

**Life and Death in Philip Larkin's poetry :An analytical study of
At Grass, Next Please , Mr. Bleaney and *The Trees***Instructor Dr.
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Abstract

The present study is concerned with the analysis of few poems by the English poet Philip Larkin (1922-1985). What attracts the researcher's attention is the recurring theme of life and death that the poet tackles continuously using a traditional systematic structure. Larkin is "an excellent example of the plain style in modern times", writes Tijana Stojkovic.* His poems are easy but all discuss a serious topic in life, a topic which is everybody's concern in contemporary life. Larkin achieved acclaim on the strength of an extremely small body of work , just over one hundred pages of poetry in four slender volumes. These collections, especially *The Less Deceived, The Whitsun Weddings, and High Windows*, present the kind of poetry from which even people who distrust poetry can take comfort and delight, for the poet produced the most technically brilliant and resonantly beautiful, profoundly disturbing yet appealing and approachable body of verse during the last twenty-five years. This research paper aims at finding few reasons behind Larkin's strange views about modernity and is to find out why people think that life is miserable. These are reflected outstandingly in the poems chosen for analysis in this paper. The research is divided into three sections. The first one presents Larkin's biography and Career as a poet and tackles the themes used and repeated in his poems : *At Grass, Next Please, Mr. Bleaney* and *The Trees*. The second section presents the relationship between Larkin and the Movement. The third section is an analysis of common themes of "life and death", with reference to the endless hopes of the human beings in the chosen poems.

ملخص البحث باللغة العربية

الحياة والموت في قصائد "فيليب لاركن": دراسة تحليلية "لغد الحشيش"، "التالى رجاء"،
"السيد بليدى"، و"الأشجار"

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تحليل بعض قصائد الشاعر الإنكليزي فيليب لاركن (1922 - 1985). إن تكرار قضية الحياة والموت يشكل ظاهرة عند هذا الشاعر الذي يستخدم الشكل الموسيقي القديم للتعبير عن هذه القضية في قصائده القليلة مقارنة بالشعراء الآخرين والتي لا تتجاوز أربع مجموعات شعرية، عبر الشاعر من خلالها عن معاناة الإنسان المعاصر. ويحاول البحث الإجابة على الأسئلة التالية: ما هي الدوافع والحوافز التي دفعت الشاعر إلى هذا التفكير السوداوي في الحياة؟ وما هو السر الكامن وراء حزنه وتعاسته؟ ولهذا قسمت البحث إلى ثلاثة مباحث. يدرس المبحث الأول العلاقة بين الشاعر والحركة الأدبية التي ينضم إليها. والمبحث الثاني مخصص لتقديم نبذة مختصرة لسيرة الشاعر وتناوله للمواضيع المهمة المتكررة. أما المبحث الثالث فيحلل المواضيع الأكثر شيوعاً كالحياة والموت والآمال السرمدية للإنسان في القصائد المعنية. وتكمن أهمية البحث في جعل الإنسان مرتبطاً بالحياة بالرغم من ادراكه ان الموت حقيقة لا مفر منه، وأن قوة الإرادة هي الوسيلة الوحيدة للاستمرار والتغلب على مصاعب الحياة. ثم يلي هذا المبحث أهم الملاحظات. وأخيراً قائمة بأهم المصادر، وملخص البحث باللغة العربية.

Section One

1.1 :A Biography of Philip Larkin :

Larkin was born on 9 August 1922 in Coventry, the only son and younger child of Sydney Larkin(1884-1948), who came from Litchfield, and his wife, Eva Emily Day (1886-1977) of Epping. The family lived in Radford, Coventry until Larkin was five years old, before moving to a large three-storey middle-class house complete with servants quarters near to Coventry railway station and King Henry VIII school, in Manor Road. Having survived the bombings of the Second World War their former house in Manor Road was demolished in the 1960s to make way for a road modernization programme. His sister Catherine, known as Kitty, was 10 years older than he was. His father, a self-made man who had risen to be Coventry City Treasurer, was a singular individual, disillusioned in middle age, who combined a love of literature with an enthusiasm for Nazism, and had attended two Nuremberg rallies during the mid-30s. He introduced his son to the works of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and above all D. H. Lawrence. His mother was a nervous and passive woman.

Philip Arthur Larkin, (2 December 1922-12 January 1985) is regarded as one of the great English poets of the latter half of the twentieth century. His first book of poetry, *The North Ship*, was published in 1945, followed by two novels, *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947), but he came to prominence in 1955 with the publication of his second collection of poems, *The Less Deceived*, followed by *The Whitsun Weddings*(1964) and *High Windows* (1974). He contributed to The Daily Telegraph as its jazz critic from 1961 to 1971, and write articles gathered together in *All what Jazz: a Record Diary 1961-71* (1985), and he edited *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse* (1973).¹ He was recipient of many honors, including the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry.² He was offered but declined, the position of poet laureate in 1984, following the death of John Betjeman.

