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**The Place of the Poet: An Examination of the  
Evocation of Space and Place in the *Oeuvre* of  
Philip Larkin**

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PhD English Literature  
The University of Edinburgh  
2018



## Abstract

This thesis attempts to recalibrate some of the critical coordinates of recent discussions of Larkin's writing by reconsidering the treatment of space and place in his work. It claims, broadly, that Larkin treated 'place' and 'space' as two separate tropic entities: the former relating primarily to geographical location and responsive to a vast catalogue of attendant symbolisms and styles; and the latter, a more notional concept, which frequently drew inspiration from the adjacent intellectual fields of fine art, political philosophy and grammatical deixis.

In exploring Larkin's space- and place- making techniques, the thesis argues that the poet demonstrated a receptiveness towards, or actively called upon, notions and styles that were contemporary and predated his compositional timeframe. Among these earlier influences, the thesis places a key focus on the poetics of Pope, Wordsworth, Collins and Dickens whose varied approaches to the poetics of place are deemed to be greatly influential upon the Larkin canon. In so doing, the thesis broaches the possibility that Larkin's variously-sought techniques for place- and space-making might betray certain allegiances in the poet himself that have hitherto been unexplored. Principal among these are the poet's receptivity towards Christian faith, the geometry of surrealist art, and the organisational principles of the panopticon.

In the introduction, the thesis attempts to diagnose a number of speculative issues that may have obstructed, or obfuscated, the literary critique of place and space in recent years. Consequently, the introduction attempts to establish a normative understanding of both 'space' and 'place' with which to approach Larkin's work. Chapters one and two deal with Larkin's early work; his novel *Jill* and his 'Dream Diaries'. Chapter one argues that Larkin was inspired by a lecture series on Ruskinian artists which, in turn, coloured the behaviour and settings within *Jill*. Chapter two posits that the 'Dream Diaries' were among Larkin's first attempts at space-making with several entries existing as heuristic-style experiments in their own right. Chapters three and four explore Larkin's understanding of 'elsewhere' with the former focusing on Larkin's "mental journeys", while the latter considers *A Girl in Winter* and its protagonist's cognition of unknown geographies.

Finally, chapters five and six explore Larkin's depiction of death and the afterlife through space and place, suggesting that in *High Windows*, these concepts can be split into two subcategories: instants in which the narrator thinks *beyond* death into an unknowable "afterlife", and instances in which the narrator ponders the *moment* of death itself.

## Lay Summary

This thesis looks at the way Philip Larkin incorporates places and spaces into his novels and poems. Since there is a degree of confusion surrounding what 'place' and 'space' actually *means* in literary studies, the thesis begins by reviewing modern-day and historic appropriations of these terms. At this point, the thesis ventures to suggest that Larkin may have had a greater understanding of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century types of 'place' description than previously thought. Conversely, when describing 'space' in his poetry and prose, the poet appears to take his inspiration from more modern forms of thought and literary style.

Using the terms 'Englishness' and '*genius loci*', this thesis looks at the ways space and place manifest themselves in his work. It quickly establishes that the evocation of 'space' in Larkin's writing often corresponds with an attempt by the narrator to describe mental concepts – such as dreams, or memories; or 'unknowable' concepts like the cosmos, death, and the afterlife. This correspondence is illustrated by an examination of Larkin's recently brought-to-light 'Dream Diaries', together with an in-depth exploration of the poems that mark the tail end of his career, such as 'Aubade' and 'The Old Fools'. The poet also appeals to 'space' when imagining what places are like when he is not there.

With regard to the evocation of place, this thesis suggests that Larkin was significantly influenced by the topographical poets of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The style of Alexander Pope, for instance, haunts much of his writing career, while the Classical and Romantic *genius loci*, the 'spirit' of a place, seem to be ever-present behind much of his imagery. There is some overlap here: as some poems mix instances of place-making and space-making. Among the more adventurous claims of the thesis is that Larkin's work reveals the influence of 20<sup>th</sup> century surrealist art while being similarly inspired by the conceptual world of grammatical and astronomical space.

With regard to the critical contexture of Larkin studies, this thesis makes a substantial use of recent publications in Larkin scholarship, especially the notable additions of James Booth, Richard Bradford and Archie Burnett. In contrast to these critics, however, the thesis lays considerable emphasis upon the persistence of certain socialist and liberal sympathies that were borne out in his work: in particular through the displaced female protagonist of *A Girl in Winter*, and throughout the depictions of prison-like spaces in his later poems. More generally, the thesis argues that renewed attention to Larkin's evocation of space and place might reveal new and potentially fruitful lines of critical inquiry into his work as a whole.

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Alex Howard

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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Lee Spinks. The combination of acuity, friendliness and wit with which he conducted our meetings has made completing this thesis an absolute pleasure. I must particularly praise his structured approach which kept me reassured and engaged throughout. Thanks must also go to Penny Fielding and Jonathan Wild, who encouraged me to consider postgraduate study in the first place, and James Loxley for his quickness to assist during inevitable moments of mini-crisis. Furthermore, I am immensely grateful to Michele Beadle and Neil Chadwick of the Hull History Centre, whose friendliness and patience while helping me to locate some of Larkin's original letters and diaries made my time studying in Hull most enjoyable. Thanks also to my partner Ellie, for contending with inescapable moments of creative uncertainty, and to my parents for their continual emotional support.

## Abbreviations Used

<i>AL</i>	<i>About Larkin: Journal of The Philip Larkin Society</i>
<i>AWL</i>	Andrew Motion, <i>Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life</i> (1993)
<i>CP</i>	Anthony Thwaite, ed. <i>Philip Larkin: Collected Poems</i> (2003 edition)
<i>FBTF</i>	Richard Bradford, <i>First Boredom, Then Fear</i> (2005)
<i>FR</i>	Philip Larkin, <i>Further Requirements: Interviews, Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews</i> , second edition, ed. Anthony Thwaite (2002)
<i>LAL</i>	James Booth, <i>Life, Art and Love</i> (2014)
<i>LTM</i>	Anthony Thwaite, ed. <i>Philip Larkin: Letters to Monica</i> (2011)
<i>PLP</i>	István Rácz, <i>Philip Larkin's Poetics</i> (2015)
<i>PLW</i>	James Booth, <i>Philip Larkin: Writer</i> (1992)
<i>RW</i>	Philip Larkin, <i>Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955 – 1982</i> (1983)
<i>SL</i>	<i>Selected Letters of Philip Larkin, 1940 – 1985</i> , ed. Anthony Thwaite (1992)
<i>SW</i>	Stephen Cooper, <i>Philip Larkin: Subversive Writer</i> (2004)
<i>TCP</i>	Archie Burnett, ed. <i>Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems</i> , (2012)
<i>TPP</i>	James Booth, <i>The Poet's Plight</i> (2005)

## Introduction

It is little wonder that Robert Lance Snyder, writing in 2007, opens his discussion of Larkin and 'place' with the somewhat exasperated assertion that 'consider[ing] the significance of place in Philip Larkin's *oeuvre* may seem a foredoomed endeavour' (115). The reasons behind Snyder's assertion are complicated and far-reaching, and direct us more, I would argue, to deficiencies besetting the critical school of place and space than they do any particular shortcoming in Larkin scholarship itself. I wish to begin our exploration of Philip Larkin, place and space, by outlining a set of critical issues and oversights which, I believe, may have prevented Larkin's poetics of place over the last 20 years from receiving the full breadth and depth of the critical rigor it deserves.

In 2008, Peter Brown introduced the series of collected essays *Literature and Place 1800 – 2000* by exposing a terminological inchoateness underlying the phrase 'place and literature'. For me, the ramifications of this act extend beyond a mere lesson in the importance of phraseological attentiveness, and serve, additionally, to highlight several key problems besetting the way in which one thinks about literature's relationship with 'place' in general. While, for Brown, 'place and literature' offers an opportunity for the critic to regroup their understanding of, and approach towards, literary appropriations of place, at the same time Brown remains seemingly oblivious towards the lexical uncertainties that prompt such a paradigmatic rethinking of 'place' criticism to begin with. In attempting to

make sense of the question of 'literature and place', Brown bifurcates the phrase into two divergent critical approaches: an 'outside' approach (which looks at 'literary places'), and an 'inside' approach (which addresses 'places in literature'). The first approach Brown deems 'empirical and quasi-antiquarian' given its focus upon, and inclusion of, "real" places in literature; the second approach he deems 'theoretical' owing to its focus on place's function as a literary *topos*. (13).<sup>1</sup> In attempting to develop his two-fold critical approach further, Brown's reasoning takes on an unconvincing air of extemporization: 'Practitioners of the 'outside' method', he suggests, concern themselves solely with the author's *life*, and 'quarry relevant written material – letters, diaries, and biographies [&c.]' in order to pander to 'general literary enthusiasm [and] curiosity about authors [lives]'; a process which Geoffrey Hartman famously states, with equal scorn, reduces a text to a mere 'tourist guide and antiquarian signpost' (208). In contrast, the practitioner of the 'inside' critical approach appears to be held in considerably higher esteem by Brown, owing to the approach's inherent focus on text rather than the author; thus, channelling the 'proper' literary critic towards the 'complex dynamics of literature and place'. Indeed, through an 'inside' approach, the 'idea of place is more important than the identification of topographical correlatives' (Brown 13). Crucially, this means an 'inside' approach for Brown eschews all interest

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<sup>1</sup> Brown uses the word 'empirical' slightly awkwardly to allude to a Historicist-type criticism that attaches substantial significance to the locales in which any given author worked, matured and sought inspiration in, and to which they are consequently indebted for formative reasons. The 'theoretical' gambit of Brown's 'outside' method, conversely, is painted as more New Criticism in nature avoiding the 'identification of topographical correlatives' and eschewing any analysis of the author's spatial context.

in the possible role of locational verisimilitude, and the stylistic or aesthetic advantages that this approach could offer by including real locations and geographies in the text.

While this attempt to split the phrase 'literature and place' into two divergent critical paradigms may be useful to help us organise critical thought within the field, one cannot help feeling that Brown's logic gives rise to a dangerous false dichotomy here. After all, it is difficult to ascertain how the poetry of Philip Larkin might benefit from this critical model; poetry which, much like Thomas Hardy's Wessex, often creates 'an imaginative construct in geographical reality', or, to put it another way, fuses fictional places within, or proximate to, real places (Millgate 332). On the contrary, the model runs the risk of obstructing avenues of critical exploration owing to its inherent prejudices and reductiveness.

And yet Brown's view towards the study of real places in literature as a somehow "lesser" pursuit is not without precedent: as well as Hartman's aphoristic denunciation mentioned above, Leonard Lutwack in 1984 castigates the decision of the author to include real places by advancing the rather damning indictment that 'fidelity to geographic realism . . . exact[s] a price that the writer cannot afford to pay' (29). Gillian Tindall, a little later in 1991, views the authorial decision to include real places with equal wariness, deeming the act to be largely futile owing to the fact that the verisimilitude of the real place invariably has its presence overpowered by the ancillary symbolic agenda it is forced to inhabit

the specific, real place [becomes] so entirely subsumed by what it comes to represent that it ceases to be an identifiable place at all, at once a triumphant consummation and a defeat (ix).

Indeed, both the attitude towards critical approaches focusing on real places, and the circumspection that these critics exhibit towards authors who incorporate real places in their work, is arguably enough to make the sort of texts which feature real places less attractive to critical investigation. Equally, these critics' disinclinations to establish a working critique for the incorporation of real places in literature makes us consider whether aspects of place theory, in general, may have endured a degree of critical ostracisation over the last 20 years<sup>2</sup>. While a small amount of defence has persisted<sup>3</sup>, one wonders whether an altogether new critical idiom of place needs to be cultivated in order that writers who feature high levels of loco-specificity in their work receive a just amount of critical vigour. Such a re-examination may well benefit poets who, whilst fond of the incorporation of

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth R. Olwig would no doubt agree. Critiquing Yi-Fu Tuan, Olwig states that 'There is a certain *tension* in the usage of the concept of place. On the one hand it can be reduced to a mere location, and subsumed under the geographer's concept of 'space'. On the other hand, it is not as insubstantial as location' (qtd. in Adams & Hoelscher 93; emphasis Olwig's).

<sup>3</sup> Although implicit, J. Nicholas Entrikin demonstrates a suspicion of the growing critical trend towards treating place figuratively rather than as a concrete, geographical reality through his comment that, 'the scientific search seems to trivialise the interest in particular places' (3). Hearteningly, Robert T. Tally Jr. ed. in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (2017) expresses a keen desire to put questions of place-realism in literature firmly on the agenda through an application of Edward Soja's seminal theoretical work outline in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*.

loco-specific elements, nevertheless remain mindful of the symbolic, stylistic and representational capacity of 'imagined' places as well; an undertaking that would invariably dismantle the false dichotomy that sits at the heart of Brown's critical approach.

A further issue with these critics' theorizing is their relatively lack of focus on the important distinction between 'place' and 'space' – with the latter receiving comparatively scant attention. Although Franco Moretti comes close to a working definition of 'space' in the outset of his monograph *Atlas of the European Novel 1800 – 1900*<sup>4</sup>, this investigative line is ultimately sacrificed for an (albeit necessary) argument advocating an interdisciplinary approach to literature and place via geography<sup>5</sup>. A symptom of this disinclination to provide a critical glossing for 'space' is expressed through the never-ending critical obfuscation and slippage that seems to exist

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<sup>4</sup> Encouragingly, Moretti uses Balzac's Paris and Austen's England as fixed historical locations upon which to apply differing understandings of space and place in literature. ['Balzac's *version* of Paris . . . [or] Austen's redrawing of Britain' (3)] – a line of thought which might have otherwise engendered a meditation on what 'place' meant for the Romantic sensibility of the authors in question.

<sup>5</sup> There have been some interesting developments in the drive towards establishing a literary geography in recent years. While some progress has been made, the position this field upholds within the critical canon is still relatively marginal. Key work has been undertaken by the Glotfelty Ecocriticism School. (A good introduction to the latter is *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* eds. Glotfelty & Fromm). Another headline player would be David Seamon (*A Geography of the Lifeworld*), and more recently, *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-War Poetry* eds. Alexander & Cooper. More common is the interdisciplinary objective to study place alongside experientialism and phenomenology. A move spearheaded by Yi-Fu Tuan in *Place and Space: The Perspective of Experience*). E. Relph's *Place and Placelessness*, though considerably older (1976), offers a phenomenological approach to place which occasionally touches on geography.

between the words 'place' and 'space'. Indeed both Moretti and Brown use place and space interchangeably, and it is down to Michael Irwin to settle upon a convincing set of rules to govern the separation of the two nouns critically<sup>6</sup>. No more an advocate of consistency (moving freely and without explanation between capitalization, italicization of both 'place' and 'space'), Irwin nevertheless offers a compelling working definition of 'place' as that which relates to 'any fictional map' applied in literature to 'authenticate the reality of a real-life locale or the pseudo-reality of a fictional one' (25; emphasis Irwin's); while 'space' concerns literature 'occupied, or seemingly occupied, by a "conception" or "ideal" [= abstract] form' (qtd. in Brown 27). Beyond these attempts, the field of literary studies has made little headway towards establishing a solid set of critical definitions for place and/or space. Consequently, ardent literary scholars in this field have been forced to revisit the teachings of Heidegger and Husserl<sup>7</sup>, or, more commonly, to borrow critical apparatus from neighbouring disciplines; notably that of human geography, where Yi-Fu Tuan's edict of place 'as one unit among others . . . subsumed under the geographer's concept and analysis of space' holds sway, gravitating critical reasoning away from the arts, and in the direction of 'thought, quantifiable data, and . . . the language of mathematics' (387).

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Irwin's essay 'Maps of Fictional Space' falls within the same collection of essays that Brown is introducing (see *Literature and Place* 25-48).

<sup>7</sup> I am thinking here of Emmanuelle Peraldo in *Literature and Geography: The Writing of Space throughout History*, and James Magrini & Elias Schwieler's *Heidegger on Literature, Poetry, and Education after the "Turn": At the Limits of Metaphysics*.

