and ... mild oaths" (Ross 53) might have alarmed a public emerging from the Victorian era, but lines such as "Get stewed: / Books are a load of crap" from "A Study of Reading Habits" (WW), fully justified in terms of the poem's logical and emotional development towards a heartfelt disillusionment, should surely now not attract undue attention. Indeed these breezy idioms show Larkin intent on celebrating a close bond with his largely middle-class audience. More profoundly, the expletives perform their traditional function of emotional release, particularly in those poems written from some bitterness. We are

informed, in "This Be The Verse" (HW), that mum and dad fuck us up,

> But they were fucked up in their turn
> By fools in old-style hats and coats,
> Who half the time were soppy-stern
> And half at one another's throats.
>
> Man hands on misery to man.
> It deepens like a coastal shelf.
> Get out as early as you can,
> And don't have any kids yourself.

Any inclination the reader might have to see this as satirical comment on psychological theories -- and the glibness of the progressions and slightly jingling rhythm do open the possibility -- is counteracted by the force of the invective. There is no sense of a veiling of powerful emotion which circumvention of expletives might create.

Colloquial English is used in "Posterity" (HW) both to express a supressed bitterness and to delineate the impatience and frustration of the speaker with his present academic role:

> 'It's stinking dead, the research line;
> Just let me put this bastard on the skids,
> I'll get a couple of semesters leave
>
> To work on Protest Theater'

The impression given here of the poem's recording the speaker's exact, "uncensored" words gives a dramatic immediacy, making the speaker a full-blooded character within the poem. A phrase such as "put this bastard on the skids" is also unavoidably humorous, particularly if applied to the sedate donnish-type who immediately (stereotypically) springs to mind. This highlights an additional dimension of the poem: it is in a sense a joke on posterity in the form of Jake Balokowsky, an artefact created from his casually uttered complaints which will make on him the claims of research he so desperately wishes to escape from, so that he is in fact "hoist with his own petard." Furthermore,

by encapsulating the critic in his own poem Larkin pre-empts him: the usual victim becomes the, at least temporary, victor.

The use of conversations or implied conversations between characters, as in "Posterity," to incorporate everyday speech into verse is a technique favoured by a number of Georgian poets and accounts for the dramatic character of much of their verse. Edward Thomas' poem "As the Team's Head-Brass" provides a deft example. The progression here from speaker's observation to direct speech is skilfully managed by means of an unobtrusive section of reported speech which seems initially to continue the description of the previous lines:

> The blizzard felled the elm whose crest
> I sat in, by a woodpecker's round hole,
> The ploughman said. 'When will they take it away?'
> 'When the war's over.' So the talk began....

The jumbled order of everyday speech is maintained here, the movement of the sentence ("The blizzard ... ploughman said") looking slightly illogical when written down, but truthfully noting the various details as they strike the speaker's senses (his eye moves last to the small hole right next to him, as it conceivably would). The effect is also one of a dramatic immediacy, for the indication that this is reported speech only comes at the end of the sentence when the details of the scene have already been presented. The progression from indirect to direct speech also seems so natural because Thomas has abandoned the more usual Georgian practice of making a "rustic," such as the ploughman, speaked in an assumed dialect.

Aided by techniques absorbed from early modernist writing Larkin develops on Thomas' work here in his longer poems such as "Dockery and Son," which I will discuss in my following chapter. His particular achievement in this area is however his ability to catch the rhythms

and nuances of everyday speech in poems which avoid direct quotation, and which follow traditional formal structures closely enough to make difficult, one would think, realistic representation of this kind. In "Toads" (LD) Larkin wittily uses traditional poetic devices such as alliteration to create completely colloquial utterance:

> Six days of the week it soils
> With its sickening poison-
> Just for paying a few bills!
> That's out of proportion.

The hissing s's, culminating in the extremely plausible "sickening," trace the build-up of the emotion finally vented in the exclamation of the third line. Owing to this strong characterisation one can almost "see" the head-shake in the fourth line, which sets up a whine which concludes the next three verses:

> Lots of folk live on their wits:
> Lecturers, lispers,
> Losels, loblolly-men, louts -
> They don't end as paupers;
>
> Lots of folk live up lanes
> With fires in a bucket,
> Eat windfalls and tinned sardines -
> They seem to like it.
>
> Their nippers have got bare feet,
> Their unspeakable wives
> Are skinny as whippets - and yet
> No one actually starves.

In the first two verses quoted this whining tone mainly results from the emphasis on "[t]hey" encouraged by the implicit and wistful association of the speaker himself with those people who have rebelled against "the toad work" (line 1); and from, in "starves," the further drawing out of an already long vowel allowed by its terminal position. In these three verses, and particularly in the first-quoted where the speaker evidently enjoys the challenge of "thinking of things that

by the more conventional "cold as snow." Rhythm and structure enact the colloquialisms of the following verse, which is the only one in the poem containing no additional line-end pauses such as commas, questions or semi-colons: the reader is thus literally forced to take it "all at one go" ("All at one sitting"), a feature which also dramatises the "fast-talking" implied in "blarney." In the poem's concluding lines the speaker extends the relationship with his audience already signified by his colloquial usage and by culturally conditioned clichés such as "the fame and the girl and the money" through engaging in direct discussion, almost argument, with the reader:

> I don't say, one bodies the other
> One's spiritual truth;
> But I do say it's hard to lose either,
> When you have both.

The tone here is one of "I'll level with you," and the insistent "[b]ut," with the parallel and plain contradiction of "I don't say" and "I do say," convey the speaker's desire to "get facts straight."

"Toads Revisited" (WW), which as the title suggests returns to a consideration of the theme of "Toads," achieves a comparable conversational tone despite the formal demand of being written in half-rhyming couplets, arguably even more constricting than the alternating half-rhymes of "Toads." This informality -- the speaker could be a friend or acquaintance -- combines with the visual details which characterise the park --

> The lake, the sunshine,
> The grass to lie on,
>
> Blurred playground noises
> Beyond black-stockinged nurses....

-- to suggest a scene "we all know" and hence to draw the reader into the poet's inner debate. The speaker's lack of sympathy with the inhabitants of this scene is superbly caught:

> Palsied old step-takers,
> Hare-eyed clerks with the jitters,
> Waxed-fleshed out-patients
> Still vague from accidents,
> And characters in long coats
> Deep in the litter-baskets....

The words "step-takers," "jitters," "[w]axed-fleshed" and "vague" indicate his unwillingness to be associated with what he sees through their each describing a perfectly conceivable characteristic, such as the slow progression of the elderly, merely from an unfavourable angle. However the odd ambiguity in "Yet it doesn't suit me, / Being one of the men / You meet of an afternoon," while expressing the speaker's alienation, also provides a latent admission of identity, suggesting that there is some defensiveness his reaction. Phrases which capture his fear or revulsion are used to manipulate the reader's sympathies: "characters" in "characters in long coats / Deep in the litter-baskets" points to the stock reaction involved here, one the reader can easily identify with, while at the same time the vividness of the portrayal makes the lines seem exact, true-to-life and therefore justified. The generalisation in "You meet of an afternoon" implies that neither would the reader like to be part of this parade, while "Think of being them!," from the next verse, is even less subtle in its approach, and if isolated from its context would in its extreme simplicity approach the inane effect remarked on earlier in some Georgian verse.

With his show of liberally considering all the options the speaker has now fully implicated the reader in his debunking of accepted notions of the idyllic ("endless play") and thus prepared him too to

accept the compromise offered by "work." At this point a graver note enters the poem, the conflict being expressed in slightly different terms:

> No, give me my in-tray,
> My loaf-haired secretary,
> My shall-I-keep-the-call-in-Sir:
> What else can I answer,
>
> When the lights come on at four
> At the end of another year?
> Give me your arm, old toad;
> Help me down Cemetery Road.

The alternative to work is not leisure: acceptance of this grim environment (when one leaves "the office" it is dark), with its own estranging though comforting sterotypes, is necessary to help one towards death.

Perhaps Larkin's most successful composition using the rhythms and idiom of everyday speech is "Wild Oats" (WW). The speaker here becomes a raconteur, as the formulaic opening "About twenty years ago / Two girls came in where I worked" indicates. The jaunty rhythm of these lines, created partly by the combining of whimsical initial anapaest with the almost sing-song regularity of the iambs, and partly by one's tendency to "gallop" the second line because of its implied temporal equivalence with the first, immediately begins to establish the speaker's deliberately casual and cynical attitude. This rhythmical effect is even more pronounced in the third and fourth lines:

> A bosomy English rose
> And her friend in specs I could talk to.

One is led to read the fourth line as if it were hyphenated from "friend" onwards, and indeed the speaker is setting two categories of "the female" against each other. Although "bosomy English rose"

inevitably bears some of the associations of romantic fantasy, the appreciation it conveys is tongue-in-cheek, the use of a set formula (repeated later as "beautiful" in "I believe / I met beautiful twice") veiling the speaker's emotion and contributing to his projection of a cynical attitude. That this cynical mask is partly the result of his strong consciousness of his audience (a fitting feature in a storyteller) is suggested by his slightly bashful self-justification:

> Faces in those days sparked
> The whole shooting-match off, and I doubt
> If ever one had like hers:
> But it was the friend I took out....

The extreme shyness wryly commented on here provides some clue to the choice of the offhand, almost vulgarly insensitive "shooting-match" and "sparked ... off." Present cynicism is however not only a reaction to past shyness: beneath the bored manner with which the speaker lists the details of his actual relationship with the "friend in specs," as it were counting the cost in effort, time and money --

> And in seven years after that
> Wrote over four hundred letters,
> Gave a ten-guinea ring
> I got back in the end, and met
> At numerous cathedral cities
> Unknown to the clergy....

-- lies a hint of pathos, a Hardyesque bitterness at the nature of things for "not working out," albeit through a self-acknowledged fault. There is something of this emotion in the unchivalrous inclusion of the detail of the return of the ring, particularly in the monosyllabic bluntness of "got back in the end." However the speaker's cynicism prevails: a relationship that involved the pledge of the giving of a ring is wryly classified under the heading "Wild Oats," which further suggests some retaliation on his part for those seven

years of struggle, as well as, possibly, for the enforced (though in this case ironically accurate?) "agreement" on his nature ("That I was too selfish, withdrawn / And easily bored to love"). The lighter tone of the conclusion --

> In my wallet are still two snaps
> Of bosomy rose with fur gloves on.
> Unlucky charms, perhaps.

-- shows, notably in "perhaps," a wistfulness for both "bosomy rose" and the failed relationship. The poem as a whole thus achieves its effect through the drawing together of various strands in Larkin's work: mundanity of subject matter and casual if not colloquial diction, tempered by a preoccupation with loss, suggest a warm humanity.

In "Homage to a Government" (HW), which of all Larkin's work comes closest to being a "public" poem, speech rhythms and prose syntax are used to create a deliberate flatness. This prosaic quality is also evident in the demonstration of the total transparency befitting a protest poem -- here Larkin is, as John Betjeman says in a comment applied to the whole of his oeuvre, clearly writing about "what all of us can understand ..." ("Common Experiences" 483):

> Next year we are to bring the soldiers home
> For lack of money, and it is all right.
> Places they guarded, or kept orderly,
> Must guard themselves, and keep themselves orderly.
> We want the money for ourselves at home
> Instead of working. And this is all right.

The language here is that of the orator: the repeated, ironic "is all right" recalls Antony's "And Brutus is an honourable man," at each repetition the refrain becoming more conspicuously untrue. Rather than being used for "poetic" effect, conventional poetic devices such as rhyme are used to work towards the heaviness one might expect in the

prose of a political phamplet: the exact repeating of a word ("home," "right" or "orderly") to create a clumsy rhyme, or the near-mirroring of a whole line or more, as at the beginning of the third verse ("Next year we shall be living in a country / That brought its soldiers home for lack of money") is necessary to drive the point home. The over-emphasis, as on the colloquial "all right," also contributes to creating the poem's grumbling tone, which at the beginning of the second verse -- "It's hard to say who wanted it to happen" -- obtains a slight whine and almost becomes that of the gossip or backbiter. No undercutting is involved here, for Larkin is engaging in an overt grumble. The impetus for this is to be deduced from the words "all right," if they are given their literal, original weight rather than the lighter associations frequent customary usage has attached to them. Although an unsympathetic critic might ascribe Larkin's diagnosis of the ills of mid-twentieth century Britain simply to right-wing political views, for Larkin himself "right" and "wrong," absolute terms, are at stake here. With heavy sarcasm he attacks what he sees as apathy and the consequent passive surrender to authority ("But now it's been decided nobody minds"), selfishness ("The places are a long way off, not here"), unintelligent acceptance of rumour ("from what we hear / The soldiers there only made trouble happen" -- the half-digested thoughts here being expressed in the clumsy "made trouble happen"), and a damning lack of moral fibre ("Next year we shall be easier in our minds"). His condemnation of the greed and other motives he discerns in the Government's decision becomes most effective with the poignant note entering the concluding lines of the poem:

> The statues will be standing in the same
> Tree-muffled squares, and look nearly the same.
> Our children will not know it's a different country.
> All we can hope to leave them now is money.

It is Larkin's characteristic concern for "the truth," one is made to feel, which compels him to add "and look nearly the same." His self-appointed role as "truth-teller" is further signalled in the dating of the poem (1969), an exceptional practice in his case: the poem is to stand as reportage. However the date also functions as an epitaph, marking off the past from the reduced life of the future which English children will unknowingly, hence unfairly, suffer.

With "Homage to a Government" Larkin has taken the Georgian ideal of the incorporation of everyday speech into verse close to its practical limits. Another aspect of the Georgian emphasis on "realism" which can be said to have influenced him is their choice of the English countryside, English small towns and English customs as both subject matter and setting for their poems. Here Rupert Brooke again went beyond many of his contemporaries in not confining his conception of the typically English to the activities of the rural peasantry. "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" energetically records the poet's frustration at being trapped in Berlin by repeatedly evoking memories (which may involve some distortion, though in this somewhat playful poem that is not the point) of the England he loves:

> Here am I sweating, sick, and hot,
> And there the shadowed waters fresh
> Lean up to embrace the naked flesh....
> .....
> Here tulips bloom as they are told;
> Unkempt about those hedges blows
> An English unofficial rose;
> And there the unregulated sun
> Slopes down to rest when day is done,
> And wakes a vague unpunctual star,
> A slippered Hesper....

Because of the degree of idealisation involved this excerpt may not seem what we now, after the modernist period, think of as "realistic," yet the setting is at least specifically English rather than vaguely

classical (a point made by Brooke himself later in the poem), the rose and hedges being grasped as concrete details, or perhaps symbols, of the English landscape. Brooke's ability to achieve memorable characterisation with extreme economy of description is also evident in the less idealised sections of the poem: the smell of the River Cam is "thrilling-sweet and rotten," an "unpleasant but truthful" touch comparable to those of "Channel Passage," while the much-quoted concluding lines -- "oh! yet / Stands the Church clock at ten to three? / And is there honey still for tea?" -- pinpoint the rural English way of life, with its institutions of village church and afternoon tea.