His poems are marked by what Andrew Motion calls a very English , glum accuracy about emotions, places, and relationships, and what Donald Davie described as lowered sights and diminished expectations. Eric Homberger called him "the saddest heart in the post-war supermarket"—Larkin himself said that deprivation for him was what daffodils were for Wordsworth.³

Larkin is influenced by W.H. Auden, W. B. Yeats, and Thomas Hardy. His poems are highly structured but flexible verse forms. They were described by Jean Hartley, the ex-wife of Larkin's publisher George Hartley (The Marvel Press), as a "piquant mixture of lyricism and discontent,"⁴ though the anthologist Keith Tuma writes that there is more to Larkin's work than its reputation for dour pessimism suggestions.⁵

Section Two: 2.1 Philip Larkin and The Movement

The Movement was a term coined by J. D. Scott , the literary editor of *The Spectator*, in 1954 to describe a group of writers including Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings, Thom Gunn, and Robert Conquest. The movement was essentially English in character. Poets in Scotland and Wales were not generally included. The movement produced two anthologies: *Poets of the 1950s* (1955) (editor D. J. Enright , published in Japan) and *New Lines* (1956). Conquest, who edited the *New Lines*, described the connection between the poets as " little more than a negative determination to avoid bad principles," . These 'bad principles' are usually described as excess, both in terms of theme and stylistic devices.⁶The polemic introduction to *New Lines* targeted in particular the 1940s poets, the generation of Dylan Thomas and George Barker.⁷A second *New Lines* anthology appeared in 1963, by which time *The Movement* seemed to some a spent force, in terms of fashion ; the 'underground' in the shape of *The Group* , and the more American- influenced style of the Al Alvarez anthology *The New Poetry* having come to the fore. Ironically , interest in "The Movement" renewed in the early nineties, primarily in America, with the rise of the New Formalism and the increased public interest in the work of Larkin.⁸

Oliver Boyd claims that The Movement poets have been publishing their work in the *Spectator*, and in the pamphlets published by Oscar Mellor's Fantasy Press . Larkin published such a pamphlet in 1954, *Fantasy Press: Pamphlet 21*. The movement did not receive its name, until 1954, when an anonymous writer published a piece in the *Spectator* entitled 'In the Movement'. The writer recognized that the composition of *The Group* was unstable indicating that:

The Movement, as well as being anti- phoney, is anti-wet;
skeptical, robust, ironic, prepared to be as comfortable as
Possible in a wicked , commercial, threatened world which
doesn't look, anyway, as if it's going to be changed much by
a couple of handfuls of young English writers.⁹

Oliver Boyd very frankly tried to clarify the way the Movement group poets write and their own characteristic feature educationally, morally and ethically:

Now it seems to me that the society of the movement poets In the first half of the fifties was in a similar position as many critics remarked on the publication of *New Lines*, the movement was a very socially homogeneous group. Almost all the poets come from the professional middle classes, the only exception being Robert Conquest. Most had been educated at grammar schools, and had then gone up to Oxford or Cambridge to read English .¹⁰

These facts are important since they establish a firm ground for revealing the ability of Larkin in achieving success along his poetic journey. Technically , Larkin is an extraordinarily various and accomplished poet, a poet who uses the devices of meter and rhyme for specific effects. His language is never flat, unless he intends it to be so for a particular reason. He is always ready like Thomas Hardy, to reach across accepted literary boundaries for a word that will precisely express what he intends to be archaic.¹¹ Larkin sees in life ' much... to be endured and little to be enjoyed' ; the forms of his poetry are 'traditional' rather than 'modern', though they are various, and unmistakably show a full response to contemporary life.

2.2 -Larkin's Poetic Style:

Larkin's poetry has been characterized as being "ordinary, colloquial, clear, a quite, reflective, ironic and direct with commonplace experiences".¹²

Larkin's earliest work showed the influence of T. S. Eliot , Auden and Yeats, and the development of his mature poetic identity in the early 1950s coincided with the growing influence on him of Thomas Hardy.¹³The "mature" Larkin style, first evident in *The Less Deceived*, is "that of the detached, sometimes tender observer" who , in Hartley's phrase , looks at " ordinary people doing ordinary things". Larkin's mature poetic persona is notable for its " plainness and skepticism ". Terence Hawkes has argued that while most of the poems in *The North Ship* are metaphoric in nature heavily indebted to Yeats's symbolist lyrics", the subsequent development of Larkin's mature style is "not ...a movement from Yeats to Hardy, but rather a surrounding of the Yeatsian moment (the metaphor within a Hardy-esque frame" . In Hawkes's his manifests itself as 'the desire to find a moment of epiphany",and " the loss of England, or rather the loss of the British Empire, which requires England to define itself in its own terms when previously it could define 'Englishness' in opposition to something else." ¹⁴ In 1972 Larkin wrote the oft-quoted "Going, Going", a poem which expresses a romantic fatalism in its view of England that was typical of his later years. In it he prophesies a complete destruction of the countryside, and expresses an idealized sense of national togetherness and identity : " And that will be England gone ... it will linger on in galleries; but all that remains for us will be concrete and tyres", the poem ends with the statement, " I just think it will happen , soon." ¹⁵