My aim here, and in this thesis at large, is not to embark upon a re-examination of Larkin's work through a single, tightly-hewn definition of place; rather, in the above pages, it was my intention to have given some indication, albeit through heuristic means, of the terminological inconsistency and apathy towards attendant critical heritage(s), that have proved deleterious towards a criticism of place recently, as well as the profound impact this has had in precluding a textured analysis of place and space in literature. Over the coming pages of this introduction, I hope to redress some of these shortcomings by scoping out critical heritage for the term 'place' which, I believe, is especially relevant to (and indeed invited by) Philip Larkin's *oeuvre*. Equally, by settling upon a lucid definition of 'space', I hope to pay witness to an incredible set of aesthetic instances that have long sat dormant in Larkin's work. Broadly speaking, I argue that the term 'space' in this thesis aligns itself with aspects of Larkin's aesthetic which are responsive to artistic or philosophical ideas, contemporary in relation to the poet's time of writing. In contrast, 'place' often correlates with the poet's attempt to forge aesthetic expressions that recall a symbolic heritage that is, by contrast, populated largely by pre-20<sup>th</sup> century tropes and notions. This is not to say I view 'place' in Larkin's work as an anachronistic event, while 'space' reflects a deliberate drive towards avant-gardism; nor that I consider Larkin, by consequence, as an avowed subscriber to any particular literary crusade (such as the Movement whose poets, like Enright or Amis, pretended '[Modernism] had never happened' [Osborne 53]). That said, I believe, through dint of this complicated nexus of commitments, that the poet

in fact ‘owed more to Modernism . . . than he pretended’ (Evans 76). The latter opinion has become increasingly widespread in Larkin studies recently.<sup>8</sup> I argue that by expressing an all-out hatred of modernism, Larkin was able to covertly engage in the occasional moment of modernist technique without compromising his prevailing, anti-modernist agenda – an agenda made all the more subtle through his tendency to flank such moments with idioms and styles that are flagrantly antithetical to modernism. Such a tactic not only cunningly obscures all perceptible affiliation with modernism, but allows us to conjecture that Larkin may have seized the critical uncertainties surrounding his true allegiance to modernism in order to spin back and re-present their inconsistencies in a distracting instance of *tu quoque*. While critical readings of Larkin’s deployment of place *per se* have been, largely, intermittent, I do not wish to suggest that this is solely as a result of the disarray that has nagged the field of place studies; I do propose, however, that establishing a solid understanding of both ‘place’ and ‘space’ (the likes of which I shall imminently describe) may well assist us in pushing Larkin studies beyond its current bounds. As I have alluded, the verisimilitude of place is something that interests me in Larkin’s work (and something which has, no doubt, received relatively scant attention for the reasons stated

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<sup>8</sup> The murmurings of a belief, positing Larkin’s quiet adherence to quietly modernist principles was made as early as 1989 in Janice Rossen’s *Philip Larkin: His Life’s Work* ([Larkin is] bashing earlier conceptions of art – in its way, a fairly modernist response’ [103]). However, it was A. T. Tolley who really forced the notion in *My Proper Ground* (1991). In the last five years, Larkin’s allegiance to modernism is being treated, once again, as a far more complicated and slippery affair in works such as István D. Rácz’s *Philip Larkin’s Poetics* (2015), and Sarah Humayun’s *Different From Himself* (2013).

above); however, the criteria against which I intend to examine place and space in Larkin's work is not limited to this alone.

Therefore, before I embark on outlining the argumentative objectives of this thesis, along with assigning work definitions to various other key terms, I intend now to briefly scope out the critical heritages that determine what the word 'place' means to me. In so doing, I shall attend first to the concept of Englishness which instructs much of the thought behind this thesis and which, in Larkin studies, has become near-synonymous with questions of 'nationhood'. Secondly I shall address the *genius loci*, a place-concept which has received scant critical attention and whose current amorphousness within the critical vernacular has allowed critics to appropriate it as they see fit. Even if Larkin did not have a comprehensive understanding of the *genius loci* and the various incarnations it assumes throughout history, I argue that the term might serve nevertheless as a useful fixing point around which we might orientate our understanding of Larkin's deployment of particular place-making techniques along with their attendant symbolic and historic concerns. Both critical reappraisals, I hope, will reveal how an understanding of the history of place is vital to any contemporary investigation into the role of place in Larkin's *oeuvre*.

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A fair deal of critical ink has been spilt hoping to locate and account for Larkin's position within an ever-growing cohort of English poets whose aim has been to question, or redefine, what "English" poetry constitutes. Seamus

Heaney's *Preoccupations*, particularly the chapter on 'Englands of the Mind' has provided a departure point for many such critical meditations, with critics such as Raphaël Ingelbien (*Misreading England*), Thomas Osborne ('Polarities of Englishness') and Richard Palmer (*Such Deliberate Disguises*) making up the frontline of heavyweight Larkin critics hoping to sustain this argument in new, often polemical, ways.<sup>9</sup> The title of John Powell Ward's monograph *The English Line* has become something of a metonymy for such discussions, which locate Larkin at the tail end of an evolving idiom of Englishness that begins with Wordsworth and eschews, through its devotion to English 'twentieth century provincialism', all the influences of modernism (*PLP* 17).<sup>10</sup>

In acknowledging this fact, one must not ignore the swathe of dissenting critics in the 1990s who, following the publication of Larkin's *Selected Letters* (Thwaite, 1992) and *A Writer's Life* (Motion, 1993) reoriented Larkin's championing of England to that of 'Little' England.<sup>11</sup> Since

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<sup>9</sup> Ingelbien and Osborne question to what extent Larkin really was a proponent of "English" poetry. For Ingelbien, the doubt has come about as a result of the strain with which heavily poet-imperial readings of Larkin's work has warped its intrinsic impression of nationhood; in Osborne's case, it is borne out of a heavy focus on the discordance between Larkin's displays of Englishness in his poems and the poet's actual attitudinal or locational position during the moment of composition. Osborne also, as Evans affirms, often seeks to push the exploration of Larkin's evocation of Englishness beyond the reasonably staid appraisals offered by Heaney and Paulin which sought 'to celebrate [and] to condemn' Larkin, respectively (127).

<sup>10</sup> The English Line has often been defined as anti-modernist *because* of its provincialism. For me this is a correlation not a causation. Unlike Alexander & James, I think 'regional' modernism or 'provincial' modernism is, broadly, a tautology.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Paulin does not hold back in vilifying the "new" Larkin that emerges as a result of *Selected Letters*, stating that the edition had exposed 'the

this time, Larkin's role as the spokesperson of a kind of 'welfare state sub' England has understandably coloured, and besmirched, many subsequent attempts to understand the type of England he presents<sup>12</sup>. Such readings have often highlighted the innate hypocrisy underlining Larkin's depiction of England as a country which is in mourning for its fractured contact with a rich pastoral (and literary) heritage while, at the same time, ventriloquizing the very types of Thatcherite politics that are instrumental in such an undoing<sup>13</sup>. This subterfuge, writ large, reveals itself, in Terry Eagleton's words, as 'a stunning sleight of hand – [an attempt] to appear contemporary while reverting to a cosy Little Englandism'.<sup>14</sup> It is little wonder, then, that for some like Antony Rowland, the term 'Englishness' has become a 'slippery signifier'

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sewer under the national monument Larkin became'. However, it was Tim Trengove-Jones, as Robert C. Evans acknowledges, who was among the first Larkin scholars to discern the impact that the austere shadow cast by Larkin's recently publicised right-wing politics would exert on his critical reputation. Trengove-Jones is quick to acknowledge the deleterious affect these findings would exert over Larkin's idiom of Englishness. Supporting Paulin's outrage, Trengove-Jones states that 'Racism is usually glossed with the tag of Englishness, and we should be grateful to Paulin for scraping away the veneer.' *Times Literary Supplement* (6 Nov. 1992 & 20 Nov. 1992)

<sup>12</sup> Documentary title: 'Larkin and Betjeman – Down Cemetery Road' (09.22-09.25)

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that while several critics, such as John Lucas, develop this argument through a caustic focus on Larkin's apparent adoration of Thatcher (see 'Without Walls'), others, such as Gervais, manage to end up with the same conclusions despite viewing Larkin as a political moderate. Gervais, for instance, reads Larkin as 'a representative of *l'homme moyen sensuel*, taking the pulse of the egalitarian, welfare state England which has displaced the hierarchical culture of the past' (211; emphasis Gervais's). Either way, it would appear that Larkin, in some sense, engages in a kind of "self-sabotage" in order to give the appearance that the cultural heritage he is attempting to portray is more enigmatic than it actually is.

<sup>14</sup> Documentary title: 'Without Walls: J'accuse Philip Larkin'. Mar 1993 (16.29-16.38).

owing, no doubt, to the very nature of this close fraternisation with notions of small-minded philistinism (qtd. in Rogers & McLeod eds. 81).

More recent criticism has, however, almost exonerated Larkin. Political recriminations directed towards the poet are side-lined in Milton Sarkar's recapitulation of Larkin's work in *Englishness and the Post-imperial Space* (2016), with the main thrust of the argument centring around 'cultural [and] ritual manifestations' as well as the 'post-imperial withdrawal syndrome manifested in the incapacity . . . of the Larkin personae' (32). Furthermore, fortuitously for Larkin's personal credibility, criticism of Englishness has developed a penchant for exploring Larkin's writing of 'elsewhere'. This might be apportioned into several categories, including work taking a conceptual approach to Larkin's depictions of place (such as J. Douglas Porteous's 'Nowhereman' [1999]); Richard Bradford's wonderful collection of Larkin's photography *The Importance of Elsewhere: Philip Larkin's Photographs* (2017); the publications of Larkin's surprisingly prolific back-catalogue of unpublished travel poetry in Archie Burnett's *The Complete Poems* (2012); and, of course, more anecdotally, Larkin's collection of souvenir tea towels in Anna Farthing's exhibition *New Eyes Each Year* (2017). Quite separate from all the incarnations of Englishness I have outlined above, and making up perhaps the slimmest tranche of thought in the ongoing attempt to re-examine Englishness in Larkin's work is, I argue, that which is borne out of an inheritance whose roots are fixed in a more distant and varied English sensibility, and whose idiom is not necessarily that of Wordsworth. It is this

approach to Englishness that I will remain predominantly concerned with throughout this thesis.

Once again, it is not a principal aim of this thesis to assert Larkin's position within a fixed permutation of Englishness; rather, through close readings, I am more concerned with how moments within the verse and prose – when approached through an albeit historic set of symbolic, lexical or idiomatic critical informants – frequently bemask, betray or exemplify instances of *poiesis* that may well be termed “English” in some sense. In certain instances, such as in *The North Ship*, this helps lift the poems above the critical disinterestedness which has often prevented them from receiving the level of critical vigour they deserve<sup>15</sup>. In pursuing this objective, I argue at several points throughout this work, that certain poems were for Larkin a kind of heuristic “style experiment”; attempts, perhaps, to try out a particular trope, iteration of Englishness (or in the case of space) phenomena or notional paradigm upon a piece of writing, in order that he might then stand back and survey its affect and effect. Seen particularly in the recently discovered ‘Dream Diaries’ and in his treatment of the theme of death, such moments of experimentation for Larkin have their importance compounded by the fact that they are frequently followed up by poems which posit a response to, or negation of, the findings formerly garnered. The agenda of such poems, or

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<sup>15</sup> Naturally I exclude Sisir Kumar Chatterjee, Stephen Regan and Janice Rossen here who have tirelessly endeavoured to find merit in *The North Ship*, albeit merit that is, in Rossen's case, perhaps a little too readily influenced by Larkin's self-proclaimed infatuation with Yeats' ‘particularly potent music’ (*RW* 29).

palinodes, also extends to include the rescindment or revision of certain attitudinal stances held by the poet many years prior, and is often accompanied by an attempt to undo earlier experimentations that sought to test out a particular place or space trope. Alongside the use of these techniques, and reinforcing his status as a purveyor of a rich and varied literary sense of “Englishness”, is the adumbration of a substantial back-catalogue of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century writers whose own grammatical and lexical styles haunt much of Larkin’s work. I do not wish to suggest, that such pre-20<sup>th</sup> century writers were the progenitors of given place tropes; rather that, like Larkin, they demonstrate a sleepless interest in the literary appropriation and usefulness of the trope in question, owing, in part, to the trope’s inability to shrug off a constellation of historic (and often ancient) symbolic influences that coalesce to form any given “current” etymology. The ‘Popean’ *genius loci* that reverberates throughout many of the poems discussed in chapters four to six, for instance, does not enter the Larkin canon without escaping a degree of syncretization by Wordsworth, while the brief reference to the *locus amoenus* in chapter one clearly reaches Larkin having undergone a degree of re-appropriation by Ruskin. Given its complicated timeline, it is on the concept of the *genius loci* that I wish to now focus attention. Alongside the concept of Englishness, the *genius loci* constitutes a second key critical presence throughout much of this work, and so will naturally require a degree of definition in its own right.

When employed within contemporary literary criticisms of place,<sup>16</sup> the *genius loci* tends to embody an amorphous set of ideas. Gervais himself underscored this tendency when deploying the term, unquestioningly, to describe an indeterminate collection of place-related “atmospheres” associated with Larkin’s Hull.<sup>17</sup> Aside from this instance, it has rarely, if ever, been applied to Larkin’s work in its own right, let alone been the subject of a concerted, meditating study. Attention instead has concentrated upon identifying earlier texts where its appearance is explicit, or even, in the case of Pope and Wordsworth, an explicit part of the poem’s didactic agenda.<sup>18</sup> Critics attempting to conduct research into the literary trope of *genius loci* would no doubt be surprised, therefore, at the dearth of scholarly engagement surrounding the term’s intellectual heritage, its usefulness for literary studies, and its relatively new prominence within the idiom of architectural experiential theories. A definitive source here, is Norberg-Schulz’s *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* that uses the term *genius loci* to assume one’s experience of place. Yet even

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<sup>16</sup> E. Relph demonstrates this most powerfully in his online article entitled ‘Placeness, Place, Placelessness’. Relph wryly states, ‘A quick Google search for *genius loci* brought up links to a recent art exhibition featuring the work of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei and others, an American kick-starter campaign for a book on tales of the spirit of place, the name of [a] travel company specializing in Italy, and an art project in Weimar in Germany.’

<sup>17</sup> ‘[T]he ‘elsewhere’ hinted at by such English places as Hull may be a foretaste of death itself, running directly counter to the conventional notion of the *genius loci*.’ (200). Here, one assumes Gervais is conflating a modern interpretation of *genius loci* as the spirit of place, in order to conjure a sense of life which is, in turn, juxta-posed with Hull as an apparent emblem of death. As I explain in the following pages, this definition is broadly inaccurate when the term’s etymological history is properly delineated.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Consult the genius of the place in all; / That tells the waters or to rise, or fall . . .’ (Pope, ‘Epistle to Burlington’ 212).

'architecture and geography', as E. V. Walter notes, pay little heed to the term's genealogy showing that "'sense of place" has degenerated into a cliché, often suggesting little more than superficial impressions' (1-2). Take a glance at the literature before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, and one quickly apprehends a richer selection of appropriations and evolving etymologies associated with the term. This is reflected in the Oxford English Dictionary's (*OED*'s) glossing of the phrase, which is irresolute and references three examples of its application in literature, all of which predate the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the *OED*, the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are periods during which the various iconographies and traditions associated with the term 'sense of place' begin to coalesce into a single, coherent definition. Below is the *OED*'s attempt to map an etymological timeline for the term (starting in 1771):

1771 T. Smollett *Humphry Clinker* III. 9 'The pleasure-grounds are, in my opinion, not so well laid out according to the *genius loci*.'

1835 W. Irving *Newstead Abbey* in *Crayon Misc.* II. 114 'A white marble bust of the *genius loci*, the noble poet, shone conspicuously from its pedestal.'

1878 L. W. M. Lockhart *Mine is Thine* xix. II. 50 'The *genius loci* may be solemn and pensive, but we laugh at him.'

The dictionary gathers its definitions from a reasonably narrow timeframe of 107 years between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries – a peculiar decision considering the term's self-evidently Latin origins. And while the term has

had such beginnings accounted for by other critics (notably by Woolf and Gilbert<sup>19</sup>), the 18<sup>th</sup> century appears to be the era in which ‘sense of place’ developed a relationship with, and an importance for, literature. If nothing else, undertones of presumption in Clinker’s definition imply that, to an educated 18<sup>th</sup> century milieu at least, the phrase had assumed a reasonably prominent standing within both the vernacular, but also within what today might be termed ‘place theory’. Conversely, the second example in the *OED*’s definition refers to the *genius loci* as an object – a solid effigy of a seemingly revered ‘noble poet’ – while the third example appears to describe something that is neither an aesthetic phenomenon, nor a representative commemoration, but, like the Roman ‘leader’, an authentic individual imbued with animate human qualities. This is suggested not only through the third example’s referral, via the third person, to the masculine pronoun ‘him’, but also by its obviously human ‘solemn and pensive’ expression, and its capacity to make its viewers ‘laugh’.