We shall see that an insistent attention to the local and everyday forms a recurrent feature of Larkin's work. That it comprises a consistent stream in Georgian verse is made particularly clear by a comparison between a romantic and a disillusioned treatment of World War I. The dominant emotion in Brooke's "The Soldier" is not the maudlin patriotism attributed particularly to its first two-and-a-half lines when, as so often, quoted out of context, but a great longing:

> If I should die, think only this of me:
> That there's some corner of a foreign field
> That is for ever England. There shall be
> In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
> A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
> Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
> A body of England's, breathing English air,
> Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

The verse's final poignant arrest on "home" reveals the speaker's homesickness. Somewhat senseless generalisations such as "English air" have to be accepted as part of the poet's treasuring of a past implicitly lost, but these are the exception. The merits of the "foreign field" are acknowledged in "that rich earth," thereby

stressing the particular value of the "richer dust"; the progression from "bore" to "shaped" to "made aware" is logical and encourages visualisation. There is pathos in the isolated "once," both from the sense of pleasures that are past ("flowers to love," "ways to roam") and from the suggestion of the gift's being so precious that it could not be repeated. The following incantation to England, while further establishing that English life has certain distinguishing qualities, fortunately distracts from the slight incongruity in a "body" breathing, body itself though being the logical reconstruction of the preceding "dust."

The source of the weaknesses in "The Soldier" can be detected in the initial "think only this of me": Brooke's idealism is a result of his being out of touch with the actual horrors of the First World War, for he died before he could experience the brutality of trench warfare. His fellow Georgian Siegfried Sassoon, writing from the trenches in 1917, seems to answer Brooke with his more profound realisation in "The Dreamers" that "[S]oldiers are citizens of death's gray land." Sassoon provides Brooke's "dream" with a context:

> Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin
> They think of firelit homes, clean beds, and wives.
>
> I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats,
> And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain,
> Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,
> And mocked by hopeless longing to regain
> Bank-holidays, and picture-shows, and spats,
> And going to the office in the train.

The dreams here seem truly of phantasma, the evanescent: they have no possibility of independent existence or meaning, but are simply an escape from an unbearable reality; hence the soldiers are "mocked" by their "hopeless" longing. The construct of "England" is shown to be almost as fleeting as their own lives. Yet it is significantly the

small, seemingly unimportant facets of English culture, the "trivialities" of everyday life, to which they cling, from which they form their memories. The realisation of "England," more concrete and more telling than in Brooke's poem, is paralleled in the portrayal of conditions in the trenches: the genuine violence here, the justified emotion of "foul dug-outs," for example, exposes the gratuitous element in the more brutally realistic touches of earlier Georgian poetry.

Larkin does not plumb Sassoon's depths of despair, but neither does he share what seems with hindsight Brooke's unjustified optimism. The concluding section of "Show Saturday" (HW), describing the dismantling of the show, draws both on Brooke's intense feeling for what is specifically English, making it the basis for a larger concern, and on Sassoon's greater awareness of how the continued existence of what he values is in no way guaranteed:

> The pound-note man decamps.
> The car park has thinned. They're loading jumps on a truck.
> Back now to private addresses, gates and lamps
> In high stone one-street villages, empty at dusk,
> And the side roads of small towns (sports finals stuck
> In front doors, allotments reaching down to the railway);
> Back now to autumn, leaving the ended husk
> Of summer that brought them here for Show Saturday-
> The men with hunters, dog-breeding wool-defined women,
> Children all saddle-swank, mugfaced middleaged wives
> Glaring at jellies, husbands on leave from the garden
> Watchful as weasels, car-tuning curt-haired sons-
> Back now, all of them, to their local lives:
> To names on vans, and business calendars
> Hung up in kitchens; back to loud occasions
> In the Corn Exchange, to market days in bars,
> To winter coming, as the dismantled Show
> Itself dies back into the area of work.
> Let it stay hidden there like strength, below
> Sale-bills and swindling; something people do,
> Not noticing how time's rolling smithy-smoke
> Shadows much greater gestures; something they share
> That breaks ancestrally each year into
> Regenerate union. Let it always be there.

It is the "high stone one-street villages," "sports finals," terrace strip-gardens, "market days in bars" and "Corn Exchange" which type this scene as English, and even the "private addresses" with their emphasis on the particularly English desire for privacy. The sharpness of the speaker's observation (for example in noting the "sports finals stuck / In front doors") conveys his emotional attachment to these imagined surroundings, one might say, from the careful recording of every distinctive detail, his love for them. His characterisation of the various inhabitants shows a similar combination of precision and typifying: the "men with hunters," the "saddle-swank" children and "dog-breeding" women catch the style of "English country," while the caricatured wives, -- "mugfaced" and "glaring" inevitably suggest the expression "a tough cookie," borne out by one possible interpretation of the husbands' being "on leave" from the garden -- the husbands and sons are recognisable but anonymous (plausibly so, for the outsider) small-village dwellers. There is even a suggestion of lifelike family friction in "curt-haired sons," the physical feature being readily transferable to the behaviour of "the kind of person we know Larkin is talking about."

The process of deft delineation seen here is even more strikingly exemplified in the description of the actual show, the ritual which has drawn together these diverse English folk:

> But there are other talents--
> The long high tent of growing and making, wired-off
> Wood tables past which crowds shuffle, eyeing the scrubbed spaced
> Extrusions of earth: blanch leeks like church candles, six pods of
> Broad beans (one split open), dark shining-leafed cabbages -- rows
> Of single supreme versions, followed (on laced
> Paper mats) by dairy and kitchen; four brown eggs, four white eggs,
> Four plain scones, four dropped scones, pure excellences that enclose
> A recession of skills.

The poem abounds in such sharply-focused visual imagery. The apparently trite repetition of "four" here is necessary to ensure the truthfulness of presentation that is the poet's passion, as is the insistent mention of the placing of each article: to overlook would be to misrepresent. This concreteness of execution goes beyond what one would normally associate with Georgian verse and seems indeed to approach Pound's ideal of "[o]bjectivity and again objectivity, no hind-side-beforeness, no straddled adjectives ... no Tennysonianness of speech ...," hence a poetry "austere, direct, free from emotional slither" (Letters 91; 'Prolegomena,' Poetry Review I qtd. in Ross 49).

Neither Brooke nor Gibson, nor even Sassoon, achieve anything like Larkin's density and even solidity of specific detail, the only Georgian poet comparable in this respect being Edward Thomas. One can see "Show Saturday" as synthesising the lines of development leading from Thomas on the one hand and early modernist practice on the other. Thomas' "As the Team's Head-Brass" is, like "Show Saturday," dramatic in character, the presence of an observer giving the task of ploughing, as the action of the show, a compelling immediacy:

> As the team's head-brass flashed out on the turn
> The lovers disappeared into the wood.
> I sat among the boughs of the fallen elm
> That strewed the angle of the fallow, and
> Watched the plough harrowing a yellow square
> Of charlock. Every time the horses turned
> Instead of treading me down, the ploughman leaned
> Upon the handles to say or ask a word;
> About the weather, next about the war.
> Scraping the share he faced towards the wood,
> And screwed along the furrow till the brass flashed
> Once more.

The flashing of the head-brass in the sunlight indicates the turning of the team of horses, and, in marking the beginning and end of the section of the poem in which the "scene is set," forms a frame for the

ensuing conversation between ploughman and observer. This is in turn paralleled by the larger frame formed for almost the entire action of the poem by the disappearance of the lovers into the wood in the second line and their reappearance in the fourth last. That the speaker perceives the lovers despite the concentration of his attention on the ploughing team is a testimony to his alertness, revealed also in the almost geometric precision of "strewed the angle of the fallow" and in the mental activity demanded of the reader to follow the "narrowing" of "a yellow square / Of charlock." The words "fallen," "fallow" and "yellow" form a musical variation here which remains subtly underplayed despite the similar position of each as second-last word in the line, and this is largely because of the different rhythmically-induced emphasis in each case: in his skilful manipulation of the iambic pentameter line Thomas is much closer to Larkin than are the other Georgian poets. Through its ending the clause which begins with "I sat among the boughs ..." "fallow" receives more time and attention than "yellow," which is both rhythmically and semantically propelled towards "charlock" by the run-on-line and possessive construction. The dead stop at "charlock" mimes that which the horses have to make, spatially, before turning, while the emphasis given to "[e]very time" by its beginning of a whole new section of thought (and not merely a line), enacts the demanding change of direction.

Larkin similarly places notable "turning-points" in the middle of his line in "Show Saturday": "But there are other talents ...", from the section of the poem already quoted, is one such example, marking the observer's entry into the "long high tent of growing and making," and is preceded (fourteen lines back) by the equally functional "There's more than just animals ..." as he turns away from the showing

of dogs and sheep to other fairground scenes. Likewise the show begins the process of "dying back" -- the organic metaphor emphasising its essential importance for the poet -- from the middle of a line:

> But now, in the background,
> Like shifting scenery, horse-boxes move; each crawls
> Towards the stock entrance, tilting and swaying, bound
> For far-off farms.

Both Thomas and Larkin seem to feel a need for the additonal structuring provided by such a device. In Thomas' case, the movement of the poem by "periods" enables clarity -- an end sought in pre-Georgian poetry by resort to discursiveness ("clarifying") -- amidst what could be a confusion of detail, and by means of this ordering of impressions a context is created against which the disruption of the war can be measured. In "Show Saturday" the details accumulate, each section building on the last, as the poem moves towards the conclusion which unveils the pattern they form, their deeper significance. As in Sassoon's poem it is precisely in their smallness, their "parochialism" that these details are valued : the show is favourably set against "much greater gestures" for, as each set of scones encloses a "recession of skills," each aspect of Show Saturday points to the "hidden ... strength" of the whole. To the "[s]ale bills and swindling" characterising the "area of work" the show opposes the uncalculating, the habit of pure, almost unthinking, enjoyment ("something people do / Not noticing ..."); the sharing each annual union involves is worthy because it not only links with the past ("ancestrally"), but provides some kind of hope for the future ("[r]egenerate"). Here Larkin shows an awareness of the value of ritual comparable to that expressed in "Church Going," though in the earlier poem the speaker is more overtly detached from the moribund

institution he is describing. A fear of similar, but future, loss enters the closing "Let it always be there" of "Show Saturday," the exhortation conveying an expansive appreciation but also a hint of a plea. Larkin, living after Eliot's "The Waste Land" and two World Wars, cannot share Brooke's unqualified confidence in "some corner ... / That is for ever England."

The denigration of a ritual of "[r]egenerate union" comparable to that of "Show Saturday" by the cynical speaker of "Naturally the Foundation Will Bear Your Expenses" (WW) suggests that the threat Larkin perceives could come, for example, from the shallow "internationalism" of outlook condescendingly adopted by this much-travelled academic. His vision of the ceremony for the remembrance of the war dead as "solemn-sinister / Wreath-rubbish," a "mawkish nursery [game]" demonstrating England's need to "grow up" is undermined by the glib, almost mechanical metre:

> Hurrying to catch my Comet
> One dark November day,
> Which soon would snatch me from it
> To the sunshine of Bombay...

Here the substitution of a pyrrhic foot after the initial trochee gives the phrase "[h]urrying to" three light stresses which suitably speeds up the rhythm before the lapse into a regularity which forces "from it" into an intentionally ridiculous rhyme with "Comet," emphasising the possibility that any wider ironies involved in "catching a comet" have completely escaped the pompous speaker. His self-conscious hauteur of tone, as evinced in, for example, "Crowds, colourless and careworn, / Had made my taxi late ...," is so unlike the Larkinian persona's usual diffidence as to make the reader doubly wary. W.H. Auden's "On the Circuit," included in Larkin's Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse, gives a similarly damning, if also

somewhat self-critical, portrayal of the phenomenon of the mercenary academic or artistic celebrity:

> Another morning comes: I see
> Dwindling below me on the plane
> The roofs of one more audience
> I shall not see again.
>
> God bless the lot of them, although
> I don't remember which was which:
> God bless the USA, so large,
> So friendly, and so rich.

This comparison however reveals the greater depth given Larkin's poem by the inclusion and rejection of a particular ritual. The latter poet is diagnosing an ill with potentially more serious consequences for his society: the speaker's dismissal is not only of the crowds and their unifying ceremony, so important to all who share in it, but of the suffering and destruction of the war itself. His "lack of memory" negates the power of regeneration. In the context provided by this poem the concluding lines of "Show Saturday" could seem almost defiant.

"Show Saturday" is thus distinguished from the poetry of Brooke and his fellow Georgians, including Thomas, in its movement from the minutiae of the particular to a general or universally significant conclusion. Given this kind of development (a common one in Larkin's work) it would seem difficult to sustain against him the charge of "Little Englandism" levelled by Frederick Grubb, for example ("No One Actually Starves: Philip Larkin" 234), if by that is meant an exclusive concern with the affairs of England or the English. These rather form for Larkin the essential base from which his vision of human life arises. His commitment to locality has behind it something of that philosophy expressed by Wordsworth in his lines on Burke:

> ... [he] the majesty proclaims
> Of Institutes and Laws, hallowed by time;
> Declares the vital power of social ties
> Endeared by Custom; and with high disdain,
> Exploding upstart Theory, insists
> Upon the allegiance to which men are born....
>
> (The Prelude [1850] Book VII lines 525-530)

In this respect it is instructive to compare Larkin's work with that of his approximate contemporary John Betjeman, for whose importance he has made strong claims. Writing in his introduction to the American edition of John Betjeman's enlarged Collected Poems, Larkin says that what he admires about Betjeman is his insistence, "in a time of global concepts," on

> ... the little, the forgotten, the unprofitable ...; the privately-printed book of poems, the chapel behind the Corn Exchange, the local water-colours in the museum (open 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.). This, at any rate, is how the British public knows him: the man who is always trying to stop things being pulled down, or blocked in, or covered in wires or concrete railings or tarmac; the man who hates town clerks 'from north of Trent' and speculative builders, and all the modernizers and centralizers and rationalizers....[3]

The emphasis on the "little" here clearly parallels that attributed to the Georgians, and at least as regards his subject-matter (as even a brief glance through the titles in his Collected Poems will verify) Betjeman may be considered their present day successor. His poetry generally differs from Larkin's in ostensibly refusing to step back from the specific details he loves. Larkin's "To The Sea" (HW), a return in verse to the seaside bathing holidays of his childhood, has the speaker both impelled into the scene with the opening lines --

> To step over the low wall that divides
> Road from concrete walk above the shore
> Brings sharply back something known long before-
> The miniature gaiety of seasides....

-- and again detached from it, in the course of the poem ("... plainly still occurs / As half an annual pleasure, half a rite ...") and at the conclusion as he deduces a moral position from what he has seen:

> If the worst
> Of flawless weather is our falling short,
> It may be that through habit these do best,
> Coming to water clumsily undressed
> Yearly; teaching their children by a sort
> Of clowning; helping the old, too, as they ought.

Betjeman however concentrates almost exclusively on the recreation of a particular experience. The second and concluding verse of "East Anglian Bathe" presents no more than that, ending with

> How cold the bathe, how chattering cold the drying,
> How welcoming the inland reeds appear,
> The wood-smoke and the breakfast and the frying,
> And your warm freshwater-ripples, Horsey Mere.

Even in lines such as these from "Beside the Seaside" which must, because of their satirical edge, to some degree involve a general picture, he does not seem to rise above his immediate preoccupations:

> Still on the bedroom wall, the list of rules:
> Don't waste the water. It is pumped by hand.
> Don't throw old blades into the W.C.
> Don't keep the bathroom long and don't be late
> For meals and don't hang swim-suits out on sills
> (A line has been provided at the back).
> Don't this, Don't that. Ah, still the same, the same
> As it was last year and the year before-
> But rather more expensive now, of course.