George Sampson claimed that:

A neo-romanticism, combining surrealist techniques with apocalyptic visions, had succeeded in the early nineteen- forties to the Marxist exhortations of the thirties ; now that reaction was its to be reacted against in the sparer, leaner poetry of the fifties written by Philip Larkin , the critic D.J. Enright , the novelists Kingsley Amis and John Wain.¹⁶

Larkin's style is bound up with his recurring themes and subjects , which include death and fatalism, as in his final major poem "Aubade". The poet Andrew Motion observes that Larkin's poems show that "their rage or contempt is always checked by the ... energy of their language and the satisfactions of their articulate formal control," and contrasts two aspects of his poetic personality- on the one hand an enthusiasm for "symbolist moments" and "freely imaginative narratives", and on the other hand a "remorseless factuality" and "crudity of language".¹⁷, Motion defines enhancing struggle this as a "life-enhancing struggle between opposites", and concludes that his poetry is typically "ambivalent": "His three mature collections have developed attitudes and styles of ... imaginative daring: in their prolonged debates with despair, they testify to wide sympathies, contain passages of frequently transcendent beauty, and demonstrate a poetic inclusiveness which is of immense consequence for his literary heirs".¹⁸

Consider the following :

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.
from "Aubade"(1977), *collected Poems*

Section Three: Run-on Sentences & Enjambment in Larkin's Poetry

3.1 – At Grass (1972)

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

Larkin uses 'Enjambment'* and run-on-line* in this poem. Enjambment refers to the recycling of life and death. Here the old racehorses are lost in shadow when Larkin mentions "eye can hardly pick" . Only when a wind moves the horses tails, only then they can be

distinguished. As critics mention that Larkin uses very simple words. C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson say:

Using only very simple words , Larkin invests the situation of the racehorses with a richness of emotional effects. The horses seem to be fading into death, their unique identities slipping back to the darkness from which they came. We are reminded of the pathos of old age and the swift passing of time. It is as if the horses were the shades of all human ambitions and triumphs. They have left behind them all that gave significance to their lives. Their movements have no meaning; one *seems* to look at the other , but probably sees nothing. No purpose gives them an identity, or rescues them from anonymity.¹⁹

As it is clear the poem has a traditional stanza form but it is not about a traditional theme of love or revenge, for instance. It tackles the recycling of life and death which is inevitable. It is as if all existence had proceeded in the same direction , as time progresses and it changes our shapes. In the last stanza of the poem, Larkin refers to the state of pleasure the horses find themselves in because at the end of the race (old age of retirement), the horses feel free and gallop for joy, but in the first stanza the case is the opposite ; words such as 'cold' and 'distresses' make the horses seem pathetic in their retirement. What attracts the researcher and reader's attention is the beautiful image Larkin creates not fanciful but realistic. The fate of human beings that ends in death is penetrating our insight and creating great effect on us as human beings. There is nothing fictional or against our expectation since Larkin addresses to the destiny of each human being which is inevitable. Simply , we have got enough energy like horses to win the race and be happy, but the old age though pathetic, it is convincing for there is no need for hurrying because already time passes and human beings need rest (death). Larkin talks to his readers as a man speaking to men. In his view, the poet's uniqueness lies mainly in his technical ability, his

*enjambment : running on of the sense beyond the second line of one couplet into the first line of the next.

*Run-on line : A line of verse which runs into the next line without any grammatical break . Also known as enjambment .It is common in English poetry.²⁰

power to compose the sequence of words that express fully and adequately a human situation. 'At Grass' is a reflective poem, carefully constructed, and commenting in beautiful, dignified language on the penalties and pleasures of retirement.²¹ This comment reminds us of ourselves when young, everybody hurries in a competitive way to be triumphant and achieve victory. Year after year, reality imposes itself on us and time convinces us to neglect such a competition for other (young) generations that will proceed for such competitive state. This poem is a simple lament about old age. Describing experiences that everybody can understand for its plain style.

Larkin does not use free verse. He writes in traditional rhythms, meters, and rhymes and syntax because his concern is to celebrate traditional feelings. 'At Grass' is a fine example of his technical ability. The simple words join together in a most outstanding rhythm with octosyllabic lines, so carefully constructed, to suit such a pathetic theme. The rhyme scheme, with the use of the words 'in', 'on', 'about', and 'out' in the first stanza gives an atmosphere of inevitability and speedy time which creates a kind of balance between language and meaning.

Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps
 Two dozen distances surfaced
 To fable them: faint afternoons
 Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps,
 Whereby their names were artified
 To inlay faded, classic Junes –

In this second stanza, the mood remains sad though it is about the past and the triumphant horses. 'Two dozen distances' suggests the smallness of the actions that create a story like a fable, and the word 'faint' is nostalgic about the afternoons in the past time. The last line is about the old paintings of the racehorses that often hang in a pub or commercial hotel. They seem unreal, it is as if the pictures were portrayed by human beings who seem proud of what they painted and it is no more than a matter of time that will pass and be forgotten unfortunately. This stanza ironically refers to the great meanings people give to praise their work of art which is only a matter of time and it will fade away.

Silks at the start: against the sky
 numbers and parasols: outside,
 squadrons of empty cars, and heat,
 and littered grass : then the long cry
 hanging unhushed till it subside
 to stop-press columns on the street.

In this third stanza , there is the description of the color and vitality of the race-meeting , the skills of the jockeys, the number of the horses in their frames and the ladies. But, typically , the viewpoint still stays focus on this energetic life in two lines. Then Larkin mentions the abandoned car-park, in which the littered grass conveys a message to the reader that in this place , the picnics have been just completed. With the shouts as the race ends, into 'a long cry', pathos is introduced again. The cry moves outwards across the country, as newspapers headline the winner's name in columns.

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 crowd and cries
 all but the unmolested meadows.
 Almanacked, their names live; they

As it is clear in the fourth stanza that there is a slight change of tempo. By using **nine syllables** in the first three lines , Larkin slows down the movement, and introduces his own reflections . The fourth line, with only eight syllables , has a quick and faster movement to suit the race-meeting , and this is contrasted with the fifth line, again with nine syllables, which conveys a sad moment the poem creates. Cox and Dyson believe that:

In the fourth stanza , the situation of the horses is not without rewards . Memories do not 'plague' them , nor are they 'molested' by the meadows. They have a freedom which humans can never achieve , but which at times seems desirable .They have escaped from the burden of memory, and from all the pressures of society.²²

The last line has only seven syllables. 'Almanacked', a long word suggesting dignity, is contrasted with the ending of the line. "They" is an unusual word, short and lacking emphasis, with which the stanza ends. After the heavy tresses of the long word 'almanacked', 'they' slips the poem into the concluding stanza:

Have slipped their names, and stand at ease,
Or gallop for what must be joy,
And not a field glass sees them home,
Only the grooms, and the grooms boy,
With bridles in the evening come.

This last stanza presents the gloomy atmosphere in a poetic form. Here, Larkin clarifies the happiness of the horses because they (the horses) feel free for at last they get rid of all responsibilities thrown on them. They use their powers as they wish and no one stops them. But at the end of the day, the groom and his boy come with bridles to lead them home. The placing of the simple word 'come' at the very end of the poem suggests the inevitability of the horses' fate. As they are taken back to the stables, it is as if, as with all men, they were submitting to death.

3.2: The Analysis of *Next, Please*.(1964)

Another important recurring theme that Larkin tackles is an endless wish entitled as *Next, Please*. The poem is self explanatory as indicated in the title. Larkin sticks to reality and an empirical tone in various themes. He manipulates an empirical discussion in his previous poem *At Grass*. He conveys a message to the reader that death is the natural and inevitable fate of all human beings. Similar though in a different context, Larkin very clearly calls our insights that being humans, nothing can stop us. In other words, there is no end for our desires. But the real, empirical view denotes the opposite which is that our desires are like a ship without "anchor". The poem starts as follows :

Next, Please

Always too eager for the future, we
Pick up bad habits of expectancy .

Something is always approaching; every day
 Till then we say,
 Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear
 Sparkling armada of promises draw near,
 How slow they are they are! And how much time they waste,
 Refusing to make haste!
 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 wit golden tits
 Arching our way, it never anchors; it's
 No sooner present than it turns to past,
 Right to the last
 We think each one will heave to and unload
 All good into our lives, all we are owed
 For waiting so devoutly and so long.
 But we are wrong;
 nly one ship is seeking us, a black-
 Sailed unfamiliar ,towing at her back
 A huge and birdless silence .In her wake
 No waters breed or break

"Next Please" opens with a statement of the emotional concept with which it is concerned:

Always too eager for the future, we
 Pick up bad habits of expectancy. *(T.L.D., p.20)

The poem goes on to elaborate the concept through a metaphor. The image of our

watching for the future is similar to someone who watches for ships from a cliff. When we watch, the ships approach like hopes, but growing clearer all the time. So there is no stop for our hopes and wishes this in itself is a gift from God to continue and never stop. The wishes are sparkling beautifully in our mind's portrayal eyes. When we are disappointed, we try again and start imagining our desires dreamily. Oliver Boyd believes that :

In the poem, the ships are glittering sailing vessels, with ornamented figure-heads- the objects of our desires are always more attractive before they are realized. When they are realized they begin to pale; the ships reach us, but do not anchor. They turn, and recede once more into the distance. Larkin is making the point that our hopes are never fulfilled, but that, when they are fulfilled, the fulfillment is only temporary²³

Larkin uses a very simple language to denote the meaning he wants to convey. The theme of wish and disappointment moves in a cycle without a stop. As usual Larkin sticks to the systematic rhymes as AA BB but the theme is about

disillusionment after waiting for a long time. The run on lines of poetry continue as if a driver were very quick and wanted to reach his aim but the conclusion of this poem

*T.L.D.== ***The Less Deceived*** Abbreviated title by which Philip Larkin's works are cited in reference.

contrasts strongly with the rest of the poem. In this, by far the most striking part of the poem, Larkin says that though we constantly watch "our ship to come in":

Only one ship is seeking us, a black-

Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back

A huge and birdless silence. In her wake

No waters breed or break. *T.L.D.*, p.20.