In his writing, I argue that Larkin demonstrates a cognisance of the *genius loci* that profits from this very etymological uncertainty in order to

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<sup>19</sup> In the republic of Rome, the phrase’s literal translation of ‘spirit of the place’ attributes a special genealogical importance to the word ‘genius’: Greg Woolf revealingly describes the phrase’s role within civil ritual, recounting how ‘regular sacrifices [were] . . . paid to the “genius” of the reigning empire by local neighbourhood associations’ implying the assembly of a cohesive, tripartite union between a specific locality, its residents, and ruling ‘genius’ (Brisch 251). Similarly, Elizabeth Gilbert points to the Roman genius as a creative spirit which lives in a writer’s dwelling (*‘loci’*) and momentarily inhabits the soul offloading, as they do so, a creative genius which compels the writer to produce great works of art, and whose arrival and duration of stay is entirely unpredictable.

figuratively – and sometimes literally – give place its own ‘voice’. Moreover, just like the sprite-like caricature of the *genius loci* described in the *OED*’s third definition, I argue that, on occasion, the pernicious nature of the *genius loci* wriggles free of the writer’s grasp to invade and manipulate Larkin’s style seemingly without his knowledge. As we shall see in chapters one and four, this often happens at points in *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter* where the respective protagonists undergo psychological trauma, social ostracism or some other means of emotional destabilization that prompts their emotions to be transposed into the surrounding landscape which, in turn, begins to “ventriloquise” their emotional state for them.

Assessing Larkin’s treatment of place through Englishness and *genius loci* is not an exhaustive look into the poet’s use of place. However, it is perhaps among the more fruitful means of departure. Throughout my discussion, I return to a set of opinions on Larkin beyond those simply connected to his attitudes on place. Such a refrain is inevitable, I think, when entering into contemporary discussions on Larkin scholarship. Principal among these, in my case, is a view that has become ever-more popular in Larkin scholarship since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and involves a slightly softer attitude towards the iniquitous habits, and conversations, of Larkin’s private life exposed during the publication of *Selected Letters* (1992), and galvanised in Motion’s *A Writer’s Life*. John Osborne’s *Larkin, Ideology and Critical Violence* (2008) makes no secret of its contention that critical levelheadedness was permanently jeopardised following public dissemination of the poet’s right-wing political views. While Osborne’s work

often verges on an unpalatable exoneration of Larkin's behaviour, other critics since the 2000s, have often followed this trend of reassessing Larkin's moral credibility in less absolute terms. More convincingly, Booth's *Life, Art and Love* (2014) offers a comprehensive, and often highly biographical insight into the writer's private life, insisting that 'those who shared his life simply do not recognise the Mr Nasty version' (6). Behind this renewed "fondness" for the poet sits a critical shift that, as Nicholas Lezard aphoristically summarised, sought to 'judge the poems, not [the] poet.'<sup>20</sup>

Of the more startling yet convincing responses to this "call to arms" has been Victoria Longino's avocation of Larkin's 'empathetic attention to gender' made visible through his 'focus on the uniqueness of the female experience'; an undertaking which, Longino deems, a 'significant achievement' (100). In chapter four, I refer back to Longino's work for this very reason in my focus upon Larkin's attention to setting as perceived through the eye of *A Girl in Winter's* female heroine, Katherine – a refugee, the subject of misogynistic bullying, and the victim of the same collection of subjugating forces that Motion groups together as a 'roll-call of right-wing prejudices' (AWL 65). Through her suffering, I argue, Larkin oversees an appearance of the *genius loci*, whose function serves to offer her a degree of emotional reciprocity in the absence of the abusive, male-dominated environment she inhabits. In this thesis, then, I often synchronise with this new attempt to question the extent to which Larkin's personal ideologies are

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<sup>20</sup> 'Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love by James Booth review – judge the poems, not poet', *The Guardian*, 26 August 2015.

truly reflected in his work. However, the impetus behind this agenda is not drawn as a consequence of the type of journalistic reactivity taken by Osborne; rather, through a close focus on the text I believe, as Evans does, that the Larkin of ‘the mid-1990s [who] was often depicted as simply sexist’ may in fact have wrought a poetic that is ‘something more subtle and complicated’ (100).<sup>21</sup> Another such instance occurs in chapter three, where I contend that, in his travel poetry, the poet displayed an awareness of the radical socialist politics of Paul-Michel Foucault in his portrayal of the latter’s panopticon – a structure used to map, and police, prison space.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, also in chapter three, I argue that Larkin casts himself within (rather than outside) a communal setting in ‘The Whitsun Weddings’. This processes is then repeated, I suggest, in ‘The Building’ where the democratisation of space is conveyed through an attempt to evoke the spatial techniques embodied in Escher’s famous lithograph *Relativity*. I take an equally open-minded line on the on-going debate to tar Larkin as avowedly anti-Modernist, or avidly pro-Movement. To start an academic treatise by reminding the reader that Larkin hated a handful of so-called ‘high-modernists’ (read:

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that while Evans produces an impression of Motion’s Larkin that is, on the whole, accurate, he does overstep the mark at times. Motion goes to great lengths, for instance, to account for Larkin’s endorsement of Layard’s dictum about the role of women as a ‘priestess of the unconscious’ upon the male artist (61). Albeit refusing to afford women the appropriate autonomy, the implication behind Motion’s reading is that Larkin’s attitude towards women was at least, to a degree, textured and sympathetic.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault’s work on panoptic control builds on Jeremy Bentham’s original blueprint for the panoptic surveillance of incarcerated inmates. Bentham reasoned that a prison in which any inmate might be unknowingly observed, at any moment, ultimately created a punitive house in which ‘transgression is impossible’ (191).

Pound, Eliot, Picasso, etc.) has become almost a right-of-passage for Larkin critics. The aura of Larkin as an anti-modernist has seeped into virtually every prerequisite opinion of the poet, such that it is becoming ever more difficult to establish the truth (if, indeed, there is any) behind such a hostility.<sup>23</sup>

At this point, I wish to briefly outline the six chapters of this thesis and a few working terms. Given the complications dogging the field of place studies, I am opting for simplicity. I will use the term 'place' to refer to any moment or feature in a poem which deals with a geographical site – whether real or fictional; I will use the term 'space' for non-geographical entities. These include, in chapter six, for instance, the deictic 'space' between a sentence's *origo* and the subject or object to which it gestures; similarly in chapter five, I use the noun 'space' to refer to inchoate objects and passageways that underpin the dream-vision of the poem 'Träumerei'; likewise, in chapter two, the diagrammatic drawings that make up Larkin's 'Dream Diaries'. Equally, in order to distinguish between the poet and his personae, I found cause, at several points, to refer to the former as 'Larkin-the-man', and 'Larkin-the-poet', respectively. Equally, on the few occasions I use the phrase 'non-place', I am alluding to the idea of a "geography-less" place; a place that has been forced to adopt the definition of a space. The critical derivation of this is drawn principally from J. Douglas Porteous's excellent essay 'Nowhereman' (*AL* Issue 8), or occasionally from E. Relph's

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Regan deals with this problem head on in his essay 'Philip Larkin: A Late Modern Poet'.

seminal monograph *Place and Placelessness*. As previously stated, I do not advocate a complete exoneration of Larkin's former political skirmishes; nevertheless, I rely heavily on Booth's *Life, Art and Love*, not simply because he is 'one of the poet's most impassioned defenders' (Evans 102) but rather because his monograph, published in 2014, quickly attained the type of ubiquity that offers the critic an array of insightful, cutting-edge departure points. Burnett's *Complete Poems* (2014), for similar reasons, is used regularly; its ability to present, and bibliographically account for, an enormous repository of formerly un-published Larkin content will, no doubt, adorn it with the same status of indispensability as *Selected Letters* attained post-1992.

The chapters of the thesis, advance through Larkin's *oeuvre* broadly in line with the poet's compositional timeframe: chapter one to three address *Jill*, Larkin's 'Dream Diaries' (and attendant poetry experiments) and *A Girl in Winter*. Chapter four looks at Larkin's cognisance of travel in (principally) *The Less Deceived* and *The Whitsun Weddings*, while the final two chapters look at spatiality (and occasionally the place) of the theme of death in *High Windows*. Owing to the extensive nature of my research into death and space, the final two chapters look at death in the collection in two very specific ways: chapter five ("God's Waiting Room": Static Contemplation in *High Windows*) attempts to map, and describe, the ways in which Larkin imagines a "conceptual" world beyond the death-moment. In so doing, I argue Larkin uses the imagined hospital space in 'The Building' to envisage an afterlife whose insistence upon being drawn along an illogical combination of axes, takes its inspiration from Escher's pioneering image 'Relativity' – a

notion that haunted the poet ever since he penned 'Träumerei' several decades earlier. Despite his fascination with heterocosms, I argue that a series of Popean grammatical, prosodic and lexical characteristics still cling to his verse, thus exposing in poems such as 'The Building' a stylistic and symbolic debt which dates back centuries. Chapter six, in contrast, explores Larkin's morbid fascination with staring death in the eye. While this chapter is also interested, to some degree, in the poet's expression of, or interest in an afterlife, it is much more concerned with how Larkin imagines himself being at the moment he passes into death. I argue that, at the moments in which Larkin is engaged in such existential meditation he flirts with the notion of Pascal's Wager ('Compline'), writes himself a eulogy in which past traits are exonerated ('Sympathy in White Major'), and attempts to map out the unknowable "moment of passing" by appealing to the rules of grammatical deixis ('The Old Fools').

Lastly, for ease of use, and unless otherwise stated, 'CP' refers to the second edition (published in 2003) of Larkin's *Collected Poems*, edited by Anthony Thwaite.

## 1

## Challenging Genre: Ruskinian Allusions and Ubiquitous Englishness in Larkin's First "Post-war" Novel.

It is little wonder that Larkin felt compelled to cite James Gindin's monograph *Post-war British Fiction* (1962) in his introduction to the 1963 reprint of his first novel (*Jill*). Gindin's decision to consider Larkin's hero, John Kemp – the prototypical inspiration behind a lengthy string of protagonists that would later be deployed by the likes of 'Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Osborne, Iris Murdoch, and numerous others'<sup>24</sup> – is perhaps one of the highest points of praise this oft-overlooked example of Larkin's juvenilia has received (Gindin 2). Even Larkin himself, in a departure from the typically self-deprecating mode with which he responded to critical acclaim, happily accepted the praise: paraphrasing Gindin, Larkin asserted proudly that *Jill* 'contain[s] the first example of that characteristic landmark of the British post-war novel, the displaced working-class hero',<sup>25</sup> before proceeding to attest that the novel thus 'hold[s] sufficient historical interest to justify republication' (Larkin vii). As

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<sup>24</sup> For example the protagonists in John Wain's *Hurry on Down* (1953), Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) and *That Uncertain Feeling* (1955) – as identified by Leader in 'Movement Fiction and Englishness'.

<sup>25</sup> Some critics choose to define this 'characteristic landmark' by the protagonist's behaviour and emotional state rather than the social milieu from which they emerge (e.g. Michael Hamburger: '*Jill* has been seen as a forerunner of the 'Angry Young Men' spate of fiction so closely linked with the 'Movement' 25)

audacious as this moment of self-praise may seem, the generic classification of *Jill* as the first post-war novel (or, perhaps more accurately, the first novel after World War II whose trends in theme and characterisation might be considered prototypically ‘British post-war’) has been vindicated: in 1977, some 14 years after Larkin entered himself into the canon, a scathing review by P. Bien waged a caustic attack on the stylistic and plot-based deficiencies of *Jill* while nevertheless stopping to admire the ‘fine’ set of ambitions governing Larkin’s desire ‘to create a new kind of novel for the new realities of the early 1940s’ (451). Later still in 1982, Robert Phillips introduces *Jill* in an interview with Larkin as ‘the forerunner of the new British post-war novel – the literature of the displaced working-class hero’ (30).

Given the shared feelings on the canonical importance of *Jill*, it is yet more surprising that among several of the more renowned contemporary Larkin scholars,<sup>26</sup> critical interest in *Jill* remains largely non-existent. Indeed, if not acknowledging the novel’s juvenile speciousness in passing, such critics, predominantly, only turn to *Jill* to mine its autobiographical fragments in order to lay out a series of illustrative waypoints within a greater argument: one centring on Larkin’s personal ascent to poetic “maturity”. In many ways, one might argue that more recent scholarship is simply responding to a flawed precedent set about by pre-21<sup>st</sup> century Larkin critical heavyweights, Thwaite and Motion, the latter of whom, especially, makes no secret of how a

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<sup>26</sup> Rossen’s *Philip Larkin: His Life’s Work*, Cooper’s *Philip Larkin: Subversive Writer* and Motion’s *Philip Larkin: A Writers Life* all refuse an analysis of *Jill* beyond contextualizing references to Larkin’s life and college career.

person friendship with Larkin hampered his critical objectivity.<sup>27</sup> This has meant that, often, the later poetic collections of *The Whitsun Weddings* and *High Windows* have exerted a teleological pull upon the likes of *Jill*, with many of the stylistic and formal faculties of the latter deemed to be impoverished, stunted attempts at the accomplished grace of the former.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, referral to *Jill* as a ‘false start’ has become widespread<sup>29</sup>; more crucially, the novel’s omission from critical conversations on account of ostensibly authoritative accusations which have deemed it stylistically and formally lacking has, given the importance attributed to its “post-war” status, produced a schism in the novel’s perceived value. In short, critical reception of *Jill* appears to have exposed its own disinterestedness as, *ipso facto*, unreasonable. While I intend to highlight the critical oversight that has led to the rift between *Jill*’s generic categorization and its failure to

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<sup>27</sup> Speaking about his presence in *Philip Larkin: Writer*, Motion states, ‘I was present everywhere in the book . . . as the shaper-interpreter-selector of the material I had collected’. *The Times*. 25 August 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Victoria Longino’s essay on gender outlines how the thematic modes and tropes of *TWW* and *HW* represent an ‘expanded’ version of the more juvenile equivalents set up in the novels – an observation which belies the critical tendency to eschew an analysis of the novels based on their own intrinsic merits: ‘[Larkin’s] empathetic attention to gender . . . continued into the novels and expanded in the three books of poetry that followed. This poetic expansion is evident in *The Whitsun Weddings*, and *High Windows*’ (100).

<sup>29</sup> Rossen acknowledges ‘a false start in the 1940’s (three books which received almost no notice [xvii])’; while Booth, commenting on the newly revised 1988 *Collected Poems* (ed. Anthony Thwaite), praises the collection’s capacity to ‘enable the reader to trace the development of the poetry through false starts and periods of blockage’ (231). Tolley blames the ‘resurgence of interest in Romantic poetry . . . In particular the growing adulation of Yeats’ as responsible for ‘many false starts [for] Larkin’, as do several others, more implicitly, including Hamilton, Castronovo and Motion (see above).

elicit more widespread critical attention, my aim here is not to seek textual evidence to finally validate the novel's rightful position beneath the rather hefty, superlative accreditation of 'the first post-war novel'; rather I hope to suggest, by exposing the critical vacuum surrounding *Jill*, that Larkin evoked, in his poetics of place, a series of investments that indicate both a debt to pre-20<sup>th</sup> century symbolic heritages, and a fractious relationship with the literary trends of his time.

Furthermore, while indeed responsible at times for gestating the styles and techniques that characterised the poet's later, more graceful work, I argue that these "place moments" in *Jill*, often reveal wholly unique theoretical, aesthetic and stylistic manoeuvres which are seldom, if ever, found elsewhere in Larkin's canon. The originality of such moments, I feel, render them fully deserving of critical attention in their own right. One might be forgiven, too, for assuming that my scepticism towards *Jill*'s "post-war" generic categorization, along with an espousal for its cognisance with older tropes which predate modernism, might, by proxy, ally my reading with Movement ideals.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the argument in this chapter will naturally remain mindful and sympathetic towards these headings. I venture to suggest that, though the Movement is almost as difficult to define as the texts

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<sup>30</sup> Categorizing Larkin as a Movement writer is currently popular. Leader writes in 2009: 'In recent years much attention has been devoted to individual writers associated with the Movement – principally Larkin, Amis, Gunn, and Davie' (2); and O'Neill et al. in 2011: 'Larkin and the Movement poets foregrounded their verse among the background of the Apocalypics by adopting a dry, and unpretentious tone of voice'.

upon which it is often excessively foisted,<sup>31</sup> there are aspects in *Jill* relating to traditional “Englishness” which, although not reflective of the Movement’s core, founding principles of ‘skepticism [*sic*], robustness and irony’ still demonstrate a tacit refusal of modernism in exchange for a more anachronistic set of symbolic heritages (Reichardt 211).<sup>32</sup> This is, in part, realised by an eschewal of modernism’s ‘self-conscious, impersonal [and] difficult’ traits for a more anachronistic set of tones and symbolic allegiances (Attridge 29). Claiming that Larkin reuses or rehashes romantic tropes is, of course, nothing new and is evidenced in the plethora of material that saturates Larkin scholarship: from famous attempts to trace the allegiance ‘back through Hardy, Tennyson and Wordsworth’ (qtd. in Rossen 26); to one-off, polemic essays like Bayley’s ‘Larkin and the Romantic Tradition’ (1984); to aphoristic assertions that Larkin is Wordsworthian ‘to the core’ (Ricks 11). However, arguments rooting for Larkin’s indebtedness to other pre-20<sup>th</sup> century literary movements are decidedly rarer. Arguments that situate Larkin’s interests alongside Pre-Raphaelite poetics are practically non-existent; a surprising fact, given that Larkin himself traced his Yeatsian debt,

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<sup>31</sup> John Gilroy correctly states that ‘the question as to whether or not Larkin might be described as a ‘Movement’ poet, or indeed if there ever was such a thing as ‘The Movement’ at all, has always been to an extent a debate within Larkin studies’ (20-21). Hartley in 1954 also defines the Movement by way of a string of seemingly incompatible adjectives (‘non-conformist, cool, scientific and analytical’) suggesting that the period’s inchoateness in criticism was an issue present during its very conception (qtd. in Regan’s *Philip Larkin* 15). A concise overview of Larkin’s ‘place’ among Movement poets can be found in Blake Morrison’s *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction in the 1950’s*.