The possible step towards a recognition of ritual in "Ah, still the same ..." is simply not taken.

It is not that Betjeman lacks an awareness of a wider metaphysical surround: this is however kept so implicit, subject to the immediacy of the particular experience or scene which he values, that it is largely overwhelmed. In "The Cottage Hospital," an accomplished poem

from "A Few Late Chrysanthemums" (1954), a closely observed struggle between a spider and a fly (the fly being entangled and cocooned in the spider's web) leads the speaker to muse on his own future death:

> Say in what Cottage Hospital
> whose pale green walls resound
> With the tap upon polished parquet
> of inflexible nurses feet
> Shall I myself be lying
> when they range the screens around?
> And say shall I groan in dying,
> as I twist the sweaty sheet?
> Or gasp for breath uncrying,
> as I feel my senses drowned
> While the air is swimming with insects
> and children play in the street?

The last two lines here form a refrain, almost repeating the last two of the first verse ("The air was swimming with insects, / and children played in the street"). This formal device points to the poem's tragic realisation of the continuance of life amidst death -- the pattern which as it were surrounds the poem. The focus of attention is however the individual's agony, his terror being starkly portrayed in the almost numbed apprehension of the "pale green walls" and "tap upon polished parquet." However the "refrain" restrains any descent into an alienating self-pity, though at the same time the repetition deliberately reduces the impact of these lines in relation to the preceding ones. The drawing of an individual experience into a universal context thus remains subdued.

Betjeman's poems on religious themes are similarly individualistic, recording either his own battle with faith ("Christmas") or his rejoicing acceptance of an institution which, he seems to feel, other right-minded people will emulate. In "Sunday Afternoon Service in St. Enodoc Church, Cornwall" he, listening to the tolling church-bells, mentally encourages the area's inhabitants to

partake in the service ("Come on! Come on!"), though he himself is also able to regard the church with the "dispassionate" eye of the antiquary:

> So soaked in worship you are loved too well
> For that dispassionate and critic stare
> That I would use beyond the parish bounds
> Biking in high-banked lanes from tower to tower
> On sunny, antiquarian afternoons.

Larkin's "Church Going" immediately comes to mind here. Yet though Betjeman is capable of a degree of detachment, he shares none of Larkin's actual doubt, as characterised in the diffident, almost uncomprehending speaker of "Church Going," about the present role of the Church, about its future survival, in a world that has irrevocably changed. Those who choose to frequent the golf-course rather than St. Enodoc's are unhesitatingly consigned to doom: the seamen who "end their lives / Dashed on a rock" on the Cornish coast and who lie buried beside the church are "[l]ess pitiable ... than the corpse / Of a large golfer, only four weeks dead, / This sunlit and sea-distant afternoon." Lacking Larkin's desire to see beyond the immediate and personal, Betjeman shows none of his wisdom, his wider perception of the Church's function which has been most fully expressed in his work in the concluding two verses of "Church Going."

Where Betjeman and Larkin come closest to similar treatment of a common theme is in the realm of light satire. The subject of both "The Young Executive" and "Going, Going" (HW) is the destruction of "the little, the forgotten, the unprofitable," the characteristic features of the English landscape each poet values so highly. Betjeman attacks unwelcome change by satirising one of its typical agents, the "young executive" turned property developer. The predictably shallow attitudes of one who thinks only in terms of

buying and selling are presented in lines which move with the ease and slickness Larkin himself demonstrates in "Annus Mirabilis" or "This Be The Verse":

> I am a young executive. No cuffs than mine are cleaner;
> I have a Slimline briefcase and I use the firm's Cortina.
> In every roadside hostelry from here to Burgess Hill
> The maîtres d'hôtel all know me well and let me sign the bill.

However while Larkin in the two poems mentioned above allows elements of doubt or chagrin or even profound bitterness to creep into the speaker's tone, the satire here is straightforward: the parallel structures and glib medial divisions create the small capsules of thought which are all that is necessary to contain the clichés of the business world. Similarly in the second verse the lines filled with jargon flow smoothly on:

> You ask me what it is I do. Well actually, you know,
> I'm partly a liaison man and partly P.R.O.
> Essentially I integrate the current export drive
> And basically I'm viable from ten o'clock till five.

In response to the slightly aggressive formulation of "You ask me what it is I do" the speaker's manner becomes defensively ingratiating and he reels off what is obviously an apology for emptiness (the standard working day, it is implied, being equally inflated). The condemnation takes on a harsher note in the third verse with the lines "I've a scarlet Aston-Martin -- and does she go? She flies! / Pedestrians and dogs and cats -- we mark them down for slaughter": guided by Betjeman's judgement the reader is forced to see in "slaughter" a degree of horror which has completely escaped the speaker. Then in conclusion we are presented with the consequences of this reduction of all to material self-interest:

> I do some mild developing. The sort of place I need
> Is a quiet country market town that's rather run to seed.
> A luncheon and a drink or two, a little savoir faire-
> I fix the Planning Officer, the Town Clerk and the Mayor.
>
> And if some preservationist attempts to interfere
> A 'dangerous structure' notice from the Borough Engineer
> Will settle any buildings that are standing in our way -
> The modern style, sir, with respect, has really come to stay.

The use of "mild" to qualify "developing" is somewhat incongruous, though arguably idiomatic, for the word usually describes either an emotional state or the weather, and suggests the speaker's insensitivity to any area of experience which does not involve profit; while the swagger and threat of the earlier "Pedestrians and dogs and cats -- we mark them down for slaughter" is repeated in the increasingly intense "fix," "some preservationist," "interfere" and "settle." The "modern style" is not merely architectural but suitably characterises this brutalised individual.

The process described in the last two verses of "The Young Executive" is treated in Larkin's "Going, Going" from the point of view of those, such as the speaker in the poem, who consciously or unconsciously suffer from it. The speaker's changing moods as he comtemplates the disappearance of the England he knew are reflected in a variety of tones, and this relatively complex characterisation enables the reader to identify with his sense of loss: the poem thus takes on a broader reference while maintaining a satirical bent.

Initially the speaker himself is implicated in a mildly satirical treatment of the natural human tendency to cling to comforting delusions:

> I thought it would last my time -
> The sense that, beyond the town,
> There would always be fields and farms,
> Where the village louts could climb
> Such trees as were not cut down;
> I knew there'd be false alarms

> In the papers about old streets
> And split-level shopping, but some
> Have always been left so far;
> And when the old part retreats
> As the bleak high-risers come
> We can always escape in the car.

The short-sightedness, arising from selfishness, in "last my time" is not unusual; and to avoid facing the shock caused by the destruction of inherited absolutes ("always be") the speaker is clinging to the straws of "false alarms" and "We can always escape in the car." His timid assertion in "but some / Have always been left so far" gives way to the breathless discovery of this latter escape route, the ultimate ineffectuality of which is however evident from the overpowering "bleak high-risers." The speaker's passivity, it is suggested, is part of the problem: the vagueness of his picture of the "village louts," for example, implies a lack of active involvement in the countryside he treasures.

With the third verse the tone becomes harsher, the heavy-handed nature of the satire being consequent on the crassness of an attitude considered acceptable by many:

> Things are tougher than we are, just
> As earth will always respond
> However we mess it about;
> Chuck filth in the sea, if you must:
> The tides will be clean beyond.

The questions which follow these lines -- "But what do I feel now? Doubt?/ Or age, simply?" -- introduce a note of tired hopelessness and, with the chorus of "more"'s which follow, this develops into a resigned bitterness, dwarfing the humour in the caricature of businessmen as "a score / Of spectacled grins." This bitterness reaches its peak at the end of the seventh verse:

It seems, just now,
To be happening so very fast;
Despite all the land left free
For the first time I feel somehow
That it isn't going to last,

That before I snuff it, the whole
Boiling will be bricked in
Except for the tourist parts -
First slum of Europe : a role
It won't be so hard to win,
With a cast of crooks and tarts.

The tentativeness here ("It seems, just now"; "I feel somehow") reflects an old-fashioned reticence, a respect for mutual boundaries which "the modern style" has utterly overwhelmed, so leaving the speaker pathetically bewildered, full of self-loathing ("before I snuff it") and a helpless hatred ("the whole / Boiling"), all of which prepare for the last three lines. Yet this relentless bitterness is the product of a profound regret, as the transition in the next verse shows:

And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.
There'll be books; it will linger on
In galleries; but all that remains
For us will be concrete and tyres.

We have moved here to the elegist's sense of transience, of defeat and loss, and to his recalling of cherished memories. The insubstantiality of "shadows" shows how much more is at stake here for Larkin than the mere appurtenances of civilisation: in the features he mentions he detects its essence. The internal half-rhyme of "shadows" and "meadows," the alliteration combined with lovingly drawn-out vowels in "carved choirs," attempt to recreate some of the beauty which distinguished this England, and which is thrown into relief by the harshness of "crooks and tarts" and the "bricked in" context. To

"linger on / In galleries" is a remote and frail second best; the final sad reduction is however reserved for the human inhabitants of the scene.

The last verse of the poem presents in its first two lines a consciously feeble attempt at consolation:

> Most things are never meant.
> This won't be, most likely: but greeds
> And garbage are too thick-strewn
> To be swept up now, or invent
> Excuses that make them all needs.
> I just think it will happen, soon.

The power of "greeds," "needs" and "garbage" negates any possibility of comfort, as the development of the image emphasises. We fall victim to "developers" because of universal human failings, as much selfishness and greed as the capacity for self-delusion ("invent / Excuses") the speaker himself initially demonstrated. Whereas for Betjeman the battle is still worth fighting, for Larkin it is already lost. In its timid persistence the last line conveys the sense of enervation that co-exists with the insight.

Without sacrificing any of Betjeman's particularity of detail Larkin thus transmutes their joint concern into a universal lament for the destruction caused not so much by time as by human beings. In this development he again distances himself from Georgian practice, as he does in his manifest inability to share in the early Georgian optimism (some of which seems to have filtered through to Betjeman). In its scope Larkin's awareness of loss here seems to stem not only from Hardy, but compares with the recognition of disintegration we most typically associate with T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land. One can thus conclude from this examination of Larkin's poetry in relation to

the "English Tradition" he has mapped out that he is not entirely at one with the poets he chooses as his predecessors. I will argue in my next chapter that this is to some degree the result of his freely drawing on sources he considers antithetical to this tradition: I will consider the stimulation provided his work by the movement which took the Georgian impetus to revolt to its extreme and so revolutionised twentieth-century attitudes to poetry.

III

LARKIN AND MODERNISM

Although the received impression of Larkin's poetry, encouraged by his own statements on modernist obscurantism, is that it is accessible and transparent he has written a number of poems which in their opacity call this generalisation into question. These occur notably in the relatively early The Less Deceived, but also in the last volume High Windows, and suggest an affinity with the work of the French Symbolist poets from which early modernist poets such as Eliot and Pound drew much of their inspiration. Various critics have dwelt on this relation of Larkin's poetry to Symbolism. Barbara Everett comments on "Livings" and "Sympathy in White Major":

> If, therefore, they can be found obscure, this is not from a lack of plainness of language or from the use of esoteric concepts. This is rather from some failure, for this or that given reader, in the availability of the poem, some break-down in specific relationship with the reader, such as Larkin himself has spoken of as characteristic of modernism. (229)

Andrew Motion then goes as far as claiming that Larkin

> ... has done more than any other living poet to solve the crisis that beset British poetry after the modernists had entered its bloodstream. He has not only made evident what Edna Longley has called "a significant coincidence and continuity of effort" with the interrupted English tradition; he has revitalised existing strengths by introducing them to elements of poetic revolution by which they were challenged. (20)

Barbara Everett gives some indication of one way in which Larkin weds

these two traditions; yet another is through his maintaining a certain accessibility in the poem coupled with a syntactical usage deriving from that of early modernist writers such as Eliot, Pound, and Woolf. As Donald Davie remarks in Articulate Energy

> ... the break with the past is at bottom a change of attitude towards poetic syntax ... Later poets could refuse to countenance all the other symbolist methods and still, by sharing, consciously or not, the symbolist attitude to syntax, they stand out as patently "post-symbolist." (148)

In this chapter I will examine the various aspects of Larkin's work which reveal a close relationship with early modernist writing: his "obscure" poems in which symbolist elements predominate; his deployment of syntax and his debt to modernist philosophies, such as the emphasis on the portrayal of the "thing" or object, which inform their syntactical practice; and finally his sharing of certain thematic preoccupations specific to Modernism. I will begin by considering the influence of Symbolism on his work.

In her article "Philip Larkin: After Symbolism" Barbara Everett argues convincingly for references to Gautier and Mallarmé in "Sympathy in White Major" (HW) -- the title for example parodies Gautier's "Symphonie en blanc majeure," which itself seems to be taken up in Mallarmé's "Salut," in which the speaker acts as toastmaster to a banquet -- and demonstrates how an awareness of these allusions can aid our comprehension of a poem which otherwise, though readily paraphrasable, leaves the reader feeling bewildered, without a sense "of why the man and the drink and the fantasies of praise frankly matter at all" (230). Furthermore, this "extraneous information ... can lead a reader to find [the poem] even cleverer and funnier (or possibly sadder)" than is at first apparent (231).

That this is not an isolated instance of explicit reference to

Symbolism can be seen from Larkin's early poem "Going" (LD):

> There is an evening coming in
> Across the fields, one never seen before,
> That lights no lamps.
>
> Silken it seems at a distance, yet
> When it is drawn up over the knees and breast
> It brings no comfort.
>
> Where has the tree gone, that locked
> Earth to the sky? What is under my hands,
> That I cannot feel?
>
> What loads my hands down?

No-one seems to have noticed Larkin's debt here to a passage from Poe, whose critical writings provided, as Edmund Wilson remarks, "the first scriptures of the Symbolist movement" (17). It is a description of the sensations which follow death:

> Night arrived: and with its shadows a heavy discomfort. It oppressed my limbs with the oppression of some dull weight, and was palpable ... Suddenly lights were brought into the room ... and issuing from the flame of each lamp, there flowed unbrokenly into my ears a strain of melodious monotone. (qtd. in Wilson 18)

"It brings no comfort," from the second verse of "Going," echoes Poe's "a heavy discomfort," Larkin also wishing to make death "palpable." However in the gradual progression from "[s]ilken" to "loads my hands down" he dwells at greater length than Poe on the actual process of dying. "Silken" and "drawn up" suggest a sheet or blanket, its light, soft, almost insubstantial quality being deceptive for, as presaged in the gradual progression from knees to breast, it is capable of smothering completely, becoming the winding-sheet of the dead. These ominous implications are brought out more fully in the third and fourth verses, which dramatise Poe's "[i]t oppressed my limbs with the oppression of some dull weight," the repeated questions reflecting the speaker's increasing disorientation as the "dullness" is transferred

to his own sensations ("What is under my hands, / That I cannot feel?"). Despite this questioning form, and the force of "locked" and "loads," the poem at its conclusion lacks the intensity, the sense of urgency in the face of death that characterises "Aubade," for example. Perhaps this derives from the quality of its model and Larkin should be seen here as intending to evoke the sinister rather than the terrifying. The isolation of the last line, to emphasise the subject's total entrapment, suggests that he is attempting more than this; the line is however given a weight it cannot sustain in the context of the poem.