Here Larkin uses the sparkling ships for our colored wishes. These wishes fill our hearts with happiness and we eagerly watch for the ships to come near to fulfill our desire. Along our ages and when young , we hurry to reach our aim but only disappointment awaits us. When we become old and the wishes will no longer seem sparkling and the reality unfolds itself like a black sailed ship which is the only factual symptom .Thus, death will be waiting for us but this time our feeling is just the opposite. Larkin warns all human beings to be modest in their wishes and not exceed the normal limit.

3.2 : Reality in *Mr. Bleaney* 1963

Mr. Bleaney is a poem that is included in *The Anthology of 20th century English poetry-part III*.

'This was Mr. Bleaney's room. He stayed
 The whole time he was at the Bodies, till
 They moved him.' Flowered curtains, thin and frayed,
 Fall to within five inches of the sill,
 Whose window shows a strip of building land,
 Tussocky, littered. 'Mr. Bleaney took
 My bit of garden properly in hand.'
 Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook
 Behind the door, no room for books or bags -
 'I'll take it.' So it happens that I lie
 Where Mr. Bleaney lay, and stub my fags
 On the same saucer-souvenir, and try
 Stuffing my ears with cotton-wool, to drown
 The jabbering set he egged her on to buy.
 I know his habits - what time he came down,
 His preference for sauce to gravy, why
 He kept on plugging at the four always -
 Likewise their yearly frame: the Frinton folk
 Who put him up for summer holidays,
 And Christmas at his sister's house in Stoke.
 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.

Larkin was a poet who went to considerable lengths to deliberately present himself as a man of the people and a poet of the ordinary man, finding significance in the commonplace. Despite his success as a literary figure in his own lifetime Larkin eschewed the London literary scene and chose to live a deeply provincial life.²⁴

Larkin's poems have an undoubted focus on the everyday situations, with their surface examination of the monotonous trivia of daily life; from advertising to dreary rented lodgings and even cut grass. He was also a committed literary traditionalist. In this research paper, namely in previous sections we have known that the manifesto of the 'Movement' is equated to a refusal to abandon a rational structure and comprehensible language, even when the verse is most highly charged with sensuous or emotional intent.²⁵ Larkin saw poetry as something not to be offered up for detached and arid literary criticism, but as a way of preserving experience by replicating emotion in others, "generating delight in the state of living".²⁶ He was a poet and a man of deep complexity and contradiction; although he appeared to stand firmly against the values of Modernism. At the same time his work is chiefly concerned with one of Modernism's key themes; the alienation and isolation of modern life.

This combination of modernist themes and traditional structure comes to the fore in "Mr. Bleaney." Its traditional form is an ABAB rhyme scheme encased in seven quatrains of iambic pentameter. The narrator and Bleaney have shared the same bleak, lonely room- 'Bed, upright chair, sixty watt bulb, no hook/ Behind the door, no

room for books and bags', whose experience and impression of the same situation are portrayed as differing vastly from each other. At least originally, in the mind of the narrator. While the Larkin persona, the 'I', of the poem, passively despairs that all his life has yielded him is this 'one hired box' with its 'fusty bed' and 'thin and frayed' curtains. He doubts

that Bleaney ever felt the same sense of misery and failure that he himself admits. Indeed from the landlady's second –hand descriptions of Bleaney, it appears that he is certainly a more optimistic and active figure than the Larkin character, as emphasized by his repeated attempts to win the football pools– 'He kept on plugging at the four always'. The Larkin persona is being both superior to and jealous of the humdrum Mr. Bleaney; he tries to create a 'bit of garden' on a ' strip of building land', while at the same time he is envious of Bleaney's potential freedom from nights of insomnia watching 'the frigid wind'. In the final line of the poem, Larkin goes on to undermine any claim to narrator superiority over Bleaney as his persona has to finally admit he simply admits that he doubts whether Bleaney has access to the same thoughts and feelings as himself. The refinement of feeling that the narrator has is both all too tangible, making him clearly aware of how his lodgings represent the empty failure of his life, but also tragically limited; he is alienated from an ordinary man such as Bleaney because he has no idea whether he can share his own sense of deep isolation. The combination of this duality means that Larkin, both a persona and person, must exist outside what is considered the 'ordinary'. As the critic Laurence Lerner states, " Mr. Bleaney could not have written ' Mr. Bleaney' ".²⁷ What is noticed in this poem is the quick observation of the poet Larkin which indicates his thoughtful and empirical way in using modern images in a traditional form. Terry Whalen claims that:

Larkin's use of traditional poetic forms and his openly expressed contempt for Modernism have gained for him a reputation as a relatively provincial poet. Many see his admiration for such minor poets as John Betjeman, for instance , as being in step with the narrow taste he exhibits in the selections which make up his edition of *The Oxford Book of Twentieth –Century verse* (1973).²⁸

Modernist art is given to obscurity without profundity, and is inclined to pretentiousness. In an interview with Ian Hamilton, Larkin has expressed his impatience this way:

What I do feel a bit rebellious about is that poetry seem to have got into the hands of a critical industry which is concerned with culture in the abstract, and this I do rather lay at the door of Eliot and Pound. I think a lot of this 'myth-kitty' business has grown out of that, because first of all you have to be terribly educated, you have to read everything to know these things, and secondly you've got somehow to work them in to show that you are working them in.²⁹

On the basis of these kinds of reservations, it therefore makes sense that Larkin's critics have acquired the habit of discussing his poetry away from the Modernists and next to the work of such figures as Edward Thomas and Thomas Hardy, or they discuss it in the context of the more close-up tradition of the Movement poets. But Larkin's poetry is not as alien to the work of the Modernists as first thoughts tend to assume.³⁰

Whalen continues in his discussion claiming that the subjective dimension of the poem lies in the fact that it is precisely the personality of the poet which enables him to realize a meaning in what he sees. It is the emotional coloring of the persona which gives uniqueness to the particular vision of the physical world. Thus it is the familiar ironic persona of Larkin's 'Mr. Bleaney' which colors the world which that poem embodies. The world perceived in the poem is one which that particular persona has an inclination to recognize. Paradoxically, the persona's limitation of perception is his very qualification for the uniqueness of his moment of vision.³¹

One can easily understand why Larkin sticks to the physical details of Mr. Bleaney's room. To indicate a reality in such a case and in the prosaic quality of Bleaney's existence is captured in the speaker's beholding empirical consciousness. His eye collects impressions in a journey toward comprehension:

Flowered curtains, thin and frayed,

Fall to within five inches of the sill,

Whose window shows a strip of building land,

Tussocky, littered. 'Mr. Bleaney took

My bit of garden properly in hand.'

Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook

Behind the door, no room for books or bags-

'I'll take it.' So it happens that I lie

Where Mr. Bleaney lay, and stub my fags

On the same saucer – souvenir...

The objects which are selected to compromise the contemplation have all the freshness and realistic presence which Hulme regards as necessary to the image. But the ordering of the images, the connecting of the spaces between them, is the cohering process which gives the poem its true brilliance. And the poem beckons us to participate in that process.³²

Thus the physical orientation of thought and expression in Larkin's work is one of the major grounds on which we recognize a consonance of his craft, and of brilliance with the imagists. So, as a conclusion in such a poem, both Hulme and Larkin seem to agree that 'The real is the only base. But it is the base'.³³ The real is the stimulus, and is an integral part of the thinking process of the poem. Additionally, Larkin is a poet capable of adopting radically different postures and personae. He once said that "what I should like to write is different types of poems that might be by different people."³⁴

3.3: The Analysis of *The Trees*

The Trees

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 full grown thickness every May.
 Last year is dead, they seem to say,
 Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

Larkin in this twelve -line poem , presents a kind of reflective description of the speaker's observation of trees. As usual Larkin uses three stanzas, each consists of four lines. The language is very plain and it reflects the beauty, honesty and delicacy of nature. This state of honesty is compared to a human being's honesty. Despite its misleading superficial simplicity, the poem bears a deeper meaning :the trees that are reborn every year symbolize renewal and hope in the face of the humans who have to face death eventually. So, the life and circles of a tree are compared to a human experience.

The effect of Thomas hardy on Larkin is clear here when Larkin personifies the leaves, buds as spoken words, grief, and countless other abstract items, each line of the poem draws a connection between the anatomy and activity of a tree to the emotions and philosophy of a human closing and opening various chapters in his life.³⁵

Andrew Sanders comments on Hardy's influence on Larkin saying:

Philip Larkin discovered a new model of poetic restraint in Hardy . It is Hardy's example which seems to inform even the Title of ***The Less Deceived*** . Much of Larkin's subsequent Poetry was to bypass Modernist experiment and high flown Language in favor of traditional metrical forms and a precise

And plain diction .³⁶

As technical matters go, the twelve lines of the poem are arranged into four-line stanzas. In each stanza, the first and fourth lines rhyme with each other in a true rhyme pattern (i.e. lines 5 and 8 : again, grain) while the second and third lines work in an additional true rhyme (i.e. lines 6 and 7 : too, new). In complete, this rhyme scheme appears in the following pattern A B B A – C D D C – E F F E. There is also a consistent iambic foot and tetrameter rhythm. This simply means that the rhythm alternates between unstressed and stressed syllables, and there is of each in each foot.