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that Reichardt is directly paraphrasing J. D. Scott’s contemporary glossing of The Movement as originally coined in his *Spectator* article published on 1 October 1954.

not back to modernist derivations, but instead to the voice which ‘Yeats in turn learned as a young poet from Morris, Rossetti, and other Pre-Raphaelite poets’ (Rossen 26).<sup>33</sup>

When seeking a critical rubric with which to approach *Jill*, I argue that an examination of these pre-20<sup>th</sup> century influences is vital, especially in terms of exposing, and fully understanding, the poet’s poetics of place in the novel. Foremost at play here seems to be Larkin’s adherence, at times, to a Ruskinian school of landscape aesthetics: notably the pathetic fallacy which emerges most conspicuously at the end of *Jill* as John Kemp has his illusion of an idealised woman dismantled before him.<sup>34</sup> Rather than existing as an atmospheric backdrop to the action, Larkin embarks upon a mode of place-making which is analogous with that of Collin’s; particularly, in terms of the latter’s tendency to imbue place with the worsening emotional predicament of the protagonist. Indeed, the eponymous protagonist of Wilkie Collins’s novel *Basil* has his emotional descent expressed along similar lines – a novel to which *Jill*, either by design or chance, bears several key resemblances. While Larkin communicates little interest in Collins (the only recorded mention being a couple of mildly derisive lines about the latter’s

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<sup>33</sup> Simon Petch is an exception, stating in *The Art of Philip Larkin* that ‘the poems in *The North Ship* hover in an atmosphere of vague romanticism recalling the worst excesses of the Pre-Raphaelite movement’ (19).

<sup>34</sup> Collins’s debt to the Pre-Raphaelite movement is broadly believed to originate from the work of his brother, Charles, an avowed member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The former’s proximity to the Pre-Raphaelite credo, particularly that popularised by Ruskin, has led Tim Dolin and Lucy Dougan to assert, that above all else, ‘*Basil* intersects most clearly with the concerns of Pre-Raphaelite modern art’ (qtd. in Bachman & Cox eds. 13-14).

sensationalism in a letter to Monica<sup>35</sup>), the common ground he shares with Collins pertaining to the expression of psychology and sexual delusion through place implies a stylistic affinity between the two writers that has hitherto remained unexplored. Existent in Collins's *Basil* and Larkin's *Jill* is a tendency to force place to exist entirely in the symbolic realm, prompting it to shed any of the features which might render it "realistic" in the eyes of the reader – a process which, at least for Collins, has been credited to the 'negative effects of opium use' (Cornes 110).<sup>36</sup> In such instances, place functions only as an elaborate, metonymic expression of inward feelings; feelings which, for reasons of social decorum, are often deemed unfit for direct expression.<sup>37</sup> Place becomes, as Richard Bernheimer states, an attempt to 'give external expression and symbolically valid form to the impulses of reckless physical self-assertion which are hidden in all of us' (3). Bernheimer's choice of words in 'symbolically valid form' is interesting, seemingly connoting both *literary* forms, and a physical (though symbolically freighted) *spatial* form which become a concretised manifestation of internalised, or "hidden" self-assertion.

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<sup>35</sup> Dated 12 October 1952.

<sup>36</sup> Cornes wages a very compelling argument on the detrimental effects of opium in "place-making", positing that 'it weakens the authors ability to picture realistic landscapes; rather the landscapes appear more symbolic than visually accurate' (110).

<sup>37</sup> Collins deemed his own novel *Basil* (1852), in which madness and repressed sexuality pervade, 'the synthesis of a new entertainment form' (qtd. in Davis 121). For an excellent outline of the Victorian novel's depiction of madness see Hughes' *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s*, and, more broadly, Feder's *Madness in Literature* (1980).

Significantly, my argument for Larkin's deployment of the Ruskinian pathetic fallacy in *Jill* may also have grounds for support along autobiographical lines: having started work on *Jill* as an Oxford undergraduate around 1942 and 1943,<sup>38</sup> Larkin may well have been influenced, either literally or by contemporary trends circulating within the Oxford scholarly milieu, by a series of lectures delivered by the incumbent Slade Professor of Fine Art, Kenneth Clark. Possibly teaching at the same time Larkin began work on *Jill*,<sup>39</sup> Clark sought in his lectures to revive and reapply notions of pathetic fallacy as originally popularised by John Ruskin, himself a Slade professor, who had held the chair between 1870 and 1878. A further claim in this chapter will be that these ideas are not necessarily irreconcilable with Movement ideals, especially at the points whereat social, traditional and spatial concerns intersect. Taking the Movement's varied interest in 'minimiz[ing] social difference' (Larkin vii), applying 'traditional forms' (Ray 308) and 'retain[ing] the "Englishness" of the surrounding social and cultural life' (Bhatnagar 17), one can see similar themes developing in contemporary definitions of late-Victorian writing. Soja notes that with the approach of the *fin-de-siècle*, there is a growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the

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<sup>38</sup> '*Jill*, which he had begun at Oxford' was completed 'in the Spring of 1944', the early part of which, 'with examinations looming, he had begun to conceive a new kind of fiction' (Gilroy 15).

<sup>39</sup> Clark's tenure is cited in *The Dictionary of Art Historians* as being during this time (specifically, Gallery Books 5. London: P. Lund, Humphries cites 1944 as being the year in which *Landscape Painting* was delivered, by Clark, during his first year as Slade Professor); though the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* cites his professorship at Oxford as '1946-50'.

historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence (3).

Soja is not alone in noticing the new thematic simultaneity that crystallised in the lead up to the *fin-de-siècle* period. Susan Carvalho pushes the notion further, arguing that the late-Victorians employed ‘the concept of place as a site of intersection and interaction’ (18). Carvalho’s theory is equally compelling, suggesting that place features as a trope in an ever-widening arena of vying interdisciplinary concerns, but is also the very site in which these notions are played out. Simply put, place forms part of the conversation, but also supplies the ‘territory’ upon which this conversation takes place. While not intending to yoke together late-Victorian stylistic tropes with those of the Movement based on this concept alone, nor assume the former instructs the latter in a *post-hoc ergo propter hoc* sense, I nevertheless hope to use the concept as a departure point to help draw out the similarities between the Movement and late-Victorian literary tropes in relation to Larkin’s deployment of place, and intend to appeal to Collins’s *Basil* as a prototype for similar instances of place-making that can be traced through to Larkin.

Lastly, I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that Larkin, while resistant to modernism, nevertheless “flirts” with certain modernist principles in his wielding of place in *Jill*. This is especially evident in John Kemp’s attitude towards, and relationship with time, and, particularly, the ways in which memory intersects with time. Thus, my attempt to elucidate the place poetics of *Jill* in this chapter will fall into three parts: starting with an

endeavour to acknowledge Larkin's debt to the Ruskinian school of landscape aesthetics with reference to Collins's *Basil*; followed by an attempt to explore how the poetic of "Englishness" infiltrates the novel through the rubric of the Movement; and finally an acknowledgement that, despite these former preoccupations with predominantly pre-20<sup>th</sup> century tropes, *Jill* occasionally betrays an awareness of modernist principles, especially when referring to place through notions of time, and the phenomenology of remembering.

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In the epilogue to his lecture series, *Landscape into Art*, Kenneth Clark speaks of the Englishman's cognisance of beauty. Given the literary and political context of 1944, the description seems mawkish in tone; both at odds with, and markedly irresponsible towards, more popular, cynical attitudes surrounding the English landscape which often sought to dismantle and question the validity of pre-existing Romantic and Victorian place models in the aftermath of two World Wars.<sup>40</sup> Speaking with what we must assume is a degree of confidence in his audience's sanction of these anachronistic beliefs, Clark states that

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Gronow equates the depletion of Romantic inclinations in the writing of the 1940s with a depletion of a forward-thinking confidence, positing the 1940s as a time 'during which the prophetic-romantic facet of the [poet] figure seems to undergo a process of erosion' (166). A good example of the effect this has on poetry of the decade is perhaps best seen in Alex Comfort's 'The Sleeping Princess', in which the narrator states: 'My trade is shrunked down / to a negative' (qtd. in Skelton 248-49).

every Englishman, if asked what he meant by “beauty”, would begin to describe a landscape – perhaps a lake and mountain, perhaps a cottage garden, perhaps a wood with bluebells and silver birches . . . but at all events, a landscape (230).

Continuing, and seemingly a little more aware of the global catastrophe in the midst of which his lecture is being conducted, Clark adds:

Can we escape from our fears by creating once again the image of an enclosed garden? No . . . Nature was friendly and harmonious. Science has taught us that nature is the reverse. We shall not recover our confidence in her until we have learnt or forgotten infinitely more than we know at present (241).

The statements above, reveal Clark to be at once supportive of an outdated vision of the English landscape, while simultaneously aware of the latter’s accepted departure along with the imbued iconographies and symbolisms of a former literary epoch. The ‘enclosed garden’ recalls the numerous attempts, in Victorian literature, to sequester an individual from the meteorological and physical threat posed by nature; yet this nature, too, Clark deems in retrospect, only posed a “faux” threat in previous literary epochs, its character ultimately ‘friendly and harmonious’ (241). Clark’s idea of a response to these notions is equally unusual, and would appear to endorse an amnesiac attitude towards knowledge in order that one might ‘forget . . . more than we know’. Instead, one should wholeheartedly welcome the truths of “science”, as detailed in his immediately preceding thought. In

many ways, Clark's critique reflects the tenor of a 'lack of discipline, pretention, excess and vagueness' typically attributed to Movement writing of the 1940s in general; and yet its stern invocation of, and sympathy with, late-Victorian and Romantic modes of writing – particularly the *fin-de-siècle*'s famous entrancement with science – precludes one's natural inclination to deem it an embryonic Movement manifesto (Caesar 31). Indeed, Clark's discourse seems more cognate with notions of the Victorian garden and its association with psychological sequestering. His reference to the 'Englishman', 'beauty', and the walled garden subtly recalls and challenges instances such as Tennyson's attempt in 'Mariana' to depict a walled garden as 'a parody of beauty that is ordered and controlled [with] the image of man as master of nature's beauty' (Kincaid 48). In short, like Tennyson, Clark appears to be 'imagin[ing] poetry and poetic processes in terms of gardens', and, in doing so, tacitly recalls several of the preoccupations and literary investments encoded within Victorian writing (Waters 98). Commenting on the lecture series more recently, Jeff Malpas described Clark's *modus operandi* as an attempt to elucidate how, in art at least, humankind in 1944 was 'attempt[ing] once more to create a harmony with its environment', a motivation that was driven by, according to Mitchell, a renewed attempt to reclaim and redefine 'innocence' in the wake of the First World War (vii). Returning to *Jill*, it is this very quest for innocence that forms Kemp's greatest preoccupation. Indeed, one might argue that the theme of innocence is *Jill*'s overarching leitmotif, and extends to include the eponymous Jill Bradley herself, whose adolescence – as we shall see – is constructed around a

series of simulacral images and associations related to Victorian notions of sexual purity.

Thus, according to Clark's rubric, the ubiquity of innocence as a theme is some of the best evidence the novel can garner to validate its rightful status as a "post-war" novel (133). Rather than featuring merely as the target of one solipsistic protagonist, a Clarkian approach might well deem innocence a socio-political tenet whose reclamation is a central thirst for society as a whole. Cited below is the novel's central epiphany. It is a curious moment of self-realisation, reminiscent of a hyperbolic Shakespearian murder scene. In it, a knife-wielding Kemp is struck, seemingly at the point of murder, by a sudden moment of cogitation. At this point, the image of the lone knifeman, heart thumping at the prospect of the impending bloodshed, dissolves into a mawkish discourse of the nature, and symbolic manifestation of innocence in a dramatic change of tone whose ridiculousness borders on the bathetic:

He sat spellbound, holding his knife, his heart beating loudly. The sensation he had was of looking intently into the centre of a pure white light: he seemed to see the essence of Jill, around which all the secondary material things formed and reformed as he wrote them down. He thought he saw exactly what she was and how he should express it: the word was *innocent*, one he had used dozens of times in his own mind, and yet until that moment had never understood (133).

Kemp's euphoria here is profound. On a metaphoric level, the flagrant symbolism of 'pure white light' becomes a type of centrifuge, both drawing in, and transmuting, the awkwardly-termed 'secondary material'.

Simultaneously, on a syntactic level, the elongation of sentences, together with a conspicuous repetition of the pronoun 'he', adds to the atmosphere of personal revelation. The combination of both sets of forces creates a poetic moment that strikes us as stylistically over-wrought: it is both descriptive of, and somehow inhabited by, the same moment of expressive confusion it is seeking to describe, giving the reader the uncomfortable impression that Larkin-the-author may, himself, be nearing apostrophe. The central image in the extract is of an article finally coming into focus; the limpid vision of a side to the Self which has hitherto been blurred or obscured. Importantly, the moment alludes to Larkin's advocacy of the landscape aesthetics of Clark, along with the latter's treatise on recapturing innocence following an act of war. Indeed, much like wartime Britain, Kemp's mind is unsettled and struggles to access the purity of feeling necessary to express Jill's innocence fully. After all, this extract constitutes both a written act and an act-of-writing, since the scene portrayed herein is Kemp's struggle to find apt vocabulary to write about Jill in his novel.

An alternative reading might suggest that this scene is the fictional counterpart of a letter Larkin sent to James Sutton – a theory that is not altogether incompatible with the reading above. In the letter, penned on 16 June 1941, Larkin advances his views to Sutton regarding the role of women in the artistic process – an espousal which sees him enthusiastically

paraphrasing another lecture he had recently attended, this time delivered by John Layard. Larkin's letter to Sutton is partially cited below:

The solution as [Layward] saw it was that women should be the priestesses of the unconscious and help men to regain all the vision they have lost . . . What women must do is – as they are in the unconscious, rubbing shoulders with all these archetypes and symbols that man so needs – is to bring them up and give them to man (qtd. in Leader 103).

It is easy to see why Layard's views were so appealing to Larkin: not only were they uniquely compatible with Clark's vision for recapturing lost innocence through art, but they demoted the status of women to the servile level of a symbolic facilitator to man's inadequate creative aptitudes. Layard's "woman" is merely a catalyst to this end, assisting with the redelivery of a symbolic freight into the work after a period of personal (or indeed national) disillusionment. That Sutton's friendship played an important role in cementing Larkin's new views on art and literature during this time is well-documented.<sup>41</sup> Sutton, after all, was a Slade scholar, and a pupil of the same Kenneth Clark who so influenced Larkin's own ideas on art. A year later in 1942, Larkin would jubilantly write to Sutton, stating that 'there has been a

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<sup>41</sup> Leader in *The Life of Kingsley Amis* states that both 'Larkin and Sutton shared a Laurentian sense of mission and election' (101), while Motion mentions how the pair shared 'a passionate interest in jazz, literature and (on Sutton's side) painting' (*AWL* 39). Gilroy, most valuably, levels a contrast between Larkin's friendship with Sutton (with whom 'he shared the profounder, cultural, interests of music literature and art') against his friendships with Gunner, Hughes (et al.) who 'reflected his more outgoing self' (10).

change in the English psyche. The wind is blowing in “a new direction of time,” and I feel that you and I, who will be if anyone the new artists, are onto it.’ Whether remembering these correspondences with Sutton or not, the pair’s friendship at this particular time in 1942–44 was characterised by a shared enthusiasm for creative discussion and enterprise, the results of which glimmer gently behind the above extract from *Jill*.

While the *Jill* extract above may help us understand Larkin’s creative allegiances, his attempt to engage the trope of place to evoke a sense of Englishness occurs, most conspicuously, earlier in the novel. Kemp’s epiphany about innocence follows shortly after a scene in which Jill is playing the piano. In the same scene, Kemp observes Jill in voyeuristic secrecy from a shadow-flecked lawn, separated by ‘palpable’ air that stands between them like ‘a transparent sea’. Despite the atmosphere of oneirism that imbues the language arising from Kemp’s infatuation and ‘gently stirred’ emotions, the scene quickly assumes a somewhat elegiac tone, with the narrator ostensibly hankering after a departed, Edwardian-esque England:

Jill came into his mind, as now she would (though he did not know this yet) whenever his emotions were stirred gently. He imagined that it was she playing the piano that he could hear and that they both lived in a big house with gardens. He was on the lawn in the evening; the lawn was in shadow and the sun was so low in the sky that it only caught the attic windows. The colours of the flowers and the striped deckchairs that were still left out had grown indistinct . . . He could see her sitting at the

piano dressed in white. She bent her head slightly to see the music and her shoulders moved as she played. Her fair hair was controlled with a ribbon; her arms, her whole body, were so slender that the bones showed through softly (101-102).