"Going" suffers from a tendency towards generality which can be considered the consequence of over-reliance on the literary source from which it takes its impetus. In this it looks back to the earlier "Yeatsian" poems of The North Ship, rather than to the instinctive honing of the received against the poet's own experience seen in poems such as "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album." In "Going" Larkin follows Poe and convention in choosing night and "its shadows" (actualised in the image of the evening "coming in / Across the fields") as a metaphor for death, whereas the much later "Aubade," drawing almost exclusively on everyday experience, obtains much of its impact from the overturning of these expected associations -- the speaker fears the arrival of day, not night -- thereby paradoxically achieving the Symbolist and modernist ideal of defamiliarising the familiar Poe aims at with his interweaving of sensations. To be fair, some of the horror of "Aubade" is presaged in the evening "never seen before" of "Going" -- Larkin is unable to concentrate as Poe does on the sensations of death to the degree that he loses sight of its nature as a final ending. "That lights no lamps" can thus be seen as a critical comment on the "lights" or "lamp[s]" of the Symbolist

passage, an attempt not to seek corresponding sensations for death, in a manner rejected as too heated and fantastical, but to penetrate its exact nature.

In various poems of The Less Deceived, his first volume after attempting to throw off the influence of Yeats, Larkin seems to experiment with the materials of Symbolism and early Modernism. The somewhat obscure "Absences" concludes with what one might describe as a characteristically Baudelairean gesture, a cri de coeur couched in the form of an apostrophe:

> Rain patters on a sea that tilts and sighs.
> Fast-running floors, collapsing into hollows,
> Tower suddenly, spray-haired. Contrariwise,
> A wave drops like a wall: another follows,
> Wilting and scrambling, tirelessly at play
> Where there are no ships and no shallows.
>
> Above the sea, the yet more shoreless day,
> Riddled by wind, trails lit-up galleries:
> They shift to giant ribbing, sift away.
>
> Such attics cleared of me! Such absences!

The "Frenchness" of this last line strikes one particularly in the slightly uncomfortable participial adjectival construction "cleared of me," as well as in the less customary literary use of the emphatic "me" in English than in French, and in the plural of the abstract noun "absence." The poem does fit, though obliquely, into the tradition of introspection and remniscence suggested by this likeness to Baudelaire: in the first verse Larkin seems to be attempting to imagine a space "cleared of" himself, to concretise his absence by the creation of an unobserved and unreachable scene ("Where there are no ships and no shallows"). The anthropomorphising in for example "tilts and sighs" or "tirelessly at play" helps to confirm this independence, "tirelessly" suggesting endless succession hence complete self-containment. This "picture" formed by the first verse presumably

is one of many features in the "galleries" of the second, through which the reflecting poet implicitly passes: the "lit-up galleries" are thus taken to signify something like "galleries of remniscences." However the suppression of logical connections in the poem makes it difficult to determine on an interpretation without hesitation -- one is faced here with Eliot's "logic of the imagination" ("Preface to Anabasis" 78).

The obscurity of "Absences" is increased by the apparently private nature of many of the associations, yet there is perhaps a precedent for at least the odd collocation of house or building and the sea in modernist literary tradition. The houses in Eliot's "East Coker" "rise and fall" in wavelike motion ("In succession / Houses rise and fall, crumble ...") and at the conclusion of the second section of the poem they are "all gone under the sea." Eliot's preoccupation here with dissolution (as a basis for renewal) alerts one to the implications of decay in Larkin's poem: although in the first verse these are subordinated to the portrayal of the movement of the waves, they are there vestigially in the "slanting" of the floors, and in words like "collapsing" and "wilting"; they emerge more strongly in the second verse with "riddled," with the literal attrition in the move from "shift" to "sift", and in the startling image, almost dreamlike in both its unexpectedness and grotesqueness, of the "giant ribbing," the beams or "bare bones" of a house. The setting at the beginning of this second verse ("Above the sea, the yet more shoreless day, / Riddled by wind,trails ...") again compels comparison with "East Coker":

> Dawn points, and another day
> Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind
> Wrinkles and slides. I am here
> Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.

Eliot's search for his origins is negatively mirrored in Larkin's "[a]bsences."

Such specific reference to a literary source is however unusual in this volume. More often one is simply able to say that a particular poem shows signs of having been written after certain modern literary and artistic movements. Thus one is faced with the impenetrable image cluster of "Age" (LD), where the arbitrary transitions, tending, given the strongly visual element, towards the grotesque, suggest the method of surrealism:

> My age fallen away like white swaddling
> Floats in the middle distance, becomes
> An inhabited cloud. I bend closer, discern
> A lighted tenement scuttling with voices.
> O you tall game I tired myself with joining!
> Now I wade through you like knee-level weeds.

These fantastical images are idiosyncratic (too much so), and do not have the flavour of the borrowed, as does for example, the image which concludes Poem XX of The North Ship:

> If I can keep against all argument
> Such image of a snow-white unicorn,
> Then as I pray it may for sanctuary
> Descend at last to me,
> And put into my hand its golden horn.

Here the use of the mythological beast as a symbol for poetry clearly suggests the early Yeats.

One can similarly claim that "Dry-Point" (LD) shows the influence of modern visual expression. The disillusioning nature of sexual fantasy is captured in the strongly visualised image of a monstrously growing bubble which assumes such outrageous proportions that it imprisons its begetter before it bursts ("The wet spark comes, the bright blown walls collapse") revealing the volcanic, moonlike landscape one would expect to find in a Dali painting:

> But what sad scapes we cannot turn from then:
> What ashen hills! what salted, shrunken lakes!

The whole development of the image, in the context of the speaker's terror at the unstoppable, calls for the description "surreal" as the word is used today -- to signify the dreamlike, what is beyond rational control.

In the last verse of "Dry-Point" we are presented with an image which almost defies rational construction, recalling the concluding image of "High Windows":

> ...how remote that bare and sunscrubbed room,
> Intensely far, that padlocked cube of light
> We neither define nor prove,
> Where you, we dream, obtain no right of entry.

The room, which is presumably "that padlocked cube of light," has an ascetic purity ("bare" and "sunscrubbed"), while the sun and light here, like the "sun-comprehending glass" of "High Windows" and the sun itself in "Solar," have positive connotations which are to be set against those of the "sad scapes" with their grey ("ashen") hills. The speaker seems to be visualising an area of his existence which transcends -- it is indefinable, untestable -- the recurrent sexual fantasy of the present, some private ("padlocked") space which these sensations cannot enter. The "cube ... / We neither define nor prove" might be contrasted with the earlier "cube," the inflated bubble with "walls," which is not "[i]ntensely far" but, as it issues from the speaker's body, immanent. The formulation "neither define nor prove" also points towards the infinity envisaged in the concluding "shows / Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless," of "High Windows", but lacks the negative implications which are allowed to filter through into the later image.

The surreal imagery of "Dry-Point" also suggests affinities with

the work of the Apocalyptic School: Dylan Thomas was the most renowned practitioner of a poetry distinguished by a strongly visual component and by an arrangement of images proceeding, as in "Dry Point," almost by free association. Larkin has acknowledged the influence of Thomas on his early work[1] and something of it seems to have survived through to this volume, not only in "Dry-Point" or "Age" but in the less opaque "Wedding-Wind." Here we find cadences which can be termed uncharacteristic in the light of Larkin's poetic development: the second line of the poem, "And my wedding-night was the night of the high wind" obtains a lilting rhythm from the close repetition of night, while the construction "[a]ll is" followed by a repeated participle in "All is the wind / Hunting through clouds and forests, thrashing / My apron and the hanging cloths on the line" creates the sense of propulsion, of vigorous forward movement, seen in lines from "Fern Hill." The fusion of the inappropriate in the image which compares the "bodying-forth by wind / Of joy" the speaker's "actions turn on" with "a thread / Carrying beads" further recalls Thomas, though, as David Timms remarks in his discussion of a similar image from The North Ship, Larkin is less successful with such a technique, the main effect here being one of confusion.

Yet it was Dylan Thomas who came under attack from the "Movement" poets for his obscurity, and in The Whitsun Weddings, which has been described as Larkin's most "empirical" volume," of all his books ... the one owing most to Hardy's example" (Motion 14-15) Larkin seems to be deliberately eschewing the obfuscation of Symbolist and apocalyptic poetry. Even here however one can trace the influence of the modernist movement, for Larkin is making use of syntactical patterns which have been explored before him by these writers. I intend to examine various affinities which hold between Larkin and modernist

poets' use of syntax by concentrating on two poems from this volume.

A poem such as "MCMXIV" displays a notable lack of syntactical generation, for in his attempt to capture the essence of the "age of innocence" Larkin achieves almost photographic precision by making use of an endlessly expanding subject:

> Those long uneven lines
> Standing as patiently
> As if they were stretched outside
> The Oval or Villa Park,
> The crowns of hats, the sun
> On moustached archaic faces
> Grinning as if it were all
> An August Bank Holiday lark;
>
> And the shut shops, the bleached
> Established names on the sunblinds,
> The farthings and sovereigns,
> And dark-clothed children at play
> Called after kings and queens,
> The tin advertisements
> For cocoa and twist, and the pubs
> Wide open all day;
>
> And the countryside not caring:
> The place-names all hazed over
> With flowering grasses, and fields
> Shadowing Domesday lines
> Under wheat's restless silence;
> The differently-dressed servants
> With tiny rooms in huge houses,
> The dust behind limousines;
>
> Never such innocence,
> Never before or since,
> As changed itself to past
> Without a word - the men
> Leaving the gardens tidy,
> The thousands of marriages
> Lasting a little while longer:
> Never such innocence again.

Except in the subordinate clauses "As if they were stretched outside" and "As changed itself to past" there are no finite verbs here (and even these are not main-clause verbs), but a collection of participial constructions based mainly, but not exclusively, on the present

participle: "[s]tanding," "[g]rinning," "not caring," "[s]hadowing," "[l]eaving," "[l]asting." Donald Davie's comments on the ideographic poem

> Swiftly the years beyond recall
> Solemn the stillness of this spring morning

could thus, with qualification, be applied here to explain the (suitably) static quality of Larkin's poem:

> What are missing are the verbs, hence the syntax ...
> Significantly what we get is only a state, an immobile grouping, not an action, a dynamic transference of energy .... (Articulate Energy 42)

In the case of "MCMXIV" the verbs have in terms of Davie's argument been emasculated, forced into an adjectival function. A possible exception is "As changed itself to past" in the last verse, which being the pivot of the poem should suggest some movement or "transference"; yet the line does not have this force, suggesting rather an unobtrusive disappearance, an alteration of states in its suddenness ("Without a word") almost insidious.

A similarly paratactic syntactical structure is common in much of T.S. Eliot's poetry. The randomness of experience in the city is captured in "Preludes" by such means:

> His soul stretched tight across the skies
> That fade behind a city block,
> Or trampled by insistent feet
> At four and five and six o'clock;
> And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
> And evening newspapers, and eyes
> Assured of certain certainties,
> The conscience of a blackened street
> Impatient to assume the world.

The journey of the Magi is realised through a series of co-ordinate clauses arranged in an anaphoric sequence:

> Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
> And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
> And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
> And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
> And the villages dirty and charging high prices....

Returning to "MCMXIV" one finds that this construction of an initial "and" followed by a present participle, internally repeated, or of an initial "and" followed by a noun and a collection of subordinate clauses (as in the last four lines quoted from "Preludes"), is intrinsic to the poem. In the third verse "and fields / Shadowing Domesday lines" follows shortly after "And the countryside not caring," while in the second verse the first two lines, "And the shut shops, the bleached / Established names on the sunblinds," are paralleled by "And dark-clothed children at play / Called after kings and queens" and by, internally, "and the pubs / Wide open all day."

However the emphasis on this method of enumeration is slighter in "MCMXIV" than in the selections from "The Journey of the Magi" and "Preludes," where the "and" construction draws attention to itself on the printed page through being repeated in close succession: in "The Journey of the Magi" this is used to create the grumbling, hostile tone that gives body to "A hard time we had of it"; in "Preludes" this extends the mindless automatism of "At four and five and six o'clock" to the following rhythmically less regular lines. The relative unobtrusiveness of the construction in Larkin's poem, as well as of the present participles which begin a number of the lines, creates by comparison a neutral, almost detached tone: the reader is presented with a series of intensely visualised impressions or images, but the fact that they are a series is not underlined or bent to any further purpose of tone or mood.

Eliot's tone becomes more like Larkin's in a subsequent section of "The Journey of the Magi" where he, after reverting to finite verbs to

indicate that the journey is successfully underway again, continues to use the participial construction to capture the succession of momentary impressions that form it:

> Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
> Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation
> With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
> And three trees on the low sky.

The power of the visualisation here, the photographic precision of, for example, "three trees on the low sky," is comparable to that in "The crowns of hats, the sun / On moustached archaic faces" from "MCMXIV." "With a running stream" almost parallels "With the voices singing in our ears" four lines earlier in the poem, and one notes a similar pattern established in the third verse of "MCMXIV" as "all hazed over / With flowering grasses, and fields" leads on to "With tiny rooms in huge houses" four lines later. Although in the latter poem each usage of "[w]ith" has a slightly different grammatical function, the parallelism tends to obscure this difference: a musical or formal effect begins to take precedence over grammatical conventions so that one could say, using Donald Davie's terms, that articulation in the poem proceeds by image rather than by syntax. In the last verse of "MCMXIV" "[w]ith" then becomes "[w]ithout" -- "As changed itself to past / Without a word." The initial position of "Without," continuing the pattern established, suggests that the earlier repeated "[w]ith," as Eliot's repeated "[a]nd," does not merely function as a copula, but serves to establish a positive which is then set against its loss. Larkin would thus seem not to be following the traditional practice Donald Davie notes in Wordsworth, for example, in which some words are simply to be accepted as connections, as "fiduciary symbols. Wordsworth's words have meaning so long as we trust them" (Articulate Energy 106-7), but rather to be

guided by Pound's ideal, as expressed in his "Imagist Manifesto," of using "no word which does not contribute to the presentation" (Literary Essays 3).

Signs of indebtedness to Modernism occur not only in the method of "MCMXIV" but in echoes, arguably unconscious, of early modernist poetry and prose. Pound's war poem from Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, which elegises a loss of innocence, not only shows correspondence of subject matter, but makes similar use of "never" as a refrain:

> Daring as never before, wastage as never before.
> Young blood and high blood,
> fair cheeks, and fine bodies;
>
> fortitude as never before
>
> frankness as never before,
> disillusions as never told in the old days...