The poem is in a strictly regular metrical and rhyming structure, which is reflective of the nature's cycling of birth, growth and renewal. "The trees" demonstrates the transience of youth as a result of the destructive passage of time, one of the recurring themes of Larkin's works. In the introductory part of the poem, Larkin purposefully reveals the meaninglessness of life. Larkin explains the trees as "coming into leaf." This means the new leaf is a symbol of life and conveys a positive, hopeful connotation. Through this physical depiction, Larkin establishes an image of fresh growing trees, and sets a mood of liveliness in the scene. Then Larkin strengthens this mood by mentioning and describing the comforting view of "recent buds [that] relax and spread. " ³⁷

So like Hardy when he personifies nature as a mother or a cloud or wind or human beings, Larkin personifies the leaves of the trees as human beings. These leaves are like people who grow old and die , then new green leaves start again afresh as it is mentioned in the last line of the poem. The philosophy of Larkin lies in the fact that behind a beautiful , factual and credible description of the trees in this last poem in this paper, or of the ships described previously or Mr. Bleaney, there is a complete sense of sadness . Larkin achieves realistic moments by creating such agonistic situations. There is a system in presenting the images. In other words, Larkin creates a hierarchical shape in his poems, creating continuity like the trees first are buds, then in the second stanza, the leaves grow perpetually young, and eventually have to die, demonstrating the theme of inevitability of death . Larkin uses a caesura to effectively

highlight that his thought about the trees, endless youth is immediately defeated by his realization that trees do eventually die as well as humans. This caesura underscores his abrupt wavering of tone from speculative to pessimistic, and further emphasizes the ambiguous mood of the poem. It is through this predominant ambiguity of the poem that Larkin reflects the opaque meaning of life in his perspective. The words "rings of grain," denotes that despite the fresh outer appearances, the trees are going old inside.

In the final stanza, Larkin compares the trees to "unresting castles," to denote the image of masculine, firm trees, like castle turrets. Then Larkin's repetition of the onomatopoeia "afresh" enhances the sound of tree leaves bustling and rustling by the wind, signifying life. Larkin cleverly uses no enjambments at the end of each stanza but instead ends each with a period. The speaker's use of this punctuation effectively reflects the predominant message of the poem that even though nature repeats in cycle, there is an end eventually, underscoring the theme of the inevitability of death.³⁸

In conclusion, Larkin purposely expresses his reluctance toward life, which is meaningless to him. He ambiguously conveys that trees that appear to be young, hopeful and consoling to human eyes, are in fact just as equally mortal as humans. From his ambivalence, Larkin conveys that death after life is inevitable, showing his negligence of the tree's message to begin his life afresh. The researcher views trees differently: The reader feels from it joy and affirmation, and even motivation to try harder in all he does, as nature and its views are what he intends to rely on whenever in problem. Yet we feel sad in the same way when the ship comes with the black color anchor to declare death. As Alun R. Jones states in his critical notes on Larkin's works, "the effect [of Larkin's writing] is akin to that achieved at times by Mozart and Schubert at their most tender and poignant".³⁹

Larkin in *The Trees* , compares the life and cycles of a tree to human experience. When we read this poem, our sense perceptions remind us of Hardy, for Larkin is really influenced by his style and poetic devices. Riddled with personification of leaves, buds, and bark as spoken words, and with grief and countless other abstract items , each line of the poem draws a connection between the anatomy and activity of a tree to the emotions and philosophy of a human closing and opening various chapters in his / her life.⁴⁰

So the speaker in this poem notices and observes the leaves of the trees when the old leaves fade and die replaced by the new ones . Larkin sticks to the traditional way of design and structure of the poem. These twelve lines of the poem are arranged into four line stanzas. In each stanza , the first and fourth lines rhyme with each other.

Concluding Remarks

1- Larkin achieves success in his poetry. The most outstanding theme in the poems in question is the theme of life and death.

2- Larkin follows the traditional structure in writing poetry by using the stanza forms and rhyme.

3- Larkin manipulates modern themes in his poetry but not in the same way used by other modern poets like William Butler Yeats and T.S Eliot.

4- Larkin conveys his messages about our life and death by personifying "Nature" and in this point he reveals the impact of Hardy on his poetry. For instance, he uses the "trees" to refer to human beings and the old leaves of the trees to the old age of the men who die. There is the recurrent image of life and death in most of Larkin's poetry like, *Next, Please , The Grass , Mr. Bleaney, and The Trees.*

5- In most of these poems, Larkin tries to advise us not to be cheated by our happy days for all our hopes are going to be finished with our death. Thinking about this topic is not bad because it tackles our own

reality but it is not healthy to stick always to our end for it will affect us negatively. There is no doubt about the fact that it is fine to be realistic but hopes should accompany our mind and heart continuously to continue in our path courageously but not pessimistically.