On a first reading, the scene appears to be one of carefree repose, far removed from the skirmishes and anxieties of war: both natural and human features co-exist in seeming harmony and supply the stable, attractive backdrop upon which the narrator describes Kemp's imagined voyeurism. A closer reading, however, reveals the scene to be replete with various malignancies. While no walls surround the garden, the setting is nevertheless communicative of several unspoken boundaries indicative of symbolic and psychological containment.<sup>42</sup> The scopophilic Kemp, situated outside and concealed in shadow, is looking in at an illuminated Jill whose otherwise unruly hair is 'controlled with a ribbon'. The very use of the word 'control' seems to provoke a frisson of sexual energy in Larkin's narrator whose heightened excitement provokes pleonastic repetition ('her arms, her whole body'). The garden itself appears blanched, with the warm evening sunlight failing to draw out the 'the colours of the flowers' and 'striped deckchairs', instead making them appear 'indistinct'. Indeed, the heavy reliance on place *topoi* seems less an attempt at rendering literal or metaphoric 'colour' and

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<sup>42</sup> For a detailed exposition of the iconography of the walled garden in Victorian literature see Rosenberg's *Elegy of an Age: The Presence of the Past in Victorian Literature*.

more an attempt to develop a symbolic protocol into which Kemp's unconscious ruminations might be positioned.

The power struggle that fizzles behind the scene (whose colours appear to be 'washed out' by Jill's pervasive whiteness) arguable recalls the ancient *locus amoenus*. In this instance, the corollaries with Larkin's scene and the *locus amoenus* prompts us to consider the possibility of a double-meaning upon the word '*locus*' as both the Latin 'place', and the Homeric appropriation *lucus*, a 'grove', to which it bears a substantial visual semblance.<sup>43</sup> Importantly, as per the ancient Roman prototype, Larkin's *locus amoenus* is a '*shaded* natural site' (Howes 16; emphasis mine); though in addition to the classical version, possesses the undertones of a later, medieval appropriation in which white objects and people connote Christian purity. The Christian uptake of the term took place, according to Giamatti, during a time in which 'Christian poets plundered Elysium to decorate the earthly paradise', reconstructing 'the classical *topos* of a perfect spot into a Christian *topos* of *the* perfect spot' (15, 17; Howes's emphasis). The Christian poet's prerogative in reassigning the 'perfect spot' from the indefinite article 'a' to the definite 'the' betrays the absoluteness of Hebraistic thinking. As such, it prepares the notion for uptake into the Christian iconographic doctrines of medieval England. Clearly recognising this, Howes writes convincingly about the medieval tendency to demarcate purity through

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<sup>43</sup> The genealogy of the term, together with its deployment in literature, and the symbolism which it came to embody, can in fact be seen to evolve through 'Homer, Theocritus, Virgil Petronius, and Tiberianus' (Curtius qtd. in Howes, 16).

whiteness when a medieval narrator visualises an earthly or “postlapsarian” perfection:

In the Middle English *Pearl* . . . the earthly paradise visited by the narrator in his dream, includes . . . a path of pearls [and] trees with silver leaves . . . all while retaining the requisite aspects of the *locus amoenus* (17).

Therefore, it is worth considering that Jill’s presence, ‘dressed in white’, might not simply constitute a short-circuited attempt by Kemp to force the object of his desire to adorn themselves in the motivic costume of Renaissance purity. On the contrary, Jill’s ‘white dress’, her ‘pure white light’ innocence and translucent bone-revealing skin may well connect the scene with a more ancient set of theoretical antecedents via the ‘Christianised’ *locus amoenus* which, with its mixture of shade and verdancy, constitutes a revised appropriation of the trope that never completely frees itself from the symbolic trappings of its original Latin prototype.<sup>44</sup> Yet, antithetically, Larkin’s

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<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, Larkin’s symbolic focus on white light here coincides with a time during which the writer was at great pains to get his symbolic appropriations of light recognised by the public. Larkin had penned a collection of poems entitled *In the Grip of Light* in 1947 and, unlike Motion (who joins Larkin in writing off the collection as inconsequential), I agree with Regan who takes a more open-minded view of the work, particularly its attempt to offer a foretaste of ‘those radiant, visionary moments that Seamus Heaney celebrates in his essay ‘The Main of Light’ (*New Larkins for Old* 121). Regan does not use the term ‘heuristic’; however, his suggestion that certain creative endeavours during this period would sit dormant offering instead ‘the more literal sense of foreshadowing things to come’, underpins much of what I argue for in this thesis (122). Namely, that much of Larkin’s earlier work visibly appears to experiment – often concertedly – with symbolisms that would later reach a more virtuoso expression in his later work (In this case, see also chapters 5 and 6 where a deeply symbolic light

scene also bears a resemblance to a less chaste *locus* whose origins, Howes conjectures, arose from Isidore of Seville's belief that '*amoenus* was derived from *amor*'<sup>45</sup> and established itself initially among the 'Vernacular poets' writing in 'Provençal and French' (18). Larkin's broader intention in portraying, through Kemp, the troubling consequences of ungoverned subjectivity profits from, and mirrors, the French version's focal shift from the garden space, to the emotions of the viewer. The French garden's 'secluded, ordered, beautiful setting for the seizure by, or the loss of, love' not only stands in opposition to the Christian appropriation of Edenic perfection, but problematises, as Larkin does, the delineation between character, narrator and "dreamer" (Boase 115). Referring to Guillaume de Lorris's cognisance of the proximate *hortus conclusus* in *Roman de la Rose*, and anticipating the Victorian emphasis on boundaries, Howes states that

the enclosure stimulates the dreamer/narrator to desire entrance into the garden, since he anticipates a state of perfection, although it is an imagined perfection very different from that . . . described by Christian exegetes (19).

While Larkin scholarship has acknowledged that the poet's exhibition of French modes and tropes are a common characteristic of his later poetry (his

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reappears as 'the radio's altarlight' as well as encode a flickering sense of Christian redemption behind 'Aubade').

<sup>45</sup> Barney, conversely, attributes the apparent etymological malapropism to Varro ("pleasant places" are so called because they promote love [*amor*]) suggesting, paradoxically, that the term's misappropriation to erotic writing might have been ascribed through reasons other, or in addition to, lexical confusion.)

earlier work demonstrating, more closely, a progressive allegiance from ‘Auden to Yeats to Hardy’ [Hamilton 88]), such beliefs have centred, quite specifically, on Larkin’s debt to French symbolism.<sup>46</sup> However, I suggest that it is Larkin’s conflation of the French *locus amor* with former, classical incarnations of the *locus amoenus* which most closely exemplify the writer’s emotional agenda for Kemp: both as a novelist – conveyed through Kemp’s status as both a ‘dreamer’ and ‘narrator’ of his own story – and as a stock character ‘desir[ing] entrance into the garden’ to satiate a futile desire for ‘imagined perfection’ (Howes 19).<sup>47</sup>

The furtherance of the French thought, besides the confusion of dreaming and rationality exemplified in the *locus amor*, bears a tangential semblance to the space poetics of Bachelard. Despite being a contemporary of Larkin’s, I argue that Bachelard’s notion may serve to substantiate the traditional *locus amor*, rather than advance an altogether different poetics of place associated with 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenology. As I have mentioned, Larkin’s reference of the attic space in the excerpt is, in many ways, an embryonic instance of the high symbolism that Larkin would later apply to his poetry<sup>48</sup>; yet its role in *Jill* seems less concerned with the attic space as a

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<sup>46</sup> Barbara Everett’s ‘Philip Larkin: After Symbolism’ (1980) documents Larkin’s acquaintances and affinities with French poets, such as Gautier and Mallarmé’ (qtd. in Gilroy 104). Larkin and symbolism is covered in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>47</sup> The garden’s intersection with issues of narration is again revisited by Victorian writers who believed ‘circumspection made [them] conducive to the making and maintaining of fiction’ (Waters 223).

<sup>48</sup> For example, ‘fulfilment’s desolate attic’ in ‘Deceptions’, and the ‘thought of high windows’ in ‘High Windows’; also the overarching image which looms over Larkin’s arguably most symbolic collection, *High Windows*.

location of sexual crime, such as in 'Deceptions', but, rather, is cognate with the *locus amor's* preoccupation with dreaming, reality and misguided fictional narratives. Significantly, in the garden scene, Kemp is situated in shade with the 'the sun . . . so low in the sky that it only caught the attic windows'. To direct light on the attic, and the near luminous Jill, but to shade all else is odd, and seems to point us towards an emblematic linkage between Jill and the attic space itself; the two entities are, quite literally, highlighted. While it would be dangerous to suggest the moment is an unconscious anticipation of the sexual depravity of the symbolic attic in 'Deceptions', Bachelard's belief that the attic represents a symbolic and subjective attempt to concretise a dream world by obfuscating dreams with rational acts is compelling when one considers Larkin's already strange coupling of the two spaces.

Bachelard argues that, like Kemp

The dreamer constructs and reconstructs the upper stories and the attic . . . When we dream of the heights we are in the rational zone of intellectualized projects [unlike the cellar, where] rationalisation is less rapid and less clear (19).

The 'Less rapid and less clear' rationalization associated with the attic alludes to the absolute depletion of Kemp's rational faculties; it is the very loosening of reality which later sees him attempting to kiss Jill who, in real-life, embodies his own 'intellectualized project' gone awry. Thus, through recalling the ancient *topoi* of the *locus amoenus* and its subsequent French re-appropriation, and overlaying upon these several more modern notions of symbolism and place, the excerpt in *Jill* not only reveals a great deal about

Larkin's trajectory towards poetic maturity, but also demonstrates the extent to which his understanding of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century modes of place-making play a key role in colouring the romance narrative in his novel.

Within the ensuing chapters, Kemp's narrativisation of Jill gathers momentum. Having ascertained that 'innocence' shall be the guiding characteristic for his quasi-fictional Jill, Kemp attempts to meld his own fiction with the real girl upon which his scopophilic fantasies are attached, provoking the hope that 'through her he might enter this . . . innocent life she led' (152). A faux legitimisation compounds his deluded, fantastical world upon the discovery that Elizabeth's cousin is, in fact, named 'Gillian' (156). It is at this point, during which Kemp's unruly subjectivity cedes to absolute fantasy, that Larkin's place aesthetic appears to reflect Ruskin's idea of the pathetic fallacy. Awaking one morning having spent the previous evening overhearing conversational fragments about Elizabeth's cousin, Kemp's mood is buoyed. The poor weather, rather than becoming the backdrop to his mood, instead appears to be responsive to it, with the trees themselves becoming 'agents' to his delusional intent:

[I]n half an hour it would be an ordinary dull morning. But John did not see it like that; this half-light, this standing as it were on a prow coming over the edge of a new day, all seemed to represent the imminence of something new. And what could that be but Jill? The wet grass in the quadrangle, the brooding of the cloisters, the trees with their dripping twigs, and, above all, the wind – these felt like the agents of some great force that

was on his side. He felt sure that he was going to succeed  
(164).<sup>49</sup>

The 'half-light' is, in many ways, a coda to the complicated set of symbolic applications connoted to light and shade in Kemp's dream of Jill at the piano; though its metaphoric weight is overbalanced here, by a more overtly expressionistic notion of sentient cloisters, trees and wind whose own effervescent madness appear to mirror Kemp's. That Larkin nears catachresis in hyperbolically referring to these landscape features as 'agents' further underscores the suggestion that these objects possess an autonomy enabling them to goad Kemp towards his delusion. This mimetic presentation of nature exhibits more than a passing resemblance to aspects of Ruskin's pathetic fallacy. Writing in the third volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin states that

All violent feelings have the same effect. They produce in us a  
falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I

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<sup>49</sup> More recently, Douglas Davis accounts for the symbolic coupling of trees with intellectual thought ('trees are not simply good to climb, they are good to think. Much of their wood is fuel for metaphorical fires' [34]). Perhaps most compelling is Davis's elucidation of the symbolic deployment of trees by the Ancients. The 'dreadful realm of tall poplars and the fruit-destroying willows' (Rahner, 1971) encountered during Odysseus's trip to Hades both recall tree species with which Larkin is preoccupied at this time: the darkly sentient 'long sibilant-muscled . . . black poplars' of 'Night-Music' (1944) and the looming symbolic freight of the eponymous Willow Gables school (*Trouble at Willow Gables*, 1943) imply Larkin's choice of tree species was not entirely arbitrary. The often self-destructive ruminations of narrators in these pieces reflects the willow's biological role as 'murderer of its own fruit', for instance (Rahner qtd. in Davies 37).

would generally characterize as the "Pathetic fallacy". . . The temperament which admits the pathetic fallacy, is . . . that of a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them; borne away, or over-clouded, or over-dazzled by emotion; and it is a more or less noble state, according to the force of the emotion which has induced it (5.205).

Ruskin's use of the verb 'admits' here is interesting: it implies that despite being overpowered by such tumultuous emotion, the individual's transference of personal feelings into 'external things' is something which, on some level, is willingly chosen. Larkin offers few indications as to Kemp's personal avowal of the pathetic fallacy. However, Kemp's experience is clearly analogous to Ruskin's dictum more broadly. Much like Kemp's experience in the quad, Ruskin describes a kind of emotional reciprocity with landscape in which 'violent' feelings (in Kemp's case, unrequited desire) prompt 'false impressions' of 'external things'. These false impressions manifest themselves on a grammatical level (the 'brooding of the cloisters' is a hypallage) as well as a more literal level through the explicit assertion that certain spatial features are agents. These features then confirm their falseness back to the perceiver (Kemp) who is 'too weak to deal fully with what is before them'. Larkin adapts the scene, but pushing Ruskin's notion of the pathetic fallacy to the maximum: Kemp's 'violent feeling' is strong, the false 'impressions of external things' not only appears wholly real, but also is presented as being entirely in cahoots with their will.

The pathetic fallacy, then, in this particular instance in *Jill* could be argued to be an instance of *absolute* externalisation – an intensifying negative feedback loop of externalised feeling which affords Kemp an entirely false degree of emotional reciprocity. Such a notion troubles Ruskin's own later attempt to exonerate the pathetic fallacy from the inevitable solipsism of subjectivity, and may go some way to explaining Landow's iteration of Ruskin's own belief that using the 'pathetic fallacy to dramatise the mental states and experiences of a character . . . produce[s] an essentially unbalanced (and characteristically Romantic) literature' (378; 14). The belief adds credence to views that *Jill* unflinchingly expresses Romantic tropes consistent with understandings of the *genius loci* of that period,<sup>50</sup> though the very proximity to Ruskin's own understanding of the pathetic fallacy, together with its interrelation with symbolism and phenomenology, demonstrates that Larkin's debt to pre-existing place tropes is not an exclusively Romantic one. I would argue that a principal difference between the Ruskinian subjective reciprocity with place and that of Wordsworth is the former's tendency to operate the model around negative states of minds, rather than positive ones. Indeed, while Wordsworth's communion with his late sister along the banks of the River Wye is, admittedly, sombre,<sup>51</sup> the resulting reaction performed by weather and place upon attainment of the

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<sup>50</sup> For a concise overview of the Romantic *genius loci* and its derivation, see Hartman's *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays, 1958-1970*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1970.

<sup>51</sup> From 'Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey': 'For thou art with me, here, upon the banks / Of this fair river; thou my dearest friend . . . / and in thy voice I catch / The language of my former heart' (116-119).

transcendental connection with the dead is predominantly deemed to be positive for the spirit. Ruskin, however, seems to ally such moments of subjective reciprocity with place with grossly disquieted, and repressed mental states. The consequent pathetic fallacy, unlike Wordsworth's, seems to augment these states of mental disquietude rather than dispel them.

In the pages that follow the introduction of this pathetic fallacy, Larkin's place aesthetic tightens as Kemp begins to succumb to hallucinatory imaginings. Typographically, the narration is ruptured by Kemp's own diary entries about Jill, which are written in italics. Their arrival carefully and mimetically embodies Kemp's attempt to regain control over his feelings, though like Jill (whose earlier position behind Kemp on a pavement 'changed their roles [making him] the one that was hunted') the narrative itself stubbornly maintains a certain authority over Kemp whose efforts to "possess" Jill through narration self-implodes. As a consequence, the reader is unable to reliably discern which narrative articulates the "true" course of events with features of both the diary entries, and primary narration, seeming to intermix and meld. The sentience contained within certain life-exuding fixities of place also re-emerges with the 'stars march[ing] frostily across the sky' as Kemp's drunken stupor collapses into a bathetic break during which he attempts conversation with a tree:

He stumbled and swore and ran into a tree. At this he paused and told the tree what he was looking for. While talking he noticed a staircase (219).