A more deliberate allusion is perhaps to be found in the "dark-clothed" children "Called after kings and queens" of the second verse of "MCMXIV." It is that pre-eminently Victorian couple Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay who name their children after the kings and queens of England in To The Lighthouse. This echo suggests the possibility of further correspondences and indeed Virginia Woolf also uses a technique comparable to that of the poem's construction around a series of semi-colons, or of commas which function as semi-colons in the length of the pause they introduce, in order to record a succession of sense impressions:

> The moment runs like quicksilver on a sloping board into the cottage parlour; there are the tea things on the table; the hard windsor chairs; tea caddies on the shelf for ornament; the medal under a glass shade; vegetable steam curling from the pot; two children crawling on the floor; and Liz comes in and John catches her a blow....("The Moment: Summer's Night" 12)

This prose piece obtains, as does Larkin's poem, a particular density

from the ability rendered the writer to extend endlessly (if need be) the list of observed objects and scenes. This coincidence of method may not be accidental. Woolf seems to have been a potent influence on Larkin's early writing, for he describes his second novel, A Girl in Winter, as "a Virginia Woolf - Henry Green kind of novel" (Haffenden 116). In the above passage, Woolf is simply following her own advice to the novelist who is attempting to convey life "as it really is":

> Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions -- trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old.... ("Modern Fiction" 106)

The process of enumeration engaged in by Larkin in a poem such as "Here" can usefully be described as the receiving of "an incessant shower of innumerable atoms," the mind this presupposes being present in the observing traveller implied in the poem. This figure of the traveller is of course central to early modernist writing: Joyce's choice of the Odyssey as a framework for his novel, Eliot's deployment of the motif of journeying in The Waste Land, and Woolf's inset allegory of the traveller in Mrs. Dalloway are obvious examples. A major difference in Larkin's poetry is however that the speaker is usually travelling in a landscape which is familiar, local, English. The setting of "Here" is a provincial harbour town, presumably Hull, and the varied impressions the speaker receives on his journey towards it are captured in a participially-based expanding subject like that of "MCMXIV," though, through Larkin's reverting to the use of finite verbs in the second and fourth verses, the syntax is not pushed to the same extremes. The whole first verse is constructed around the present participle "swerving":

> 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....

When the suspended participle "swerving" is repeated it is preceded in each case by a semi-colon, suitably signalling a change of direction; to maintain this focus on the swerving movement Larkin goes to some lengths to avoid another present participle with the same function ("widening" and "shining" are used adjectivally) -- the "harsh-named halt, that shields / Workmen at dawn" is probably actually "shielding" them now as the speaker passes them in the dawn light. Attached to "[s]werving east," "swerving through" and "swerving to" are the observed phenomena which give the verse its quiddity, the underlying symmetry throwing into relief the dissimilarities. Even the "solitude" seems crowded: a "solitude / Of skies and scarecrows, haystacks, hares and pheasants...." The use of the present participle also contributes to this effect, as it is both conventionally associated with ongoing (unfixed) movement, and, if used repeatedly, paradoxically manages to some degree to halt the movement as this is never "carried over": the showering atoms at the same time succeed rapidly, and are "caught" exactly in a moment of time to be absorbed by the consciousness. What is involved is a judicious balancing: as in "MCMXIV" and "The Journey of the Magi," the repetition of lines beginning with "[a]nd" creates a relatively static effect which is counteracted not only by the force in the idea of swerving, but by "widening," the participle creating a sense of movement in that it is a verbal adjective as well as in its indication that the speaker must be moving past the river if it is widening slowly. Thus Larkin, working within the restraints of a

pentameter form (further contained by a regular a.b.a.b.c.d.d.c. rhyme scheme) and employing traditional metrical devices such as the emphatic trochaic inversion on the initial "[s]werving," the meaningful caesura after "east," and the monotony-inducing regularity of the iambic in the second line, is able by also using techniques derived from modernist poetry to come close to embodying the traveller's physical and mental movements, without his needing to resort to the extremes of imitative form practised by poets such as William Carlos Williams.

The second verse begins with the finite verb "[g]athers" which, through its emphatic position at beginning of both line and verse, and with the metrical emphasis a reversed foot provides (the initial trochee comes after the regularity of "... the shining gull-marked mud"), is given the literal force of "gathering," pulling together all the participial strands of the previous verse and bearing down on the "large town" which at this stage seems to be the traveller's destination:

> 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....

Despite the reversion to a more traditional syntax here, with the finite verbs "cluster" and "[p]ush through" giving the lines a clearer direction ("[p]ush through" vigorously enacts the intensity of the "desires"), the process of enumeration of "things" has not stopped.

In fact "Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies, / Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers" is the only actual list of things in the poem so far, though it already seems overcrowded, and could answer fairly well to the plea of the early twentieth-century philosopher T.E. Hulme and his disciples for poetry to contain "things, rendered in all their toughness and quiddity" (Articulate Energy 142). There is some transference in the description of the crowd as "cut-price," the transition being effected by "their desires," for it is rather the objects which are "reduced": characterisation proceeds through the relatively direct means of presenting desired objects, as against the oblique detailing of poignant sensibilia seen in "Home is So Sad" or "Love Songs in Age." One could even, if one wished, see in the eager reaction of the shoppers to the goods they see an ironic adaptation of Eliot's doctrine of the objective correlative:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. ("Hamlet" 108)

Considering "Here" in the context of early modernist practice helps one to guage Larkin's attitude to his subject. Donald Davie, in his reading of the poem, has accused Larkin of snobbery and inhumanity:

> In Larkin's poem one detects a perverse determination that the ultimate ("terminate") pastoral shall be among the cut-price stores and nowhere else. And the pity felt for the denizens of that pastoral, the "residents from raw estates," is more than a little contemptuous. (Thomas Hardy and British Poetry 81)

The equation of "terminate" with ultimate is a misreading, as I shall argue in connection with the last verse; what seems to arouse Davie's

ire are the terms "cut-price" and "residents from raw estates." Yet surely Larkin's tone here should be described as "scrupulously neutral," to borrow Davie's own comment on the attitude of the speaker in "The Whitsun Weddings" to the urban detritus which forms part of the landscape he passes through. A comparison with the "blackened street" of "Preludes" would substantiate this. One might just hesitate in ascribing an attitude of condemnation of the crowd and the urban environment to the lines which open the second section of the poem:

> The morning comes to consciousness
> Of faint stale smells of beer
> From the sawdust-trampled street
> With all its muddy feet that press
> To early coffee-stands.

Yet such judgement is inescapable at the beginning of the fourth section:

> His soul stretched tight across the skies
> That fade behind a city block
> Or trampled by insistent feet
> At four and five and six o'clock...

Here the poet (or someone like him) is implicitly identified with the suffering "soul," set apart from the owners of the "insistent feet." These feet have "blackened" the street, the conventionally negative associations here being intensified by the echo of "soiled" from the concluding line of the previous section ("Or clasped the yellow soles of feet / In the palms of both soiled hands"). Eliot clearly is concerned to make a moral point; in Larkin's poem, though there may be implications of limitation ("terminate"), both of space ("cluster," "barge-crowded") and, in the use of objects to suggest human emotions, human consciousness, these are at this stage in the poem subordinated to an acceptance of the urban scene. The speaker's tone is that of

one stating a fact, and his primary concern is with presenting the scenes, the things, the people, exactly as they impinge on his consciousness.

In the third verse of "Here" the lines from "A cut-price crowd, urban yet simple" to "grim head-scarfed wives" seem to be repeating the non-finite construction of the first verse and to function syntactically as a discrete unit, yet they actually depend grammatically on "And residents from raw estates," a connection easily lost sight of given the density of enumeration preceding them and the slight interruption of the flow of the sentence by the dashes after "desires" and "driers." Even less immediately evident is the grammatical relation of the line following these, "And out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges," to what goes before it: we find that "its" refers to the "large town" in the first line of the second verse (that is, thirteen lines back), though the word tends rather illogically to associate with the "cut-price crowd" which, through being isolated from "residents" by the division between verses, almost behaves as the subject of the third verse (the section of the poem begun by "And out beyond ..." is actually the second part of a list of which the lines from "Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster" to "grim head-scarfed wives" form the first). One could thus describe the syntax as dislocated.

However there is a purpose to compressing three eight-line pentameter verses into one sentence, as the last verse reveals, and in this logic of development there is a distancing from most modernist practice. The confusion of syntax, of myriad sense-impressions, becomes thematic and highlights its antithesis, a clarifying loneliness:

> 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.

"Loneliness clarifies," like "[a] cut-price crowd," is almost detached from the subordinate clause of which it is the subject ("where loneliness clarifies removed lives") by the syntactical inversion and the maintenance of a division between verses, so that it functions as an absolute statement in the verse of which it seems also to be the thematic subject. The traveller's journey did not end with his arrival in the town; it becomes clear that his movement has continued from the "[h]ere" of the second verse ("Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster") to the "[h]ere" of the fourth ("Here silence stands / Like heat"), though his way may seem somewhat obstructed, for the reader at any rate, by the attention each "atom" in the "shower" demands -- it is difficult to skim over "mortgaged half-built edges," for example, as much because of the need to unravel the concepts as because of the fittingly clumsy alliteration. As the long list which, with concomitant subordinate clauses and non-finite verbs, has formed most of the first three verses comes to an end the tempo increases. "Isolate" is the first in a succession of finite verbs, not only portraying unhampered movement, but suggesting, by means of the present tense, the perpetual and habitual, the full (as opposed to crowded) life contained in the intense but unobtrusive activity of the "leaves," the "weeds," the "waters"; nature's continual regeneration is syntactically set against the habits, in a narrower sense, we

create for ourselves in an urban existence. Loneliness, it is seen, does not mean emptiness, but an absence of inevitably acquisitive human beings. The leaves, weeds and waters are able to exist freely as they have not been appropriated, an action that must take place, "unnoticed" implies, simply through their impingement on the human consciousness. "[H]idden" they are safe, and "neglected" is cause for relief: the epithets do not have the "negating or cancelling" force Davie sees in them (81), but rather the opposite. In this last verse the speaker himself seems less central, for the vigour of the verbs, while conveying his excitement at "unfenced existence," also suggests the ability of their subjects to continue living independent of his observation. Even the speaker's exact physical position at the conclusion is not quite clear -- one can see his journey as continuing literally to the end of the poem, if one takes "[h]ere" in the second last line as being at the end of the land and not, as with the two earlier uses of the word in the verse, in the midst of the growth it supports.

The concluding line-and-a-half of the poem, "Here is unfenced existence: / Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach" recalls the central image of "High Windows" in its suggestions of transcendence. The "unfenced existence" comments critically on the "terminate pastoral" introduced by the "[h]ere" of the second verse: if there is anything "wrong" with the pattern of existence in the town it is that it <u>is</u> terminate, the limits placed by the crowds, streets, objects and so unconsciously accepted paralleling the limit of death. However the implications of this last verse, as in the case of "High Windows," are not entirely clear-cut. Within the context of the poem "out of reach" seems overwhelmingly positive, the expression of an escape from the clutter of the previous three verses, yet in the light of Larkin's

oeuvre it has some unfavourable echoes -- there is the "unreachable" of "Ambulances," describing the trapped victim, or the fact that the free outside world is "beyond the stretch / Of any hand from here" in "The Building." Looking back through the verse one is then alerted to the fractionally chilly quality of the "bluish neutral distance" which "[e]nds the land suddenly," causing the slightest tremor of shock: its indeterminacy is similar to that of the unanswering perspective through the "high windows," "neutral" further bringing to mind the blankness, neutrality of death in "Aubade." The line ending in "Here silence stands / Like heat" also becomes significant: it allows the simile to stand unqualified for a moment, before being tempered by the faintly oppressive associations of heat "standing," though the positive association of heat with sunlight and energy, hence growth, is taken up in the fertility implied in the following lines. It seems as if Larkin wishes to maintain a play of ambiguities, this double reference being seen too in the non-cancelling negatives of "unfenced" and "untalkative."

However the positive associations of the last line overwhelm these doubts. "Facing the sun," with its intimation of unobstructed vision and access suggests the "sacred place" of "High Windows" or "Church Going"; the speaker's thankful turning to the sun must emphasise, particularly in the context of "terminate pastoral," its transcendent and life-giving qualities. "Here" may be removed from distinctively human company -- it is "untalkative" -- but it is at the same time free of humankind's wordly demands. The sun is restorative because it is transcendent, an emblem, as in "Solar" (HW), that contrasts decisively with the narrowness of human impulse.

In "Essential Beauty" (WW), enlarging on "Here," Larkin hits on an already existent projection of contemporary urban desires in the

form of billboard advertising to give Eliot's doctrine of the objective correlative a further sardonic twist. Traditional rhetorical techniques combine with the surreal effects resulting from the verbalisation of the customarily visual to convey a moral purpose clearer than that of "Here," but nevertheless still tempered by a tone at times almost detached in its urbanity, at times elegiac.

The objects in the opening lines denote commodities and are used not only to convey consciousness, but to overwhelm and trap it, literally as well as metaphorically:

> In frames as large as rooms that face all ways
> And block the ends of streets with giant loaves,
> Screen graves with custard, cover slums with praise
> Of motor-oil and cuts of salmon, shine
> Perpetually these sharply-pictured groves
> Of how life should be.

The simile describing the huge billboards recalls the "room" of "Ambulances" and the "rooms" of "The Building," a similar sense of entrapment being almost physically enacted in "block the ends of streets"; "that face all ways" suggests the ubiquitous television screens of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four; and "giant" reduces the humanity already slightly limited by its association with the thing in "Here" to Lilliputian proportions, implying the total impossibility of "fighting back." In their bite and urbanity these lines remind one of the Eliot of Section III of The Waste Land ("When lovely woman stoops to folly ...") but Larkin somehow avoids the sense of the sordid. The jarring, irreverent image of "[s]creen graves with custard" (it is visually jarring too with its suggestions of orange-yellow on grey) should create some sense of revulsion, but the tone lacks overt indignation and so is restraining -- in fact the extreme incongruity could even be seen as giving rise to some gallows humour. "Screen" and "cover" also suggest the action of "hiding," the negative

implications of this being greatly intensified if one considers that their objects are "graves" and "slums." A deeper irony is thus obtained by the line-ending on "praise": the lines are so well-lubricated ("[o]f motor-oil") that one tends not to stop to absorb the full force of the clause, the injustice, distortion and denial of reality involved. With its glib parallelism and antithesis the whole line is deliberately constructed so as to lead the reader to gloss over its semantic significance, thus enabling a further ironic comment on the poet's part. The condemnation is subtler and more understated than in Eliot however, Larkin showing a greater sympathy for human failing, and perhaps this is what makes the epithet "sordid" inapplicable here.

In the lines which follow the above excerpt, "High above the gutter / A silver knife sinks into golden butter," the technique of antithesis, combined with a mockingly regular rhythm and comic rhyme, is also used to both highlight and mask extreme incongruity, with attendant moral implications. The absurdity of the next-mentioned aspect of the advertisement, "A glass of milk stands in a meadow," is no longer noticed by us as the image is so common that it is now not truly "seen," but Larkin revives this by isolating the image from its context, relatively speaking, more or less confining it to its own single line. Eliot uses the same device, suggestive of an arbitrary logical relation, in "The Journey of the Magi":

> Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
> Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation,
> With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
> And three trees on the low sky.
> And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
> Then we came....

Another reference to modernist practice can possibly be discerned in the "free association" of images in the extended subject that forms

the last eleven-line sentence of "Essential Beauty," an effect created by the "overlapping" of the literal descriptions of a series of adverts and the irrepressible interpolations of the poet who is correcting what he sees by reference to his own experience:

> There, dark raftered pubs
> Are filled with white-clothed ones from tennis-clubs,
> And the boy puking his heart out in the Gents
> Just missed them, as the pensioner paid
> A halfpenny more for Granny Graveclothes' Tea
> To taste old age, and dying smokers sense
> Walking towards them through some dappled park
> As if on water that unfocused she
> No match lit up, nor drag ever brought near....

This breaks down not only the conceptual boundaries between the images but also those conventionally between subject and object. The concluding image of the poem is similarly allowed to fade into the smokers' actual death as "that unfocused she" now stands "newly clear, / Smiling, and recognising, and going dark."