6-Larkin uses a brilliant verse concerning the technical aspect using plain style but with profound modern themes.

7- Conceptually, there is a kind of dilemma in the content of Larkin's poems. When we read these poems , one feels a problematic situation and notices that the speaker is unable to tell the truth and is nice at one and the same time. What makes the situation even more problematic is the lack of any support or sympathy from the external, non- human environment.

8. Many other aspects are explored on the level of the poem as discourse. It bridges the gap between the poem as form and the poem as a theme . It presents the text as a real story of the human destiny and all lexical items are added to such a context of situation.

9- The researcher suggests a more optimistic topic which will only be tackled with the theme of will-power in decreasing the tension between the human hopes and disillusionment.

Notes

* See Stojkovic, 2006 ,p.37.

¹ Philip Arthur Larkin ([http://www.britanica.com/EBchecked/topic/33650/ Philip-Larkin](http://www.britanica.com/EBchecked/topic/33650/Philip-Larkin)) , *Encyclopaedia Britannica* .Retrieved 12 November 2009.

² Sleeve note, *Letters to Monica*, Faber 2010.

³ Andrew Motion, Philip Larkin in Bayley, John and Carey , Leo (eds). *The power of delight; a Lifetime in Literature : Essays, 1962-2002*. W. W. Norton & Company. ISBN 0-393-05840-9

⁴ Philip Larkin(1922-1985)" (<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive /singlepoet,do?poetId=7076>).

⁵ Keith Tuma , *Anthology of Twentieth –Century British and Irish Poetry*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.445.

⁶ Blake Morrison, *The Movement*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.2.

⁷ David Lodge wrote: Dylan Thomas was made to stand for everything they detest verbal obscurity, metaphysical pretentiousness, and romantic rhapsodizing from working with structuralism (1981) p.9.

⁸ Retrieved from [http:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_movement-\(literature\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_movement-(literature)), p.1.

⁹ Anon., ' In the Movement, *Spectator*, 1 October 1954, p.400.

¹⁰ Oliver Boyd, *Philip Larkin and The Movement* , (London: Longman Group Limited, 1973), p.15.

¹¹ Ibid., p.19.

¹² Eugene V Moran, *A People's history of English and American Literature*, (New York : Nova , 2002, p.151.

¹³ Richard Bradford, *First Boredom Then Fear: The Life of Philip Larkin*, (London: Peter Owen, 2004), p.70.

¹⁴ Terence Hawkes, *Textual Practice*, (Cambridge: Routledge, 1955), p.285.

¹⁵ Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p.190.

¹⁶ George Sampson, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 865.

¹⁷ Andrew motion, *Philip Larkin : A Writer's life*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), pp 468- 469.

¹⁸ Regan Stephen , *Philip Larkin* (Basingstoke: Pal grave Macmillan, 1997), pp32-53.

¹⁹ C.B.Cox & A.E Dyson, *Modern Poetry: Studies in Practical Criticism*, (Great Britain : The Camelot Press Ltd, 1974),p.138.

²⁰ J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* , (United States Of America: Penguin Books LTD, 1984), p.593.

²¹C.B. Cox , pp.138-139.

²² Ibid., p.140.

²³ Oliver Boyd, p.70.

²⁴ See Pop Culture Picks, p.1). Retrieved from [http://chrishburn.wordpress.com/2008/12/01/ Philip- Larkin essay](http://chrishburn.wordpress.com/2008/12/01/Philip-Larkin-essay/)

²⁵ Laurence Lerner, *Philip Larkin* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1977), p.4.

²⁶ Larkin, *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin* 1940-1985, p.115.

²⁷ (Lerner, *Philip Larkin*, p.22)

²⁸ Terry Whalen, *Philip Larkin's imagist bias: his poetry of observation*.
Published in *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 23, no.2.

²⁹ (*London Magazine*, 4(Nov.1964)pp.71-2

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.35.

³² *Ibid.*,p.36.

³³ 'Adagia', in *Opus Posthumous*, ed. and introduced by Samuel French
Morse (New York, 1966) p.158.

³⁴ ('Not like Larkin', From BBC Radio 3,) *Listener* , 88 (1972), p209.

³⁵ (retrieved from [http:// katherinekennon.tripod.com/id15.html](http://katherinekennon.tripod.com/id15.html)
5/2/2012).

³⁶ Andrew Sanders, p. 605.

³⁷ (See Oxbridge writers- specialist Oxbridge writing Service), p.1.
[http:// www.oxbridgewriters.com/essays/english-literature/criticism](http://www.oxbridgewriters.com/essays/english-literature/criticism)
Retrieved from

³⁸ (*Ibid*, p.3).

³⁹ (*Critical Analysis of Larkin's poetry*, 2012, Oxbridge writers.p.4).

⁴⁰ (See Visions,P.1).

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