The comedy of the moment is self-evident; however, its appearance also reminds us of Larkin's earlier reference to such trees as 'agents of some great force that was on his side', leading us to conjecture whether Kemp's craving for emotional reciprocity has heightened to the point of prompting him into actual conversation with inanimate objects. His efforts at sequestering Jill within narrative are also mockingly reversed, seeming to backfire, and, in doing so, prompt place itself to offer up its own rebuke. The retaliation is as vivid as it is vicious. Place comes to life with 'singing and shouting', a tremulous noise which 'rebound[s] from the sky as if the sky were a low damp vault'. Faintly reminiscent of an enraged Greek God, the meteorological disturbance progresses to animalistic violence with the transcendent trees 'throwing their heads like impatient horses [and] clashing their proud branches together like antlers of furious stags' (221; 225).

Were it not for the unmissable seriousness in their delivery, the moments described above might well be read as a fine example of the Movement's commitment to satirizing tone and sentimentality. After all, irony features prominently around the sentience of inanimate fixities of place. However, the histrionic nature of Kemp's suffering here would seem to negate any suggestion that Larkin was satirizing the Movement, given the latter's hostility towards overt sentimentalism. As such, I argue that Larkin may have taken his inspiration from an altogether different set of stylistic departure points. Some of Larkin's technique appears to recall the sensational place aesthetics of Collins. Therefore, at this point, I propose we turn our attentions to *Jill's* evocation of the Victorian sensationalist genre with

reference to Collins's *Basil*. In Collins's novel, the eponymous Basil experiences a similar thwarted romance whose unconsummated sexual ardour manifests itself in a psychological fixation with place and weather. During his earlier fantasies, Basil, like Kemp, experiences dreams of an idealised woman, Margaret, whose associated themes and spatial *topoi* closely parallel Kemp's earlier dreams of Jill. Basil dreams of a 'plain . . . bounded by thick woods' near hills that rose into 'beautiful white clouds'. Two women approach the space, one dressed in a robe that is 'white, and pure, and glistening' and the other shaded in 'cloud-shadows' (41). The bounded space, shading and predominance of whiteness all recall the *locus amoenus* of the *Jill* scene. Furthermore, included within Collins's landscape, are a plethora of smaller iconographic indicators serving to inculcate the two women with a deeper symbolic texture: the 'harvest-moon', combines 'harvest' – a time of natural fecundity synonymous with burgeoning female sexuality – and the 'moon' a commonly held symbolic reference to chastity via the Greek goddess Diana. Both women approach Basil until 'the hills and the plain were joined together' (41); the description later depicts a seemingly liminal or indeterminate place which itself suggests a profound encoding of this psychological portrayal of Basil's mind. As Ruskin states in his essay *Modern Painters*:

The spirit of the hills is action, that of the lowlands repose; and between these there is to be found every variety of motion and of rest, [including] the inactive *plain*, sleeping like the firmament (427; emphasis mine).

Ruskin delineates the associations connected to the varying topographical regions: the hills of 'action' (from whence Basil's ethereal women emerge); to the spurning 'action' of Basil's feverish dream and its expression of a confused sexuality; to the 'inactive plain' described as 'sleeping'. Kemp experiences this in his own right; his stupefying alcohol-induced delirium mirrors Ruskin's 'lowlands [of] repose', and cedes an image in which he and Jill dwell

in a sort of cottage . . . it was near the sea and had a long overgrown garden full of weeds and raspberry canes. They sprawled together on the couch and John was filled with a lassitude so great that it alarmed him (224).

Similarly, Basil at the height of his delirium sees himself and his beloved Margaret alongside

a still, black lake of dead waters [in] a white, faint, misty light. Outspread over the noisome ground lay the ruins of a house, rooted up and overthrown to its foundations (140).

Both Collins and Larkin seem to be subverting the pre-existing, positive connotations connected with the isolated country cottage originally envisaged via Wordsworthian Romanticism,<sup>52</sup> while nevertheless struggling to free themselves from its greater place *topoi* and, in Collins's case, failing also to

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<sup>52</sup> Nicolas Fox outlines the iconographic endurance of the Wordsworthian country cottage, and its capacity to dissolve the gap between modernity and the classical idyll: 'The country cottage and the simple, bucolic life still hold the promise of restoration for many jaded urbanities' (60).

escape the 'whiteness' of the *locus amoenus* (the light is still 'white' though admittedly 'faint, [and] misty'). Fundamentally, however, unlike both men's dream visions prior to their romantic thwarting the landscapes appear more unkempt and do not pedestal and "whiten" their respective desired women.

My focus, thus far, has centred on Larkin's expression of Kemp's emotional descent, and the tropes through which the full immiseration of this descent is expressed. Larkin's attempt to describe Kemp's longing for an emotional schematic with which to compute his desire provokes a retrograde attempt to reawaken departed literary modes; such an attempt is, on the whole, artfully delivered, despite the sense of stylistic anachronism that hangs over it, and Larkin is reasonable in expressing his disappointment that such stylistic moves failed to be acknowledged. Concurrent to this, I have argued that the recognition of *Jill's* tropic realisation of place depends upon, to some degree at least, a rejection of received readings of *Jill* that consider it stylistically inchoate.

I now wish to problematise my own claims, by suggesting that upon diverting attention away from the climactic quagmire of Kemp's breakdown Larkin uses *Jill* herself to embody several notions related to the synthesis of Englishness through the act of remembering. To best understand this, I propose we turn to the contemporary thought of Edward Casey and Jeff Malpas whose understandings of the poetics of memory are closely tied with theories of place. Needless to say, these particular evocations of place do *not* lean upon pre-20<sup>th</sup> century rubrics for their successful realisation; instead, a reading of *Jill* through the more contemporary theories of Casey and

Malpas reveals that Larkin was not only diverse in his execution of place-making, but also remarkably cutting-edge.

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In his monograph *The Poetry of Place*, Jeremy Hooker inadvertently scores a subtle yet important delineation between a subjective envisioning of place and its connection to ideas of nationhood; whose dialectical relationship, in a post-Romantic epoch, may have hitherto been mistaken for mere interchangeability. Paraphrasing Matthew Arnold's reading of Wordsworth, Hooker states that Wordsworth 'had given a new life to hills', but that we should exercise caution 'to see in these lines a dream of England' (182-3). Continuing to spurn Arnold, Hooker refers to his anachronistic critical method of 'substituting a romantic landscape for the cultural reality': the conflation of which, we can assume, diminishes the maxims of both.<sup>53</sup> In short, a subjective, Romantic sense of place, should be separated from more concrete notions of nationhood or "Englishness" with emphasis put more on one's role in engendering the other, rather than their coterminous existence. This unyoking of the 'the national imagination' from 'the poetical imagination'

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<sup>53</sup> Hooker points to Housman as, broadly, an exemplifier of this. Housman's faux endorsement of nationhood implies his *de facto* endorsement of imperial, culturally English themes, although such themes are, in fact, illusive and employed merely to heighten the *subjective* experience of landscape. ('Housman never in his life climbed Bredon Hill . . . Despite all the selling points of Elgar . . . the sense and sensibility of place was evidently not, after all, a necessary condition for the creation of English Art' (Leyshon 191). Toby Loeffler also observes the trend adopted in Ford's writing: '[Parades End] . . . by repeatedly reminding the reader of the English nation . . . reconstructs English national identity while, simultaneously, recoiling from nationalist "parades"' (20).

– both of which ‘are realized and perfected’ in a process arguably precipitated by the passing of the First World War<sup>54</sup> – affords us new ways of looking at an individual’s cognisance of place as *separate*, though not necessarily *disconnected* from, nationhood. I argue here that Larkin utilises this new separation of place and nationhood to enrich the depiction of Kemp’s emotional faculties, particularly via the blurring of his own, manufactured image of Jill with a lost or inchoate Englishness, and his tendency to use individual places as emotional “fixities” of memory. While Mitchell’s view that ‘landscape is the medium by which evil is veiled and naturalised’ possesses a degree of currency in explicating Kemp’s deferral to landscape to cloak his furtive and often queasy scopophilic infatuation for Jill as ‘the one that was hunted’ (vii; 153). I argue that Larkin’s deployment of England and Englishness is, generically at least, ‘characterised as regressive’<sup>55</sup> in its nostalgia, but is also – and in many ways consequentially – a fundamental part of what makes Jill herself desirable to Kemp (Leader 247). England, then, not only becomes a by-product of the novel’s half-hearted commitment to a Movement rubric, but is also a simulacral composite of sexual desire.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> A detailed discussion on this can be found in Ingelbien’s *Misreading England: Poetry and Nationhood Since the Second World War*.

<sup>55</sup> Leader’s statement that Larkin’s portrayal of Englishness is also ‘reactionary’, begins to gain credence in the later poems of *High Windows* (one thinks of ‘Going, Going’ [1972]) when a nostalgic longing for a lost England jars most conspicuously with the post-Movement milieu in which these poems were composed.

<sup>56</sup> This elaborate treatment of England and desire was not unfamiliar to other movement writers: comparing the Englishness of *Jill* and the heroine of *A Girl In Winter*, Leader states, ‘the beauty of Oxfordshire is wholesome, the

This connection between sex and England in Larkin's poetry has not gone unnoticed by critics. Examining the stylistic consequences of Larkin's fractious relationship with dismantled British imperialism, Corcoran notes that:

Larkin's idea of England is as deep and intimately wounded by such post-imperial withdrawals as some of the personae of his poems are wounded by sexual impotence (87).

The view that Larkin's sense of Englishness is 'wounded' by 'post-imperial withdrawals' would no doubt be supported by Regan, who asserts that, rather than peddling a 'conservative vision of the nation', Larkin's poetry is 'responsive to the fractures and collisions in post-war English culture' ('Reputations' 67). Significantly, however, while identifying the connection between impotent sexuality and national decline, Corcoran does not overtly state whether the sexually-thwarted 'personae' of Larkin's poems are agents of this decline, or are principally responsive to it. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that Corcoran's critique is hampered by his singular focus on the poetry where textured characterisation happens to be intrinsically limited. Chatterjee's famous address of Larkin's treatment of nationhood and personae in *Philip Larkin: Poetry that Builds Bridges* cunningly nudges the conversation away from the strict confines of the word 'sexual' – a word frequently deployed by the likes of Janice Rossen and Clark on this topic –

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landscape equivalent of the beauty of Christine, the heroine in Amis's *Lucky Jim* (256).

instead favouring the broader, quasi-sexual noun 'yearning'.<sup>57</sup> Chatterjee questions the presence of any singularity in the personae's lament for a departed England, choosing instead to categorise this trait as the inevitable presence of nostalgia within the human condition, albeit one which often includes aspects of sexual frustration:

Larkin is never nostalgic only for the imperial glory of England that is lost. [The poems] amply illustrate that Larkin's nostalgia is an expression of a universal human emotion, a longing, lingering look behind, a groping for that tender phase of life that is buried in the past . . . assuming the form of a yearning now for a lost landscape . . . now for the pristine innocence he can no longer feel . . . now for the love that is lost (10-11).

In *Jill*, it is Kemp's 'yearn[ing]' for an imagined recipient to his desire which prompts the evolution of Jill from a real person, who is unattainable, into a fictional person, who is attainable. Originally intended as a sister, Jill's promotion to the status of 'girlfriend' in Kemp's mind immediately develops Kemp's fantasy along more sexual lines. Moreover, the point at which Jill attains the autonomy of a sexual partner comes at a point in which the lustre of Englishness becomes virtually inseparable from Kemp's experience of writing:

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<sup>57</sup> Chatterjee refers to the 'critical bias [employed by] feminist critics like Steve Clark and Janice Rossen who have focussed their attention solely on the issue of Larkin's "sexual politics"' (11).

His pen hung over the word 'Kemp'. He did not like it. He did not, he found, want to connect her with himself in that way. What should he call her? After a moment he finished it: *Miss Jill Bradley*. Bradley was a nice name, it was English, it was like saddle-leather and stables (112).

The quote clearly demonstrates Kemp's attempt to depict Englishness as innocent and natural. A connection is established through the hard nouns of 'Brad-ley' and the visceral undertones of the 'saddle-leather' housed within the coarse, rugged environment of the 'stable'. Both images hardly endow the new, wilder Jill with the porcelain-like, excruciating youthful qualities of her earlier characterisation. Instead, rather than existing as 'the embodiment of romance: feminine, ephemeral, and . . . desirable' Larkin imports the more vital images of saddle-leather and stables, overlaying their imagistic essence upon Jill's more established "innocent" visual and behavioural traits (Aisenberg 141). Furthermore, the scene is besmirched by Kemp's queasy tendency to inflict the idiom of sexuality upon moments which do not duly call for it, such during his reverie of Jill riding her horse, Toby, through the English countryside in 'wordless ecstasy' (131). Similarly, the 'blue and white riband[ed]' Jill of Willow Gables school with her gentle, reluctant intellect and susceptibility to bullying becomes suddenly and rigorously sexualised having acquired a set of contexts freighted via a pastoral, traditional vision of England.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, the new quasi-aristocratic, horse-riding Jill is

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<sup>58</sup> The conflation of innocence and "traditional" Englishness anticipates poems such as 'MCMXIV' in which the passing of 'servants . . . in huge

emancipated from her former imprisonment within the disempowering rhetoric of innocence and frailty. That Jill's sexual and spiritual emancipation occurs at the very moment that she assumes the state of being Kemp's dreamed sexual companion (as opposed to sister) destabilises claims, such as Aisenberg's, that Kemp 'need[s] a purely innocent desire' (145); instead, the moment shows that Kemp is as much beguiled by his creation's own capacity for sexual autonomy and ability as he is by his own power to inflict upon her the very conditions and qualities necessary for his own personal, short-circuited sexual fulfilment.<sup>59</sup> Importantly, in this sense, Jill becomes "liberated" only upon being viewed in relation to England. The effect is furthered by Kemp's decision to post his letter to Jill, complete with address, to the fictional Willow Gables school. The act not only complicates further Kemp's need to consolidate sexual desire with a sense of old England, but foregrounds the novel's commitment to ekphrasis.<sup>60</sup> The resulting notion is

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houses, the dust behind limousines' is mourned with the overarching, final lines, 'Never such innocence again' (32).

<sup>59</sup> Such moments parallel the ekphrastic agenda of the novel at large, deftly outlined by Simon Petch: 'John [Kemp]'s imagination is central to the novel . . . we are both seeing John and seeing with him' (27-8).

<sup>60</sup> Although *ekphrasis*, as Jean Hagstrum recognises, emerges around the same time as the prosopopoeia and constituted 'the special quality of giving voice and language to the otherwise mute art object', its marginal difference from the prosopopoeia has been keenly noted (qtd. in Heffernan 38). Larkin profits from this subtle difference, executing both techniques during the 1940s across his poetry and prose. I, like Aisenberg, happily consider *ekphrasis* to mean the artist's reanalysis of his creation; the creation itself being (as writing) *inanimate*. Prosopopoeia, on the other hand, does not acknowledge the artist's reflexive criticism, and instead refers to the creation's own *vocal* autonomy as an inanimate object (e.g. the 'sibilant-muscled trees' of 'Night-Music', *TNS*, 1946).

one of Kemp – the sleeplessly anxious undergraduate – having his creative work ratified, or “marked” by England itself:

He was trembling when he dropped it into a pillar-box . . . filled with exultation at the idea of thus speaking with nothingness. He envisaged the envelope wandering around England, collecting pencilled scribbles of suggestions on the front and back until, perhaps, a year or more hence, it came to rest in some dusty corner of a dead-letter office (113).

Kemp’s excitement at ‘speaking with nothingness’ is an important fallacy here; it reminds us of the elaborate matrix of illusions that make a reciprocal desire for Jill seem possible. Furthermore, it recalls an earlier instance in which Kemp’s desire of Jill seems momentarily complete on account of the real-life Jill intersecting with the fictional version, though not so fully as to undermine the clarity of the latter. Crucially, at that epiphanic moment of completion, in many respects emblematic of climax, Kemp’s mind switches from corporeal physicality to the image of ‘a sailing ship running home into the estuary of a river’ (157). While appealing to place *topoi* with no English loco-specificity, the undertones of imperialism conveyed via the returning ship do, nevertheless, indulge the reader with a vivid heterocosm whose maritime overtones do not entirely free the image from the shadows of a former colonial England. Moreover, it demonstrates, as Aisenberg remarks, that Kemp ‘is content with believing that Jill is a space or place, not a person

to whom he must actually relate' (145).<sup>61</sup> Given, then, that writing (and its ekphrastic reanalysis) is the sole expression of Kemp's ability to sexually dominate, the fantasy of Jill's multiply-amended letter is both a fantasised ratification, and aggrandisement, of his own freakish sexual system. Postal staff from sorting offices all over England add their 'pencilled scribbles' in an attempt to ascertain Jill's real identity, while Jill herself acquires, centripetally, the depth and texture of a varied set of English voices.<sup>62</sup> The letter's eventual demise in the 'dead letter office' anticipates Kemp's ultimate epiphanic revelation during the novel's final pages – namely, that 'love die[s], whether fulfilled or unfulfilled' (225).<sup>63</sup> The technique of employing a sense of Englishness in an ekphrastic moment of multiple narration recalls accounts of

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<sup>61</sup> The moment anticipates 'High Windows' where an unexpected (and symbolic) deferral to place at a moment of imaginative "completion" also occurs: 'And immediately / Rather than words comes the thought of high windows' (16-17).