Larkin advances on the idea of "Essential Beauty" in "Sunny Prestatyn" (WW) by allowing a caustic reality to intrude on an image of projected desire: the girl on a poster advertising a holiday is gradually disfigured ("She was too good for this life") until very little of her is left. Initially levels of representation are deliberately confused to create a surreal effect:

> Behind her, a hunk of coast, a
> Hotel with palms
> Seemed to expand from her thighs and
> Spread breast-lifting arms.

The observer's refusal to react as desired punctures the three-dimensional nature of the poster. It is not only he who is unresponsive to its message:

> A couple of weeks, and her face
> Was snaggle-toothed and boss-eyed;

Huge tits and a fissured crotch
Were scored well in, and the space
Between her legs held scrawls
That set her fairly astride
A tuberous cock and balls....

As the observer slowly deciphers the scrawls a deadpan tone is maintained which, as in "Essential Beauty," tends to neutralise the potentially sordid nature of the subject and to leave the details merely crude. Thus though Larkin shares in the modernist deromanticisation of sex, his emphasis differs from Eliot's, for example, in the treatment of comparable subjects. Neither is he trying to shock superficially in the manner of the "Movement" poets of the fifties. His moral comment remains deceptively understated in the grimmer humour of the last verse: the violence in "Someone had used a knife / Or something to stab right through / The moustached lips of her smile" -- its gratuitousness intensified by "knife / Or something" -- suggests that "Fight Cancer" ("Now Fight Cancer is there") may, ironically, come closer to being on equal terms with the human environment.

As we have seen, Larkin commonly presents his figures in relation to a highly concrete world and the various techniques of characterisation on which he draws -- objective correlative, concretely realised setting -- raise the question of to what extent character is determined by the sensibilia of public life. This is an issue of central concern to modernist writers: Woolf in her manifesto writing frequently insists on the freedom of the human spirit, its independence of a materially rendered environment, and one of the opportunities provided by interior monologue techniques is to illustrate the free functioning of fantasy within a highly concrete world. This is a debate which Larkin explores and extends. In poems such as "Mr. Bleaney" (WW) he seems ultimately to be advancing a grim

rebuttal of this freedom, whereas in other poems such as "How Distant" (HW) he proposes a highly autotelic sense of individual identity. In "The Whitsun Weddings" he develops, in response to this vexed question of presentation, one of his most subtle balances between speaker and subject.

The "cut-price" objects which surrounded Mr. Bleaney in his room and which are charily noted by the new lodger -- such as the "[f]lowered curtains, thin and frayed," the "[b]ed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb" -- are not detailed primarily to create a "realistic setting" or "atmosphere," though they must also have this effect, but are advanced as a reliable means to portraiture:

> ... So it happens that I lie
> Where Mr. Bleaney lay, and stub my fags
> On the same saucer-souvenir....

That the landlady too insidiously participates in this process of definition, of her new lodger as well as of Mr. Bleaney, can be seen in the gradual progression in the poem of her speech from direct ("'Mr. Bleaney took / My bit of garden properly in hand'") to reported ("I know his habits -- what time he came down, / His preference for sauce to gravy...") as it becomes subsumed into the speaker's interior monologue. The speaker will be susceptible to this process, it is suggested, because his options are limited: despite the room's apparent unsuitability ("no hook / Behind the door, no room for books or bags...") he takes it.

Mr. Bleaney's habits seem to have had the same "moulding" function as did the objects with which he was surrounded, "their yearly frame" suggesting that they have a force almost independent of their perpetrator. The word "frame" further ominously recalls the "harden" of "Dockery and Son":

> They're more a style
> Our lives bring with them: habit for a while,
> Suddenly they harden into all we've got

Mr. Bleaney's repetitive holidays are not regenerative, as rituals often are in Larkin's poetry, but constricting. His reported "preference for sauce to gravy" is not a mere detailing of minutiae: the speaker's fear is that this may be all that counts.

Such a close connection has been forged between the speaker and Mr. Bleaney by the last two verses that anything the former does Mr. Bleaney might also have done:

> But if he stood and watched the frigid wind
> Tousling the clouds, lay on the fusty bed
> Telling himself that this was home, and grinned,
> And shivered, without shaking off the dread
>
> That how we live measures our own nature,
> And at his age having no more to show
> Than one hired box should make him pretty sure
> He warranted no better, I don't know.

It is his recognition that external factors are deterministic that creates the speaker's "dread," a dread intensified by "shivered" with its intimations not only of cold and fear, but, taken with "frigid" and the skull-like "grinning," of death. He cannot accept this fate, as his need to "[tell] himself that this was home" and the disdainful formulation "hired box" show; but neither can he suppress his awareness of it, his last words being the inconclusive, retracting "I don't know." His rebellion gains a deeper significance in the suggested equation of the "hired box" with a coffin: the lodger's room provides a grim foretaste of the final limiting factor of death.

In contrast to "Mr. Bleaney" the later "How Distant" (HW) celebrates the ability of the individual to map out his environment. Larkin shows here a more exhilarated sense of the possibilities of the individual consciousness in its relationship to the city than is

provided in Eliot's "Preludes" and early work, for example. The last one-and-a-half verses of the poem seem to refer directly to Eliot's "The conscience of a blackened street / Impatient to assume the world" and "the sawdust-trampled street / With all its muddy feet that press / To early coffee-stands":

> This is being young,
> Assumption of the startled century
>
> Like new store clothes,
> The huge decisions printed out by feet
> Inventing where they tread,
> The random windows conjuring a street.

The sense of "to assume" as to adopt or arrogate is hardly muted in Larkin's poem by the nominalisation "assumption." Yet whereas in "Preludes" the feet suppress the street, "press" suggesting an almost sadistic infliction of physical pain, so that the street becomes a passive ("infinitely gentle / Infinitely suffering") recorder of the squalor and mindlessness of twentieth century urban living, the feet in "How Distant" are seen as "conjuring" a street. The hint of miraculous power here sustains the positive associations of "decisions," with "printed out" encapsulating the clearness and decisiveness of confident choice. This choice can be exercised because the feet do not, as in "Preludes," belong to the street ("its muddy feet"), are not trapped in a routine as stifling for their owners as for the street beneath them, but move freely (the "random windows") in a sense giving birth ("[i]nventing"). Their exploratory tendencies are suggested not only in "random," but in the initial impetus for the poem, the "departure of young men / Down valleys." The speaker is as awed at this process ("huge" decisions) and as surprised at the gulf between his "world" and that of the young men or of the "girl doing her laundry in the steerage" as the century is "startled";

yet the "huge decisions" do not become overwhelming for those taking them because they are, paradoxically, in a sense unconscious, or at least, in the context of Eliot's poetry, un-selfconscious. The emphasis is on their being made by "feet," while "tread" implies greater spontaneity than "walk" would, as it simply describes the natural and unavoidable reaction of putting down one's feet, and the whole line "Inventing where they tread" suggests such a tremendous, magical power that any human-being holding it must in self-protection be to some degree unaware of it. There is also some of this "thoughtlessness" in the "[a]ssumption of the startled century / Like new store clothes," given the secondary meaning, not fully quelled here, of assume as "take for granted," and in the easy collocation, describing an unthinking confidence, of the "century" with "new store clothes."

The randomness in the poem is not confined to the footprints but also characterises a syntax which in its dislocation demonstrates most convincingly Donald Davie's contention that post-symbolist poetry's "break with the past is at bottom a change of attitude towards poetic syntax." "How Distant" begins with a confusing, because illogical, shift in the subject:

> How distant, the departure of young men
> Down valleys, or watching
> The green shore past the salt-white cordage
> Rising and falling,

"How distant" refers firstly to the "departure of young men" and then presumably to the action of "watching," yet as it is the speaker himself doing this watching from a ship it is the "green shore" that would more logically be distant. Trying to unravel this can lead to such imaginative contortions (the poet behind the poet?) that it seems better to leave the question unresolved and to accept, in Davie's

words, that "it does not matter" (Articulate Energy 156). The section from "watching" to "falling" can thus be read as a description of a state suspended in the body of a poem which proceeds almost in the manner of free-association. The second verse would thus more comprehensibly follow straight on from "the departure of young men / Down valleys":

> Cattlemen, or carpenters, or keen
> Simply to get away
> From married villages before morning,
> Melodions play

Another grammatical sleight of hand occurs here: "or" is not the connection of equivalence it claims to be, for "keen" and the two lines attached to it do not perform the same function as "cattlemen" or "carpenters" -- though the line-ending claims for the word the same status, isolated the line is nonsensical. "Melodions play" introduces a new problem, for it forms the beginning of a different image which bears no semantic connection with the rest of the verse, but is united with it by the demands of the verse form; perhaps this could be justified in terms of mimetic form, the gap between "Melodions play" and in the next verse "On tiny decks past fraying cliffs of water" providing the distance which renders the decks "tiny." However the melodions and their playing should also be part of the poem's extended subject for the line is preceded by a linking comma, rather than a full stop one might expect. "How distant, the departure of young men" is grammatical, if elliptical, but "How distant ... [m]elodions play" is not. The answer is simply to see the image as another in the pattern of "articulation ... by figuration of images" (Articulate Energy 136) and not to take the syntactical features at face value. We are approaching here the "empty and fraudulent" forms Davie considers characteristic of the modernist use of syntax: the forms of

discursive and narrative syntax may be retained, but they are not used for either logical or grammatical articulation (136).

The implicit exclusion of the observer, on the grounds of age, from the scenes he witnesses is what, in Larkin's characteristic paradox, lends him both sympathy and understanding: at a distance, he can bring together the random impressions of a sea jorney into a significant whole. This concern with the relation between observer and setting compares with that of Modernism, as is brought out particularly by the close correspondence between the title poem of the 1964 volume, The Whitsun Weddings, and the following passage from The Waves in which Virginia Woolf presents the interaction between Bernard and his immediate environment:

> "How fair, how strange," said Bernard, "glittering, many-pointed and many-domed London lies before me under mist. Guarded by gasometers, by factory chimneys, she lies sleeping as we approach ... But we are aimed at her ... The early train from the north is hurled at her like a missile. We draw a curtain as we pass. Blank expectant faces stare at us as we rattle and flash through stations. We are about to explode in the flanks of the city like a shell in the side of some ponderous, maternal, majestic animal....
>
> Meanwhile as I stand looking from the train window, I feel strangely, persuasively, that because of my great happiness (being engaged to be married) I am become part of this speed, this missile hurled at the city. I am numbed to tolerance and acquiescence. My dear sir, I could say, why do you fidget, taking down your suitcase and pressing into it the cap you have worn all night? Nothing we can do will avail. Over us all broods a splendid unanimity ... I do not want the train to stop with a thud. I do not want the connection which has bound us together sitting opposite each other all night long to be broken...." (79-80)

The speaker in "The Whitsun Weddings" does not see London with quite the same mystical reverence ("ponderous, maternal, majestic") as does Bernard, whose view is informed by his "great happiness" at "being engaged to be married," for he is at one remove from the wedding-parties at "[e]ach station that we stopped at" --yet, as he recognises in "loaded with the sum of all they saw / We hurried

towards London," there is a connection, to use Bernard's word, between him and each wedding-party. The faces in "The Whitsun Weddings" do not appear "[b]lank" and "expectant" as the faces on the platforms do to Bernard, for the people observed are like Bernard in some way involved in the wedding proceedings; furthermore, the speaker is sufficiently detached to attempt to interpret their expressions:

> And, as we moved, each face seemed to define
> Just what it saw departing: children frowned
> At something dull; fathers had never known
>
> Success so huge and wholly farcical;
> The women shared
> The secret like a happy funeral;
> While girls, gripping their handbags tighter, stared
> At a religious wounding....

The speaker introduces the series of observations leading to the lines quoted above with "Struck, I leant / More promptly out next time, more curiously, / And saw it all again in different terms": as his attention is increasingly caught by the scenes he is observing his assessment of them changes. The presence of the observer influences what is seen, this counteracting any determinism which might be implied in the concept of the "shower of atoms." His consciousness not only brings together the various "views" he has witnessed, but also, as the journey continues, unites ("a splendid unanimity") each fresh couple boarding the train with all the others:

> They watched the landscape, sitting side by side
> -An Odeon went past, a cooling tower,
> And someone running up to bowl - and none
> Thought of the others they would never meet
> Or how their lives would all contain this hour.

Again the speaker is not a mere "passive receptor" here, but using his authorial privilege, as it were fills in the details (an "Odeon," a "cooling tower") to form the other passengers' perceptions. The

"Odeon" and the "cooling tower" recall Bernard's "gasometers" and "factory chimneys," while three lines later the almost direct echo of "But we are aimed at her" in "There we were aimed" ("I thought of London spread out in the sun, / Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat: / There we were aimed") establishes an illuminating parallel between Bernard's comparison of the train to a "missile" hurled at London and Larkin's closing lines:

> There we were aimed. And as we raced across
> Bright knots of rail
> Past standing Pullmans, walls of blackened moss
> Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail
> Travelling coincidence; and what it held
> Stood ready to be loosed with all the power
> That being changed can give. We slowed again,
> And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
> A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
> Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

Here the potentially destructive impact of "We are about to explode in the flanks of the city like a shell ..." is transmuted into a force for regeneration. The image of the arrow-shower is less specific in its reference than that of the missile, yet conveys the same sense of resistance followed by almost uncontrollable ("[a] sense of falling") release, while the suggestion of fertility in Bernard's excited view of London as a "maternal ... animal" is expanded into a general, if characteristically non-committal ("Sent out of sight, somewhere ...") benevolence.

The massing of detail is less overwhelming in "The Whitsun Weddings" than in "Here," for example, though both poems record the impressions of travellers on a journey, and this is largely the result of a syntax which approximates to that of prose in its clarity and logical development, deviating from the grammatical only to the colloquial ("I nearly died"). The creation of a distinct persona, one who is active rather than passive, is also an effect of this syntax:

the speaker is allowed to ruminate on the condition of those around him, almost, in a kindly and inquisitive fashion, to ramble. "Lists" of objects do occur in the poem, yet they are not, in grammatical terms, suspended as have been many of the other lists discussed, but themselves propel the poem onwards with a proliferation of finite verbs:

> All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept
> For miles inland,
> A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.
> 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 smell of grass
> Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth
> Until the next town, new and nondescript,
> Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

The "slow and stopping" nature of the curve is enacted here by the extension of the last section of the sentence which runs from "Wide farms went by" to "acres of dismantled cars": the steady movement is marginally but successively halted by the commas after "town" and "nondescript," before coming to the smooth halt the unexceptional and uniform ("acres of ... cars") nature of the view suggests.