<sup>62</sup> While Heaney's claim that Larkin as a 'poet . . . of composed and tempered English nationalism' (150) is astute in this context, Ingelbien is correct to identify the 'strains' that expose Heaney's critique of Larkin in his otherwise excellent essay 'Englands of the Mind' (1976). Perhaps more useful here, and subtly communicative of Larkin's implemental, rather than thematic, deployment of Englishness, is John Bayley's observation that, for Larkin, 'Englishness is not in the subject matter but in the way it conveys itself into our minds' ('English Equivocation' 4).

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Entrikin notes the importance of an 'understanding of the narrative-like qualities that . . . capture the peculiar connections between people and places'. Entrikin argues that narrative, in relation to place and history, is 'configurative . . . connect[ing] the parts to wholes' (128). Furthering this, Kemp's mixing of place, person and past supports Ricoeur's image of the historian as one who 'proceeds analytically by separate plans, leaving to the interferences that occur between them the task of producing an implicit image of the whole. The resulting 'virtual quasi-plot' that results reflects Kemp's epistolary palimpsest (215).

male-dominated 'colonial desire in Kipling's Anglo-India' (65). As Anjali Arondekar recognises:

Creative collaborations and narrative pacts are struck between Englishmen, as well as between native servants and their English masters. Each narrator plays an active part in each story's unfolding, reminding the reader constantly of his participation and control over the narrative he is crafting . . . [T]he narrative incorporates the narrator into the very picture it presents, thus eradicating the distant relation of observer and observed (75).

Indeed, it is Kemp's artificial eradication of the 'observer and observed' in his narration that engenders his decision to leap at the real-life Jill – a decision which earns him a blow to the face and a dousing in cold water from a fountain by the corporal-like Christopher Warner. His envisagement of the panoply of conflicting annotations gathering on the improperly-addressed letter to Jill represents, in many ways, Kemp's own loss of 'control over the narrative he is crafting': England, as a symbolic entity, slips free of his control, attaining an interpretive agency all of its own by way of the suggested addresses for the fictitious Willow Gables School, offered by postal staff from all corners of England. Thus, Kemp embarks on a sort of hermeneutic experiment with the aim of freeing himself, or at very least problematizing, the very symbolic vision of England that he originally cultivated: this vision is, quite literally, 'overwritten' as Kemp's vision is 'incorporat[ed] . . . into the picture' of a greater narrative, forcing Kemp

himself to become the ‘become the one that [is] hunted’ (75; 153). The resulting image is of an England that rises up, with its various provincial voices usurping the power of a single, centralised authority – a reversal of fates which bears no small resemblance to a recently liberated colonial power. It is little wonder that mere seconds before spying the real-life Jill, Larkin chooses to punctuate the moment by describing a black pedestrian, whose lavish dress and indifference within the white-dominated upper-class Oxford tacitly denotes a triumphant reassertion of control against Kemp’s quasi-imperial narrativisation of the captive ‘Other’:

a Negro pass[ing] . . . in an enormous fur coat, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles and carrying an ivory walking cane: John stood and stared vaguely after him (137).

John’s vague stare is also a comment in its own right, this time positioned in the gulf between Larkin-the-author and protagonist, rather than protagonist and *his* character – Jill. The black man’s presence, regaled in gold and ivory, arrives seemingly out of nowhere, and is a sharp reminder of the newfound economic triumph of an ethnic minority over its former oppressor. The gawkish ignorance of Kemp’s ‘vague stare’ is not an indictment of his unrelenting solipsism, but also shows his unawareness of a symbolic realm beyond that of his own misery. The black man’s presence on the streets of Oxford challenges the England-centric gambit by which Kemp is attempting to summon, or indeed ‘write’, Jill into existence. His inability to recognise the subtle moment of symbolism foreshadows his own inability to recognise the imminent collapse of his delusions. Just as Kemp relishes the control

afforded to him by writing and rewriting fictional versions of Jill, Larkin here interjects an ancillary symbolic moment, whose intention is to trip up Kemp in his own runaway game of symbolic misattribution. The moment shows that *Jill* is a novel which is at once subtle and deeply complicated: not only are symbolic conceits deployed by Larkin within place-making itself, but they are also deployed, ostensibly, by Kemp himself who in turn appears to respond to the symbolic nature of his author-ascribed surroundings. Effectively, Larkin confronts his protagonist with one of the novel's own symbolic turns – a process which is as intricate as it is well-timed, given the scene's placement just moments before Kemp experiences, at first hand, the injurious consequences of his own unchecked narrativised “dreaming”.

I wish finally to examine place's role in the process of remembering which, in turn, serves to orientate and to some degree stabilise Kemp's own sense of self. The thinking behind this emerges partly from Malpas's claim that ‘memory . . . cannot be understood independently of the place in which the memory is located’ (64), but more so from Casey's belief that ‘place imparts a “fixity” to memory that memory would not otherwise possess’ (63).

<sup>64</sup> The former statement is problematic in its use of the word ‘location’, both in its failure to qualify the noun with a suitably conceptual gloss, and its assumption that memory is a spatial phenomenon rather than a temporal one (or at least operates as such). Casey's elucidation on Malpas's statement

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<sup>64</sup> Both citations taken from Malpas's essay ‘The Remembrance of Place’ in *Exploring the Work of Edward S. Casey*, eds. Azucena Cruz-Pierre & Donald A. Landes (64).

seems sensible: memory cannot purely be temporal lest it seem ‘largely disembodied’, though Casey admits, too, that a temporal component is evident in one’s remembering (64). It is *place* rather than *time*, however, that seeds memory, according to Casey, with a given locational fixity ‘confer[ing] upon itself a temporal and spatial identity’ (64).<sup>65</sup> That place’s role in memory is largely overlooked and unstudied might be a result of criticism’s more recent preoccupation with the ‘temporal dimensions of memory’ – a trend Casey casts aside with the strident, hefty claim that ‘any genuine rethinking of memory cannot be pursued other than in connection with the rethinking of place’ (66).

For the same reason that the Heideggerian ‘nostalgic’ return home prompts a ‘convalescent’ effect on the mind, so a spatial fixity supplies the anxious Kemp with a degree of momentary reassurance owing to its ability to attach memory to a concrete ‘object’ in place, rather than the conceptual ‘abstraction’ of time (Malpas 310):

he saw once again the scarecrow buildings, the streets half heaved-up by detonations, the candlelit bar. It no longer seemed meaningless: . . . he thought it represented the *end of his use for the place*. It meant no more to him now, and so it

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<sup>65</sup> Writing in 2007 and 2013, respectively, Malpas and Casey nevertheless build on the Platonic notion that ‘thinking is understood as a return’ given, within the majority of their schematising, the locus of the thought is in the past. However, both thinkers are markedly post-Heidegger in their shared belief that, although thinking is largely ‘backward-looking’, it does not constitute ‘a returning home’ and, in so being, does not effuse the ‘convalescent’ properties of home that Heidegger extorts so highly (Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology* 310).

was destroyed: it seemed symbolic, a kind of annulling of his childhood (202; emphasis mine).

The loss of Kemp's childhood home, and its elimination as a spatial fixity in nostalgic remembrance, is a rejection of the Heideggerian mode of place and its associated symbolism of 'return[ing] home'. That Coventry's destruction 'represented the end of his use for the place' implies, moreover, an element of self-criticism to Kemp's thinking: he speaks as a scholar, whose relationship to the past – its mentation and philosophical schematisation – is being overwritten in a moment of self-criticism; a procedure which is underscored by his adoption of the critic's lexicon in the use of the term 'symbolic'. That Kemp, too, has no more 'use' for Huddlesford renders his subsequent referral to it as a place that 'meant no more to him' and was 'destroyed' seem like simple examples of commoratio – a further indication of the character's academic, rhetorical register.<sup>66</sup> Inversely, the moment immediately precedes another in which feeling is aroused as a result of a banal stimulus. However, while the stimulus is temporal (in this case – rather ironically – a chiming clock) the emotion that results, fundamentally, does not provoke Kemp into remembering despite the looming, almost sentient antiquity of his surroundings:

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<sup>66</sup> It is at moments such as these the gulf between author, narrator and character seem to dissolve, particularly given its proximity to the awkward autobiographical fragment 'What, you mean a real air-raid – like Coventry?' (186), and, more conceptually, Heaney's statement that Larkin was aware of his past as something which he '[knew] to be, among other things, a construction of the literary imagination' (44).

Above him soared the elaborate-shaped collages. And as five began to strike, his exalted exhaustion took one more queer twisted impulse from them. Their age was comforting: he could wrap himself in it like a cloak (203).

The final culmination of Kemp's repositioning of the place of memory away from Huddlesford and into Oxford is realised during a moment of inebriated solipsism in which his conjured image of Jill is remoulded:

He wondered in what exact spot at that exact time Jill was. He had not seen her at all since returning from Huddlesford, though he gathered that she was back in Oxford . . . He lingered over her memory, remembering her as a false light he had stopped following through strength of will . . . Then he began to reconstruct her face, as one might restring a set of beads together (213).

It is no accident that Kemp's 'linger[ing] over [Jill's] memory' takes place immediately after he 'gathered that she was back in Oxford'; indeed, it reminds us of Casey's argument that 'remembering is a predominantly spatial phenomenon' (66). Yet Kemp's preoccupation with ascertaining 'in what exact spot at that exact time Jill was' demonstrates that memory enrolls time and space *simultaneously* in order to operate once the initial focus of the memory is spatially 'fixed'.

The aim of this chapter has not been to sequester *Jill* within a generic categorization, nor to advance a particular literary period or mode with which the novel expresses a firm allegiance. Conversely, suggesting that the novel possesses neither any autobiographical fragments nor any imagistic or stylistic manoeuvres that anticipate, explicitly or otherwise, the features of the poetry would constitute a bloody-minded ignorance of the position *Jill* occupies within the greater Larkin canon. I hope, however, I have gone some way to outlining the reasons behind the odd, uncharacteristic pride which Larkin expressed towards *Jill* in 1963. Admittedly, while upholding sympathies with the Augustan *locus amoenus* as well as the contemporary place theory of Edward Casey, the question of the novel's generic categorisation shows little hope of being solved, while, inversely, an argument rooting for its adherence to ideals relating to the Movement's post-war fiction naturally precludes the benefits offered by a concerted attempt to understand the novel through the poetics of place. More certain, I think, is Larkin's decision to rework, and profit from formative, but mostly revised, versions of Romanticism and subjectivity. Indeed, Larkin demonstrates a clear fondness in *Jill* for the types of Romantic notions which centre around questioning the individual's subjective cognisance of, and with, place. The proximity of Larkin's aesthetic modes to those pervading the Oxford academic milieu during the 1940s, however, implies that this cognisance may result not only from inspiration, but also from inculcation. Conversely, the mild phenomenology expressed, alongside the treatment of memory and place "fixities", bring into the novel techniques that are pre-emptively avant-

garde in both their scope and execution; the latter of which – both published within the last three years – constitute the cutting-edge of place theory. In short, *Jill* demonstrates that Larkin's symbolic debt was substantial, and served to formulate a work whose overall tenor reveals a greater commitment to experimentation than it does to a mere pastiche-heavy, navel-gazing record of youth.

## 2

**Day Dreams and Night Dreams: The Oneiric Informants behind Larkin's Evocation of Contemporary and Mythological Englands in *The North Ship*.**

On 26 October 1942, Philip Larkin awoke to recall a dream that would ultimately complete the first entry in a short-lived diary in which the poet attempted to understand better the subconscious derivations of his imagery. A mere two days before, the poet had attended a talk by psychoanalyst John Layard whose lecture title 'Night Journey over the Sea' bears no small resemblance, in its commingling of wistful, maritime images, to the title Larkin gave to his first collection of poems (*AL*. 27. 5). The expectation, then, that Larkin's dream record (contemporaneous, in the case of the second entry, to within three months of a poem later collected in *The North Ship*<sup>67</sup>) may constitute a "Call to Arms" to scholars hoping to challenge the received reading of *The North Ship* as 'Yeatsian pastiche', might seem inevitable

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<sup>67</sup> Larkin's poem 'Mythological Introduction', later collected in *TNS*, made the spring edition of *Arabesque*, 'Hilary Term [Jan-Mar], 1943' (*TCP* 484). Just over two months prior, on 27 October 1942, Larkin recorded 'Dream 2' in his dream diary, in which he revealed an acute preoccupation with the same notion, and image, of 'liquid decay' (*AL*27 ed. Don Lee.) Other concordances between the two fragments are detailed later in this chapter. Deductions achieved by cross-referencing 'Larkin's Dream Diary 1942-3. Part 1' (*AL*27), and 'Part 2' (*AL*28), both 2012, with publication dates in Burnett's 2012 *TCP*.

(Rossen 25).<sup>68</sup> Equally, *The North Ship*'s expression of a 'psychodramatic need' in Larkin could well, one might think, constitute the perfect opportunity to relate these poems to the self-evident psychological expression of 'The Dream Diaries' themselves (Longley 190). Indeed, if nothing else, there is little doubt that such projects would appeal to the critical appetite for understanding the subconscious machinations of Larkin's tortured mind and might, along the way, turn the study of his *oeuvre*, perhaps, in interesting new directions. Critical interest in these diaries (hereafter, 'The Dream Diaries') and *The North Ship* continues to be far from ebullient, however, and the reason for this may reveal several issues concerning the nature of contemporary Larkin scholarship at large: hitherto sighted only briefly in Motion's *A Writer's Life* in 1993,<sup>69</sup> 'The Dream Diaries' did not fully emerge into Larkin scholarship until 2009,<sup>70</sup> a mere three years before their humble contribution was eclipsed by Archie Burnett's *The Complete Poems of Philip Larkin* in 2012, followed by James Booth's polemical and long-awaited biography *Life, Love and Art* in 2014.<sup>71</sup> With Booth inheriting Motion's chair of Larkin critic *ex cathedra*, and Burnett satisfying the public's appetite for unseen Larkin for the first time since A. Tolley's *Early Poems and Juvenilia* in

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<sup>68</sup> Edna Longley in *Yeats and Modern Poetry* perhaps has the most comprehensive and detailed account of the 'Celtic fever'. For a broader study, see Chatterjee's excellent *Philip Larkin: Poetry That Builds Bridges*.

<sup>69</sup> Motion cites three excerpts in *AWL* 16 years prior to first dream record in *AL* 27 (2009).

<sup>70</sup> 'The Dream Diaries' were compiled fully in *AL* 27 and 28.

<sup>71</sup> Peter J. Conradi anaphorically sums up Booth's misunderstood Larkin: 'Larkin the nihilist also wrote: 'The ultimate joy is to be alive in the flesh.' Larkin the xenophobe loved Paris and translated Verlaine. Larkin the racist wrote the wonderful lyric 'For Sidney Bechet' and dreamt of being a negro' (*The Spectator* 23 August 2014).

2005, it is little wonder that ‘The Dream Diaries’, and their potential for offering a rather heuristic second look at Larkin’s early juvenilia, fell by the wayside. And yet, to utterly eschew Booth’s misunderstood “new” Larkin, along with the public interest that this jocular reincarnation has predictably garnered, would also constitute a certain bloody-mindedness in my view – a hostile denunciation of the claims made by one of Larkin’s final, living comrades whom he knew personally, and whose word could severely shake up the sardonic image of the reclusive jazz-lover whom the public has come – somewhat perversely – to cherish.