This second verse of "The Whitsun Weddings" suggests the final area of coincidence between Larkin's work and early modernist writing which I shall dwell on in this chapter. The speaker's attitude towards what he sees is one of acceptance, as Davie remarks:

> These slow canals have wound through many a poem about England since T.S. Eliot's Waste Land, but never under such a level light as this. For in the poem as a whole ... the tone of the describing voice is scrupulously neutral; it affords no handle at all for reflections like "A canal, not a river," or "Tainted water, not fresh." There is no meaning, no "placing," in the way preindustrial things like farms, cattle, hedges, and grass are interspersed with industrial things like chemical froth and dismantled cars ... Canals and smashed cars come along with hedges and cattle simply because they come along like that in any railway journey through England, as we all know. (Thomas Hardy and British Poetry 65)

The speaker in "The Whitsun Weddings" is furthermore something of an outsider to the rituals he is observing, however sympathetically, and his position is fairly typical in Larkin's poetry. Given these two factors, one can cautiously place Larkin in the tradition Graham Hough sees as beginning with Baudelaire and extending through the modernist movement:

> Baudelaire is the first modern, the first to accept the de-classed, dis-established position of the poet who is no longer the celebrant of the culture to which he belongs, the first to accept the squalor and baseness of the modern urban scene..... (314)

One should, in relation to Larkin, qualify both sections of this statement: beginning with the latter, one of the conditions of Larkin's acceptance of the "modern urban scene" is that the terms "squalor" and "baseness" can, as I have argued, only be applied with difficulty to this portrayal of it; then, though his work confirms the "de-classed, dis-established position of the poet," as I shall demonstrate, he is in a number of poems (such as those discussed in my comparison of Larkin and certain Georgian poets) a celebrant of the culture in which he finds himself, if "belongs" seems too strong a word. However that this celebration is not unequivocal, but is partly the result of a negative emphasis -- from the facts of birth and upbringing there can be no real alternative culture -- is suggested by lines from "The Importance of Elsewhere" (WW). The "difference" of Ireland proves the poet "separate, not unworkable," but

> Living in England has no such excuse:
> These are my customs and establishments
> It would be much more serious to refuse.
> Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.

Despite this realisation Larkin shows a degree of detachment not

so much from the culture in its narrower sense, in its externally identifiable manifestations, as from certain of its underlying values, and in particular those of marriage, house, child and success, the secular ideals, replacing the lost religious absolutes, of twentieth-century urban existence. This particular combination is grimly satirised in "Money":

> So I look at others, what they do with theirs:
> They certainly don't keep it upstairs.
> By now they've a second house and car and wife:
> Clearly money has something to do with life

The grasping materialism of a society which with self-adulation reduces emotion to a commodity, and a relatively unimportant one at that, judging from the relegation of "wife" to the end of the list, is rejected -- and yet the rejection is not unequivocal. A tinge of regret creeps into the last line here, suggesting that the speaker is not entirely sure, as the speaker in "Annus Mirabilis," that he has not "missed out." The scope of this regret broadens with the poem's concluding image:

> I listen to money singing. It's like looking down
> From long french windows at a provincial town,
> The slums, the canal, the churches ornate and mad
> In the evening sun. It is intensely sad.

This is the closest Larkin comes to representing "squalor" and "baseness," the slightly sickly collocation of the churches "ornate" and "mad" (diseased), the slums and the canal suggesting the "ills of society." At the same time money, being personified, is allowed every right to exist, and, given the ambiguous reference of "It is intensely sad" ("[i]t" could refer to "money" or "money singing") is regarded almost with forgiveness. The impulse to change, expressed in satire, is subordinated to a humble and liberal acceptance as the poet's

awareness of the necessary imperfection of human life emerges. This simultaneous involvement with and detachment from his society lends Larkin's poetry a humanity which early modernist poetry with similar preoccupations more often lacks.

The paradox of displacement within a community can be traced in the figure of the "rootless persona" which appears in all three volumes of Larkin's mature poetry. In the early "Places, Loved Ones" (LD) he states his case, as it were:

> No, I have never found
> The place where I could say
> This is my proper ground,
> Here I shall stay;
> Nor met that special one
> Who has an instant claim
> On everything I own
> Down to my name;
>
> To find such seems to prove
> You want no choice in where
> To build, or whom to love;
> You ask them to bear
> You off irrevocably,
> So that it's not your fault
> Should the town turn dreary,
> The girl a dolt.

The lack of desire to settle physically is paralleled by an unwillingness to take part in a surrender which, it is implied, will not be merely emotional: "an instant claim / On everything I own" suggests the rapacity of a harpy. The rationality of the argument is clinched by the regular rhyme scheme, while the tone does not suggest any special pleading but rather bears the faint mockery characteristic of much of Larkin's earlier poetry.

This cynicism towards love and other romantic shibboleths, so characteristic of Pound and Eliot, is thrown into relief by the comparison with Larkin's earlier mentor which the last verse of "Places, Loved Ones" suggests. A Hardyesque note of wistfulness and

uncertainty enters these lines:

> Yet, having missed them, you're
> Bound, none the less, to act
> As if what you settled for
> Mashed you, in fact;
> And wiser to keep away
> From thinking you still might trace
> Uncalled-for to this day
> Your person, your place.

Here "missed" takes note of loss, while Hardy's awareness of greater forces at work than human will is present, in muted form, in "Bound ... to act," the implication of physical constriction here reviving the metaphor. The last four lines could describe the elderly Hardy's attempts to "trace" an ideal Emma, the woman not yet appropriated ("[u]ncalled-for"), by revisiting the countryside they both knew and loved, "wiser" recognising that this seeking of the ideal must involve continual apprehension of failure. The qualification this last verse gives of an initially boldly stated position is not a sign of inconsistency, but, on the contrary, evidence that the speaker's deracination is no easily assumed pose: full account has been taken of the cost of renunciation.

"Dockery and Son" (WW) explores the alternative glimpsed in the the last verse of "Places, Loved Ones" with a more acute self-probing. A visit to one's old college would usually be construed as trying to "trace ... Your person, your place," yet the speaker is only there, "[d]eath-suited," to attend a funeral. Although the Dean's words do cause various memories to resurface, they are realistically excluded from the speaker's present life:

> I try the door of where I used to live:
>
> Locked. The lawn spreads dazzlingly wide.
> A known bell chimes. I catch my train, ignored.

The pastness of the past is also what makes the speaker such a temporary resident of the present: he is not "fixed," recoverable, in any place or time. The presentation in the first two verses thus justifies the "To have no son, no wife / No house or land still seemed quite natural" of the fourth. This observation is given a suppressed emotional intensity by the image immediately preceding it: the speaker walks along the platform

> ... to its end to see the ranged
> Joining and parting lines reflect a strong
>
> Unhindered moon.

One could see in these "ranged / Joining and parting lines" a symbolic rendering of the speaker's realisation of the distance between his way of life and Dockery's:

> Only a numbness registered the shock
> Of finding out how much had gone of life,
> How widely from the others....

Yet the connection is not forced and the relative independence of the image -- to a degree it seems to exist "for itself" -- possibly makes the term "objective correlative" more applicable: the image acts as a formula for a particularly strong emotion on the part of the speaker.

His "shock" is also dramatised in the repeated questions of the second and third verses:

> If he was younger, did he get this son
> At nineteen, twenty? Was he that withdrawn
>
> High-collared public-schoolboy, sharing rooms
> With Cartwright who was killed? Well, it just shows
> How much ... How little ... Yawning, I suppose
> I fell asleep....

Here the emphasis of "nineteen, twenty" conveys his surprise. This gives way to lethargy, and the apparent artlessness here and in the

succeeding verses suggests the term "stream of consciousness," for the ideal of miming the contradictory movements of the thinking, experiencing mind is certainly achieved, though paradoxically within the confines of regular metre and rhyme. The speaker's inarticulateness here enacts the "numbness ... Of finding out," as well as portraying his sleepiness. Without warning he moves back and forth between actual observation and reflection, between present ("Well, it just shows") and past ("I fell asleep") as his internal debate with Dockery and "the others" continues, its intensity increasing:

> Only nineteen, he must have taken stock
> Of what he wanted, and been capable
> Of ... No, that's not the difference: rather, how
> Convinced he was he should be added to!
> Why did he think adding meant increase?
> To me it was dilution. Where do these
> Innate assumptions come from? Not from what
> We think truest, or most want to do:
> Those warp tight-shut, like doors. They're more a style
> Our lives bring with them: habit for a while,
> Suddenly they harden into all we've got
>
> And how we got it; looked back on, they rear
> Like sand-clouds, thick and close, embodying
> For Dockery a son, for me nothing,
> Nothing with all a son's harsh patronage.

The crisp, blunt questions and replies create a tone of urgency that leads up to the shock and irrevocability of "Suddenly they harden ...," the emotion being intensified by association with the suffocating and threatening, painfully stinging sandclouds. Here we have another example of Larkin's drawing on the materials of Modernism when it suits his purpose: although, as Andrew Motion has pointed out (14), the connection of sandclouds with the "furnace-glares" of urban Sheffield is in logical terms arbitrary, the image is imaginatively integrated to achieve a heightening of impact. The terror suggested here, prepared for in "harden" and "all we've got" shows a development

beyond the relative generality of "Places, Loved Ones": the resigned acceptance in the concluding verse of the earlier poem now seems insufficiently thought out. "To have no son, no wife / No house or land ..." becomes in this final verse of "Dockery and Son" "for me nothing, / Nothing with all a son's harsh patronage" -- hence implicitly death, the "nothing" of "Aubade," without the comfort of vicarious regeneration a successor would provide. Such a reading is supported by the poem's conclusion:

> Life is first boredom, then fear.
> Whether or not we use it, it goes,
> And leaves what something hidden from us chose,
> And age,and then the only end of age.

The theme of rootlessness thus takes on an additional dimension: the impermanence of the lodger's lifestyle epitomises the sense of transience that lies behind so much of Larkin's poetry.

Two poems from High Windows, "Friday Night in Royal Station Hotel" and "Livings, I," treat the subject of deracination even more bleakly. While deploying traditional formal devices such as a line based on the iambic pentameter and a regular rhyme scheme, both make use of techniques derived from early modernist writing to characterise the speakers through the evocation of their dismal surroundings.

The speaker in "Livings, I" seems to be a travelling salesman of sorts:

> I deal with farmers, things like dips and feed.
> Every third month I book myself in at
> The ------ Hotel in ---- ton for three days.

The extremely flat, prosaic tone of the second and third lines, which are almost a journalistic citing of fact, introduces the note of tedium and automatisn which is sustained throughout the poem. The speaker's lack of heart for what he is doing is suggested in the

throwaway "things like" which is both colloquial and, given the preceding ellipsis, careless. A lack of energy, a listlessness, is suggested by the relative disjointedness of the syntax from the sixth line of the first verse onwards:

> One beer, and then "the dinner", at which I read
> The ---- shire Times from soup to stewed pears.
> Births, deaths. For sale. Police court. Motor spares.
>
> Afterwards, whisky in the Smoke Room: Clough,
> Margetts, the Captain, Dr. Watterson;
> Who makes ends meet, who's taking the knock,
> Government tariffs, wages, price of stock.
> Smoke hangs under the light. The pictures on
> The walls are comic - hunting, the trenches, stuff
> Nobody minds or notices. A sound
> Of dominoes from the Bar. I stand a round.

The speaker's boredom, as well as the provinciality of his surroundings, is suggested by his reading even the smalls and by what sounds like his automatic, because well learnt, citing of the heads of the various columns. The line "Births, deaths. For sale. Police court. Motor spares" is in no traditional sense poetry yet it slips into the poetic convention of the rhymed line. This is simply the most obvious "list" of several in the poem: the people, listed after the colon at the beginning of the second verse, and the conversation are as predictable as the smalls, as is the speaker's whole progress in the hotel. Where finite verbs are used, as in "I stand a round," the tense is the historic present, indicating the repetitive and habitual. However what is described has none of the regenerative qualities of ritual, but is merely an empty routine: the speaker's standing a round lacks real conviviality. His consequent detachment appears in his observation of the picturesque formations of the smoke, or in his looking at the "stuff / Nobody minds or notices," gratuitous activities which reflect on the paucity of the human environment. The "sound / Of dominoes from the Bar" is merely another intrusion on the

speaker's consciousness (details are not eagerly noted as in "Here), nothing being important enough to hold his attention for long.

The talk in the second verse of the poem is all about financial matters and is possibly satirised in the rather opaque image which begins the third:

> Later, the square is empty: a big sky
> Drains down the estuary like the bed
> Of a gold river...

If this is a description of a glorious sunset, reflected in the river, it is somewhat flat and reduced, "gold" suggesting the heavy, solid metal rather than the sunlight which "golden" would, and "[d]rains down," depicting the gradual waning of the light, unavoidably bringing to mind gutters and drains. This latter expression also connects thematically with the draining of emotion and energy that is characteristic of the speaker's mode of existence. The unnaturalness of the sunset further implies the total impossibility of regeneration in this depressingly urban setting. In the last line the speaker seems to recognise the need for change, at least as regards his own lifestyle ("It's time for change, in nineteen twenty-nine"), but he is trapped, not only by the rather bleak outlook offered by the date, which the reader knows to signify the beginning of the Great Depression, but by his own inertia. He "drowse[s] / Between ex-Army sheets" ("ex-Army" again pinpointing the seediness of his environment) for sleep itself would be too satisfying, too restorative. The mechanical nature of an existence unthinkingly assumed ("Father's dead: / He used to, but the business now is mine") and which allows for no real attachment to people or place has taken over, leaving its subject weakened and therefore indecisive ("wondering why / I think it's worth while coming"). The dramatisation in the poem of the limbo

the speaker must endure provides a grim confirmation of the perception in "Dockery and Son" that the "style" of our lives suddenly "harden[s] into all we've got."

Although the speaker in "Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel" is not clearly identified, he acquires some of the qualities of the perpetual traveller through his association with the ambience of the "salesmen" who "have gone back to Leeds / Leaving full ashtrays in the Conference Room." Here objects are used to intensify the gloom suggested by the negating of light in the opening "Light spreads darkly downwards...." The seediness (the chairs are "coloured differently") and the sordidness ("[l]eaving full ashtrays") are intensified by the emphasis on the absence of the people for whom, as it were, they exist: the chairs are "empty," the newspapers "unsold." Left without a function, the objects seem doomed to hopeless overstatement -- the dining room "declares" a "larger loneliness of knives and glass / And silence laid like carpet," the lights "burn," suggesting both intensity and waste, in "shoeless corridors." The speaker draws, from the last detail which strikes his attention, a definition of the displaced person applicable not only to himself but to the speakers in "Places, Loved Ones," "Dockery and Son," and "Livings, I" as well:

> The headed paper, made for writing home
> (If home existed) letters of exile...

The sceptical parenthesis here can be compared with the incessant questioning, undermining, seen in Eliot's "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock." Larkin allows for no inherited absolutes, not even the generally accepted comfort of "Home, Sweet Home." The concluding line of the poem "Now / Night comes on. Waves fold behind villages" gives no respite in this relentless pursuit of the truth: the spondee endows

the waves with great force, and in association with this the greater gloom of approaching night becomes almost menacing.

Another poem from this last volume, "Vers de Société" provides a footnote on the poems discussed above, for it even questions the status of "exile." The speaker, cynically searching for a reason for the dinner-invitation he has just received, lights on the code of a new religion of sociability:

> No one now
> Believes the hermit with his gown and dish
> Talking to God (who's gone too); the big wish
> Is to have people nice to you, which means
> Doing it back somehow.
> Virtue is social.

However he is unable to hold to his insights and rejects the dinner-invitation, for he has been weakened by the passage of time, by the "failure and remorse" which visit him when alone. Thus Larkin, while in many cases opting for the position of the outsider, takes account of the debilitating effects of isolation.

Although the actual figure of the rootless persona is absent in the second and third parts of "Livings" -- "Livings" as a whole being a modernist exercise and displaying a "shifting" persona rather than the unified persona we associate with Wordsworth, for example -- the poet's total self-effacement in each case as he dramatises a particular milieu implies a lack of identification with his subject. His emotional distance from it in each case can also be detected in the deliberate unpleasantness of the high-table dinner-party environment of "Livings, III" and in the slightly repulsive strangeness of speaker and setting in "Livings, II."

"Livings, II" is clearly modernistic in structure: the basic information needed in order to locate the scene is only gradually

released as the poem progresses, so that it is only at the conclusion that one can claim with reasonable confidence that the speaker is a lighthouse-keeper:

> Guarded by brilliance
> I set plate and spoon,
> And after, divining-cards.
> Lit shelved liners
> Grope like mad worlds westward.

The connection here with parts one and three of "Livings" is metaphoric rather than narrative: the speaker, or in the case of "Livings, III" the group, is asserting an identity against an external environment that is perceived as hostile. The relationship between the lighthouse-keeper in "Livings, II" and his surroundings is ambiguous: while emphasising the violence of the sea (it "explodes upwards," the rocks it hides "writhe back to sight") and of the elements ("By day, sky builds / Grape dark ..."), he seems, perhaps as a result of his situation, something of a mystic, feeling himself in communion with what he sees below:

> Mussels, limpets,
> Husband their tenacity
> In the freezing slither -
> Creatures, I cherish you!

This mystical touch is taken up more explicitly with the "divining-cards" of the last verse and contributes somewhat to what seems to be the deliberate mystification of the reader.

The approach in "Livings, III" is more traditional, but in its dehumanising urbanity of tone and implicit satire the poem again recalls Eliot. The regular rhythm of the first four lines of the first verse, for example, allows for a sustained irony, a "round and round the mulberry bush" effect:

> Tonight we dine without the Master
> (Nocturnal vapours do not please);
> The port goes round so much the faster,
> Topics are raised with no less ease -
> Which advowson looks the fairest,
> What the wood from Snape will fetch,
> Names for pudendum mulieris,
> Why is Judas like Jack Ketch?

Though there is enough metrical variation here to prevent the lines from falling into the rhythm of the jingle, the overall impression is one of regularity. The predictability of the conversation is mirrored not only in the metre but in the repetitiveness of the syntactical structures, this being emphasised by the regular rhyme; the repeated subject-verb-adverbial construction in the lines "The port goes round so much the faster / Topics are raised with no less ease" almost recreates the easy slipping of the port from hand to hand. The extra stress occasioned by the second syllable of "faster" necessitates a speedier reading of the line, and, from the echo to the similarly lengthened first line, suggests that the company's discounting of the Master is equally glib. The internal parallelism established by the initial alliterating r's in the second verse similarly equates vastly disparate areas of experience:

> The wine heats temper and complexion:
> Oath-enforced assertions fly,
> On rheumy fevers, resurrection,
> Regicide and rabbit pie.

All is reduced to the same level of inanity, or perhaps only to the querulous complaints of the elderly.

The clubbish nature of the high-table setting is further characterised by the diction in this first verse, words such as "advowson" being unusually pretentious for Larkin. As a grouping with its own exclusive codes, this is the dinner-party equivalent of Prufrock's tea-party. The outside world in reaction to which this

society has closed in on itself is presented in the third verse in a tone equally drained of emotion:

> The fields around are cold and muddy,
> The cobbled streets close by are still,
> A sizar shivers at his study,
> The kitchen cat has made a kill;
> The bells discuss the hour's gradations,
> Dusty shelves hold prayers and proofs:
> Above, Chaldean constellations
> Sparkle over crowded roofs.

The metronomic regularity here coupled with the effect of a "list" suggests for the individual observations some of the arbitrary logical relation we associate with Eliot's early poetry. Each line here, except for the last two, is entire unto itself, thus mimicking the society portrayed in the first two verses. The unpleasant suggestions of sterility in "[d]usty shelves" are taken up in the archaism of "sizar" and "Chaldean": the group "lives in the past," and the need for renewal made explicit in "Livings, I" is here implicit. There is a slight opening out in the last two lines as the eye turns upwards ("Above"), a hint of another world in "[s]parkle," distinct from the claustrophobia of "crowded roofs." However at the same time the intimations of age in this verse underline the timeless nature of the scene, both inside the college and outside: through being self-regarding it is also self-generating and there is little hope of (or need for?) escape as the tightly controlled verse-form stresses.

Any interpretation offered of this final verse of "Livings, III" must remain particularly tentative, as must any explanation of the relation of the poem to the other two sections of "Livings," for Larkin's usual clear pointers are lacking in what Richard Murphy calls "a bewildering triptych" (New York Review of Books May 1975). Indeed by splitting his poetic persona into three, as it were, with the consequent disappearance of the characteristically chatty, convivial

and easily identifiable speaker Larkin comes close to achieving the poetic impersonality cultivated by Eliot. As in the case of "Sympathy in White Major" or "Absences" the poem becomes to a degree inaccessible to the "common reader" Larkin seems to rely on when for example, criticising obscurity in modernist work; he thus demonstrates here as elsewhere that he is perfectly capable of taking up a position he inveighs against in his extra-poetical utterances.

In conclusion I will take stock of some of the differences between Larkin and Modernism by looking at a poem which shares a central modernist preoccupation but which shows a forceful reaction against the kind of impersonality seen in "Livings." In "The Old Fools" Larkin mingles his pervasive concerns with loss and death with a Georgian insistence on lucidity and realistic detail, however hard-hitting, to treat a topic favoured by Eliot -- as Edmund Wilson remarks, "'Gerontion' and 'The Waste Land'... made the young poets old before their time" (96) -- and yet in contrast to Eliot to achieve a vision that is essentially humane.

Eliot's characteristic urbanity works in "Gerontion" towards an overall dryness of tone suiting the substance of the poem, the "[t]houghts of a dry brain in a dry season." The sterility of passion as of thought thus conveyed renders the speaker, a universalised figure of age, tired and remote, this sense of impersonality being intensified by his apparent detachment from any human audience (his "conversation" is with Christ) apart from, that is, himself -- his "thousand small deliberations" are the dramatised ramblings of an old man. He thus remains for the reader an interesting presence, but not a compelling one.

Larkin however abandons Eliot's urbane irony and begins "The Old Fools" on a note of frantic urgency:

> What do they think has happened, the old fools,
> To make them like this? Do they somehow suppose
> It's more grown-up when your mouth hangs open and drools,
> And you keep on pissing yourself, and can't remember
> Who called this morning? Or that, if they only chose,
> They could alter things back to when they danced all night,
> Or went to their wedding, or sloped arms some September?
> Or do they fancy there's really been no change,
> And they've always behaved as if they were crippled or tight,
> Or sat through days of thin continuous dreaming
> Watching light move? If they don't (and they can't), its
> strange:
> Why aren't they screaming?

With the very first line here the speaker moves into the attack, his words shooting out as if from the barrel of a gun. His questions are as much accusations, vehicles for his own turbulent emotion which give the addressee no chance of reply. The viciousness of this initial volley is sustained throughout the first verse: there is the sneer in "Do they somehow suppose," intensified in the repetition "Or do they fancy ...," with "fancy" here conveying much of the venom for it indicates that the subjects are out of touch with the hard facts the speaker desires them to face; and there are the brutally colloquial "drools," "pissing yourself" and "crippled or tight," each expression given added emphasis by a succeeding medial or terminal pause. The disgust in "pissing yourself" is carried over to the second section of the line ("and can't remember / Who called this morning?"), while even the title of the poem is incorporated into this uncontrollable venting of spleen. The tone is nevertheless complicated by some pathos in "if they only chose": age is, for Larkin, the end of choice, yet the degree of imaginative identification in the lines immediately following gives the old fools' earlier state some reality and hence their present temptation some validity. At the same time though these lines mock the human tendency to seek to restore an ideal past, and this condemnation of fantasy continues in "Or sat through days of thin continuous dreaming / Watching light move," lines which adapt the

"thousand small deliberations" of "Gerontion." The final isolation of "Why aren't they screaming" conveys the speaker's horror, his frightened incomprehension before such apparent acceptance of the "whole hideous inverted childhood."

The reason for the ostensible brutality in this first verse is to be sought in the speaker's sense of his own vulnerability: his extremely defensive reaction suggests that he perceives little distance between himself and "the old fools." Furthermore the questioning form and everyday language implicate his audience in the attack, as becomes even more evident in the second verse with the movement from "they" to "we" and "you":

> At death, you break up: the bits that were you
> Start speeding away from each other for ever
> With no one to see. It's only oblivion, true:
> We had it before, but then it was going to end....

The first three lines here transform the somewhat universalised picture in "Gerontion" of "De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled / Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear / In fractured atoms" into an image that is specifically directed and horrifyingly, inescapably personal. The speaker is literally pointing at the reader with his series of stark monosyllables -- there is to be no illusion, no pretence -- while he similarly underscores the speed of disintegration with a line of dactyls ("Start speeding away from each other for ever"). The feebleness of the attempt at coolly cynical evasion in "It's only oblivion, true" is immediately revealed by the parallel and emphatic denial "but then it was going to end," reinforced three lines later by the rhyme "Next time you can't pretend ...." Larkin gives short shrift to the Christian promise of salvation: the presentation of this as "a unique endeavour / To bring to bloom the million-petalled flower / Of being here" suggests not only impatience,

but, in the hyperbole of "million-petalled," derision. In "Gerontion" on the other hand the possibility of Christian consolation is raised, though rejected by the speaker himself, and this again detracts from a sense of immediacy in the portrayal of a man approaching death. Furthermore as if in contrast to the esoteric quality of Eliot's "signs" which are "taken for wonders" (for proof of the birth of Christ), Larkin uses the word "signs" as it were to introduce the diagnosis of an everyday disease:

> And these are the first signs:
> Not knowing how, not hearing who, the power
> Of choosing gone. Their looks show that they're for it:
> Ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried into lines-
> How can they ignore it?

Larkin develops here on the formalised "I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch: / How should I use them for your closer contact?" of "Gerontion" by presenting this evidence of decay in, initially, the form of the non-cancelling negative: he thus draws out an awareness of loss, opposing the positive states of "knowing," "hearing" and "choosing" to the subjects' present condition. Yet the sentiment is not allowed to lapse into a Georgian sentimentality: the sympathy is immediately tempered by a return to conscious brutality with the idiomatic "they're for it," this being intensified by the revulsion in the deliberately chosen adjectives of the following lines. The final question is however not only an accusation but a genuine expression of bewilderment, and it leads on to the overwhelmingly sympathetic grappling with the problem of age which occupies the succeeding verses.

In the third verse of "The Old Fools" Larkin seems to be elaborating on the central image of "Gerontion," the comparison of the old man's "dull head" with a house and of his thoughts with the

tenants; the manner though is not that of dry deliberation but of a gently probing query:

> Perhaps being old is having lighted rooms
> Inside your head, and people in them, acting.
> People you know, yet can't quite name; each looms
> Like a deep loss restored, from known doors turning,
> Setting down a lamp, smiling from a stair, extracting
> A known book from the shelves; or sometimes only
> The rooms themselves, chairs and a fire burning,
> The blown bush at the window, or the sun's
> Faint friendliness on the wall some lonely,
> Rain-ceased midsummer evening. That is where they live:
> Not here and now, but where all happened once....

The speaker's almost chatty approach at the beginning of the verse and the buttonholing "your head," "you know," maintain a deliberate closeness of contact with the reader; equally the warmth and implied comfort of the imagined scene renders them familiar, homely. This warmth is not only directed at the reader, but suggests the quality of the remembered past for the aged -- though, as if to emphasise present bleakness, the details so nostalgically recalled are not wholly pleasant (the sun's "[f]aint" friendliness, the "lonely" evening). These lines also capture the effects of failing visual and auditory powers: each person "looms," simply a large and potentially frightening shape, while the concentration on physical gestures in the portrayal suggests the absence, and the impossibility, of verbal communication. The weakness of vision implied emphasises the fact that these "perspectives" are distorted memories of the past, idealised as the place and time "where all happened once." This tendency of memory to perfect is most sympathetically treated in the line "Like a deep loss restored, from known doors turning," the sense of relief here being tangible. A similar empathy informs the expression "can't quite name" with its catching of an easily recognisable hesitancy, the action of worried head-scratching.

The pull of an opposing force which must remove the "old fools" from this comforting past is enacted by the antithesis which begins the next and last verse, "Yet being here" decisively counteracting "trying to be there." Against warmth is now set the "[i]ncompetent cold" of the present, the approach to death, the icy "alp" of extinction. The initial "[f]or the rooms grow farther" lends a touch of pathos to the harshness, as does the image of the old "crouching below / Extinction's alp," for it suggests a clinging to memories that are gradually being worn away, to life itself against the "constant wear and tear / Of taken breath." The phrase "the old fools," now repeated, has acquired a generosity it lacked in the first verse and sounds affectionately dismissive: it also conveys a natural frustration with those who can no longer see or understand ("never perceiving / How near it is"), nor, it is implied, move fast enough to protect themselves. With the concluding questions of the poem the apparent "we-them" dichotomy of the first verse re-emerges, though the tone now contains little of the earlier accusation, if still retaining some urgency. Perhaps this is to be attributed to the humbling realisation of the last line, "Well, / We shall find out": this acknowledgement of identity shows that the reason for this attempt at an imaginative recreaction of age is not primarily to engage the reader in intellectual exercise or aesthetic appreciation -- activities to some degree presupposed in the "puzzle" and rhetoric of "Gerontion" -- but to compel him, in the interest of his own spiritual development, to see truthfully his eventual end.

Larkin is thus working in "The Old Fools" towards the recognition of a shared fate, of the vulnerability of speaker and audience as much as of the aged subjects themselves to the destructive effects of time. It is this common humanity which Eliot's method in "Gerontion"

implicitly denies: what is in effect a withdrawal of sympathy, encouraged perhaps by too great a concern with his material, prevents him from reaching his successor's profound and horrified insight.

Notes

Chapter I

[1] David Timms provides this date (from the quotation which precedes the poem) in Philip Larkin (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1973) 9.

[2] Philip Larkin, "Books," Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982 (London: Faber and Faber, 1983) 86.

Chapter II

[1] Wilfrid Gibson and Lascelles Abercrombie attempted to convince Edward Marsh to include the work of Robert Frost in Georgian Poetry 1913-1915, but Marsh excluded Frost on the grounds of his not being British (Ross 131). Similarly Walter de la Mare, John Freeman and W.J. Turner pressed Marsh to include some work by Edward Thomas in the third volume of Georgian Poetry, but in this case, as Robert Ross remarks, they had "hit upon one of Edward Marsh's unfortunate blind spots" (177).

[2] Quoted in C.K. Stead, The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 87.

[3] Republished in Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982 (London: Faber and Faber, 1983) 208.

Chapter III

[1] Introduction, The North Ship (London: Faber and Faber, 1966) 8. I give a more detailed reference in Chapter I, page 17.

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Appendix

Aubade

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 interogation: 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.

This is a special way of being afraid
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.

And so it stays just on the edge of vision,
A small unfocused blur, a standing chill
That slows each impulse down to indecision.
Most things may never happen: this one will,
And realisation of it rages out
In furnace-fear when we are caught without
People or drink. Courage is no good:
It means not scaring others. Being brave
Lets no one off the grave.
Death is no different whined at than withstood.

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.