Yet, to overlook the significance of the melancholic student’s first and only concerted attempt to gain an understanding into the subconscious workings behind both his poetry, and its mind-to-page production, would surely be an opportunity sorely missed. The scope for critical engagement offered by ‘The Dream Diaries’ extends further, in my view, than a simple transmutation of the writer’s mental vision into compelling non-fiction. Situated among the adumbrations therein, we see an unusual and noteworthy preoccupation with geography, locational accuracy, and spatiality whose painstaking replication onto the page serves to expand our current understanding of the Larkinian mentation, and evocation, of place and space during this time. Such concerns are often depicted in carefully drawn maps that feature alongside many of the dream entries and which suggest deep preoccupations with orientation, placement, and the interior-versus-exterior

nature of dwelling spaces.<sup>72</sup> To view these maps as merely epigrammatic, I think, would be a mistake; a close inspection reveals that they demonstrate far more than a frivolous, or even devoted, side-interest in art and sketching. Indeed, through 'The Dream Diaries' and their accompanying maps, we can get a rare diagrammatic insight into the very architecture of the writer's mentation and poetic assimilation of place and space. The very processes by which images are formed and arranged in dialectic communion with the subconscious. Judiciously produced and scrupulously annotated, the diary maps appear to be an effort, first and foremost, to either evoke a dream's *mise-en-scène*,<sup>73</sup> or detail the aerial configuration of a dream's objects and characters. Objects and characters which are often, as we shall see, largely antithetical in nature to Larkin's wakeful preoccupations.

Despite being night dreams, Larkin's oneiric record seems to draw its content mainly from Larkin's present life. Indeed, scholars hoping to jump to affix aspects of Larkin's childhood to pre-conceived insights related to the writer's late-adolescent sexual development will, on the whole, be disappointed by these diaries (Larkin's parents and childhood are mentioned, but a Freudian psychoanalyst will find any such autobiographical fragments dramatically overshadowed by a more marked interest in the homo- and auto-erotic pursuits of undergraduate life). Conversely, Larkin's daydreams

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<sup>72</sup> Dreams 17 and 47 (*AL* 27) are especially prescient examples of this.

<sup>73</sup> I take my gloss of '*mise-en-scène*' from Morris B. Holbrook who adopts it to describe 'the verisimilitude of narrative action in a manner comparable to that achieved by appropriate décor, scenery, or landscaping' (qtd. in Lannin & Caley eds. 48). However, Larkin subverts the *mise-en-scène*'s usual associations with bold stylization to banalise this 'narrative action'.

seem during this time to gravitate largely around a mythopoeic past, a ‘Celtic fever’ (*RW* 30), inspired by a battered copy of Yeats from which the poet would ‘limber up’.<sup>74</sup> Overall one feels that, in addition to betraying a certain fascination with spatiality and orientation, the diaries, if anything, serve to further entrench our understanding of Larkin as pragmatic, level and unforthcoming. The image of the writer therein is one committed, perhaps misguidedly, to mastering and tapping the subconscious for professional – not personal – gain. As if impelled by the Yeatsian epigraph, itself describing the dream world of a Celtic twilight, Larkin implies he too shares Yeats’s belief that ‘In dreams begin responsibilities’.<sup>75</sup> In the dream maps, there is nothing of the surrealism of Larkin’s French contemporary, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and his little prince’s surreal diagrams,<sup>76</sup> and any whimsy is stripped away by Larkin’s careful, almost satirically stuffy, labelling of the dreams’ characters, objects, and sources of illumination for later schematic study. Neatly concordant, then, with contemporary understandings of Larkin-the-man, the *modus operandi* behind ‘The Dream Diaries’ appears to be unsentimental and restrained; its fifteen-month long run a mere serviceable

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<sup>74</sup> From the Introduction to *The North Ship*, 1996, 10.

<sup>75</sup> From Yeats’s collection *Responsibilities* (1916). There is a double-irony to this citation given that Yeats, in writing *Responsibilities* from which the “epigraph-maxim” is extracted, was himself hoping to edge his writing poetic away from the wistful mythology into the modern day.

<sup>76</sup> *Le Petit Prince*; also published in 1943. One thinks of the little prince’s hat-eating boa snake. This might also constitute a temporal concordance considering Booth’s surprising new revelation that Larkin admired and translated: the French symbolist works of Paul Verlaine.

exercise towards the young poet's concerted drive towards literary betterment and recognition.<sup>77</sup>

It is ironic, then, that juxtaposed against Larkin's *sleeping* preoccupation with the spatial present, is a *wakeful* preoccupation with a mythical past. 'The Dream Diaries' emerge at a time between 1942 and 1943 when Larkin's ruminating mind, despite his best efforts, continues to cogitate upon the archaic, maritime imagery of Yeats and a mythological England.<sup>78</sup> Larkin himself acknowledges this, and openly 'admitt[ed] that he had been swept away by Yeats' music', and had 'appropriat[ed] the images as well as the romantic and melancholy tone of [Yeats's] early Celtic period' (Rossen 25). Motion enumerates some of the more prominent Yeatsian symbols found in Larkin's writing at this time as, 'water, stars, ice, candles, dreams, hands and beds' (Motion qtd. in Chatterjee 33). That such nouns make up the hackneyed Romantic idiom of *The North Ship* does not only serve to reassert the unmistakable mysticism of Yeats, but moreover underscores the dichotomy between Larkin's dreamed preoccupation with real locales, familiar to his wartime Oxford, versus his wakeful focus on a markedly unreal, mythopoeic past.

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<sup>77</sup> In typical contrarian style, Larkin denounced the Dream Diaries project calling it 'merely one aspect of a general immaturity' (RW 8).

<sup>78</sup> In a letter to James Sutton (18 August 1942), in which Booth acknowledges Larkin's 'borrowed tones [from] the yearning Yeats', Larkin writes, 'I hear you at sea . . . / In my head the anonymous ship / Swings like a lamp' (LAL 47). This preoccupation is often described almost as an ailment from which one cannot be fully 'cured', as Regan insinuates: 'if the Celtic fever is abated, it isn't altogether eliminated' (qtd. in Collins & Matterson eds. 50).

Consequently, much of this chapter will focus on the slippage of real, unreal and surreal between conscious and unconscious states in Larkin's writing during this time. As a result, the established adjectival norms that populate the lexicon of dream analysis, such as 'fickle', 'fluid' and 'unreal' versus the living present as 'real', 'lucid' and 'accountable', will automatically be challenged whilst attending to Larkin's creative method over this period. I therefore hope that by examining 'The Dream Diaries', we may not only reveal hidden allegiances that the poet harboured during this time, but also witness the importance of the interaction between, and influence of, Larkin's conscious and unconscious mind states upon his work. An experience which, I hope, will simultaneously tell us something about the nature of dream poetry in general. Key to the discussion will be the sense that, in 'The Dream Diaries' and *The North Ship*, Larkin was, in Chatterjee's words, attempting to 'induce in himself a mood'; a mood in which the poet sought to profit and better understand both night dreaming and daydreaming (34). Therefore this chapter, while not intending to strike a particular, sycophantic loyalty with either Booth's chronically misunderstood Larkin, or Motion's enduringly acerbic one, will nevertheless reveal something new of Larkin's "character" by dint of the investigatory approach I aim to adopt in deconstructing the poet's early writing style. Overall, we shall see how Larkin's unconscious "dreams of England" merged with his waking pursuit of a Yeatsian, mythopoeic "England of dreams". Ultimately we might be able to better determine whether Gervais's statement that 'England is always a country of the mind [and] the notion of a *real England* must always be a chimera' is

strictly true (16; Gervais's emphasis). Time now, then, to take what we have learned from these biographical contributions to Larkin's life, and double back to the discovery of 'The Dream Diaries' in 2009 to seek, with the help of Burnett's attention to editorial details incorporated into his 2012 anthology, aspects of Larkin's professional and personal development which, in our excitement to devour anecdotal trivia, we may have missed.

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During the Hilary Term of 1943, the journal *Arabesque*<sup>79</sup> published a poem of Larkin's that would never go on to be published, not in a collection nor throughout the duration of the poet's life. The poem, 'Mythological Introduction' feels uncanny; a peculiar conflation of metaphysical and Romantic motifs suddenly reduced to a concluding image of macabre necrotic decomposition. The poem is cited in full below:

### **Mythological Introduction**

A white girl lay on the grass  
 With her arms held out for love;  
 Her goldbrown hair fell down her face,  
 And her two lips move:

See, I am the whitest cloud that strays

Through a deep sky:

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<sup>79</sup> Hilary Term 1943 edition.

I am your senses' crossroads,  
Where the four seasons lie.

She rose up in the middle of the lawn  
And spread her arms wide;  
And the webbed earth where she had lain  
Had eaten away her side.

(TCP 106)

The tonal features through which one might notice flagrant similarities with *The North Ship* are relatively easy to identify: the wistfulness; the stalking yet never-fully-exposed atmosphere of ontological rumination; the indeterminate, almost invisible, depiction of the narrator . . . Some tonal features even reflect the Larkin canon at large: the thwarted sexual fulfilment; the unflinching yet sudden descent into the grotesque, etc. Technically, the opening stanza abounds with features that separate the poem from its mid-war, even Movement-centred literary contexts.<sup>80</sup> The A-B rhyme scheme (grass / face; love / move) endures awkwardly to the poem's conclusion, while the opening spondee 'white girl' forces attention to linger around the

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<sup>80</sup> Larkin had a vacillating relationship with the Movement, both spurning 'this drivelling Movement business', while simultaneously upholding lifelong friendships with stalwart Movement progenitors, such as Amis. (The latter contributed to *New Lines* – a cornerstone collection of Movement poetics that eschewed the 'bad principles' which led, in O'Neill and Callaghan's view, to the imbalance 'of emotion and reason' in the wake of the modernist movement (163).

Romantic motif of feminine purity that seems to exert a centrifugal force on the otherwise disjointed set of symbolic concerns. Booth's affirmation of the white girl's evocation of the 'Blakean mode', thus, seems suitably placed.<sup>81</sup> Much of the ontological feel is delivered via this very female adumbration's outstretched arms, reasserted again in the penultimate line, in its almost Christ-like, crucifixion pose. The compound noun 'goldbrown' is equally communicative, on a micro level, of this conflation of the corporeal and the deistical. It is during the segue of the first stanza into the second, however, that we see a subtle relinquishment of these predated tropes and a gentle acknowledgement of the piece's late-modernist context. Although the announcement of imminent direct speech through the phrase 'two lips move' may seem an odd occasion for enumeratio (the recruitment of a past participle, such as 'said' or 'cried' or 'exclaimed', would surely be smoother) it is possible that Larkin's slide towards verbosity, when we consider the following stanza, may have in fact been guided by an ulterior set of concerns. Barry Spurr would no doubt agree with this affirmation, given his own account of Larkin's evocation of the syntactical aura of modernism. Spurr notes that while 'reacting against the poetic school and impersonal objectivity and cerebral difficulty initiated by T. S. Eliot' there are nevertheless 'modern touches' to be found in Larkin's 'compounding of substantives and participles in hyphenated epithets' (53). Indeed, while the following stanza adopts the

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<sup>81</sup> Booth also cites that the girl is 'reminiscent of paintings by Salvador Dalí'. The claim underscores the vibrant contraflow of polarised artistic modes hewn into Larkin's writing at this time, whose dizzying panoply often betrays something of the attentive yet over-zealous undergraduate student (*LAL* 56).

first person and, by all accounts, appears to be the voice of the woman figure, it is not enclosed in speech marks, and thus presents to the reader the possibility that the peculiarly framed moving lips are in fact communicative of the narrator's interior *emotions*, thus signposting and introducing a moment of free indirect discourse in the account that follows. Add to this the fact that Larkin only decided to indent lines five to eight *after* his initial draft of the poem,<sup>82</sup> and the suggestion that the poet debated with himself on how best to express ulterior dialogue, seems all the more likely. Larkin also applies a half-aborted attempt at such a technique in his poem 'Ugly Sister', published during the same 12 month period, in which the deferred half-voice, or *genius loci*,<sup>83</sup> is that of sentient trees and wind. The last four lines are cited below:

Since I was not bewitched in adolescence  
 And brought to love,  
 I will attend to the trees and their gracious silence  
*To winds that move.*  
 (TCP 14; emphasis mine)

Here, the possibility that 'move' assumes both the affective and physical mode simultaneously is more possible, given the absence of any "reported speech-like" dialogue immediately after, and the inclusion of a clear justification for the indistinct voice; in this case, the narrator's romantically

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<sup>82</sup> Variants [from *Arabesque*] 5-8 [Not indented]; 7 crossroads] crossways; 9 She rose up] Rising; 10 And] She (TCP 484).

<sup>83</sup> In this instance, the prosopopoeial *genius loci* as that which originated as ekphrasis, and constituted 'the special quality of giving voice and language to the otherwise mute art object' (Hagstrum qtd. in Mayers 18n).

unfulfilled adolescence. Both examples, in my view, portray enough of the tenor and technique of modernism to call into question Larkin's own self-acclaimed hostility towards it. That Larkin admired John Betjeman 'for whom the modern poetic revolution has not taken place [and for whom] there has been no symbolism, no objective correlative, no T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound' may well denote a rejection of high modernism (whose talk was for Larkin 'unpleasantly like the talk of literary understrappers'); however, such an admission far from demonstrates, in my view, a blanket rejection of all modernist tenets (*RW 79*). Conscious that I am teetering upon *tu quoque* argumentation, I would tentatively suggest that on the occasions cited above, Larkin did not act in accordance with his own position towards modernism, and that an absence of *virtuoso* examples of modernism, similarly, does not necessarily constitute sufficient evidence to cast him as the stalwart counteragent to modernism that so many Larkin critics have hitherto been so keen to suggest. Rather, the use of free indirect discourse in what appears to be a deliberate confusion of speaking voices in the first example may be better explained as modernism percolating into Larkin's verse in a manner that renders it broadly inseparable from the freight of the dream itself.<sup>84</sup>

It is not until the final paragraph, however, that we see a direct reference to the 'liquid decay' of the dog detailed in Larkin's second dream, recorded less than six months earlier on 27 October 1942. The peculiarity of

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<sup>84</sup> Rory Waterman also tentatively admits that Larkin's early idiom struck up a somewhat resistant relationship with the adumbrations of modernism: 'the eighteen-year-old Larkin's literary philosophy had been a reductive, fundamentalist take on a modernist outlook' (9).

the two images, united in their macabre fixation upon detailing the specifics of the half-living, half-decomposing status of their mammalian subjects indicates that this dream image is one that Larkin sought to recruit. Much like the 'webbed earth' eating the woman's side, the dog is static yet seemingly animate at the time of observation. The sense of 'undead' effused through the decomposing animal is replicated at large – one could argue – through *The North Ship's* crepuscular, eerie tone.<sup>85</sup> I have recorded the relevant section of the dream extract below.

**Dream 2. Oct 27<sup>th</sup>, 1942.**

Then we turned to my left and the officer opened a lot of shutters over the garage window. (Messages I don't remember were scrawled on them.) At last we could see in, and I saw a dirty, foetid room, lit by a sickly light, that disgusted me. I could see a dog lying on the floor in a pool of "liquid decay". It was not dead for I saw its head move.

The scene then seemed compressed and we were standing in the garage, but it was sweet and clean. I said to the officer: "We've played fair with you. We could have hidden them here" – and I tapped the floor with my foot where there was a trapdoor

(AL 27. 5-6).

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<sup>85</sup> Barry Spurr writes comprehensively about such 'eerie obscurity' in 'Alienation & Affirmation in the Poetry of Philip Larkin' (52).

The object to which the pronoun ‘them’ refers is a set of tools that an army private is attempting to requisition, and is referred to in an earlier dream fragment. Indeed, the dream’s offsetting of plot versus symbolism seems, roughly, to be split down the middle: the earlier fragment establishing a course of events, and the latter section, cited above, appearing to constitute their subconscious meditation. The first striking feature of the above extract is perhaps Larkin’s inclusion of the relational adjective ‘left’ to describe the characters’ exact orientation in relation to ‘the garage window’. If this connotes an especial interest in the ‘x’ and ‘y’ of geometric orientation, then it would be difficult to ignore the orientation of ‘the shutters’ over the garage window, versus the ‘trapdoor’ *under* the garage itself as potential positions along a ‘y’ axis. The mention of a high window, at any other point in the Larkin canon, would of course offer a glaring opportunity to excavate other phrasal cross-references with Larkin’s final, unflinchingly symbolic collection *High Windows*; here, however, attention seems to gravitate more towards the mysterious ‘scrawled . . . messages’ etched on these high shutters. If we can discount these as an instance of notional ekphrasis on account of the absence of authorial intent, we are nevertheless free to examine their role within the context of dreaming.<sup>86</sup> As Bachelard states:

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<sup>86</sup> ‘Notional ekphrasis’ was coined by John Hollander ‘to describe poems about *imagined* works of art (qtd. in Hicks 22; Hollander’s emphasis). More helpful, perhaps, is Tassi’s application of the term which reads notional ekphrasis, much like Larkin’s mysterious ‘scrawled messages’, as ‘a verbal representation of an *imagined* work of art’ (i.e. perceived in a dream state) as opposed to ‘actual ekphrasis’ which is ‘a verbal representation of an *existing* work of art’ (157).

The dreamer constructs and reconstructs the upper stories and the attic until they are well constructed . . . When we dream of the heights we are in the rational zone of intellectualized projects [unlike the cellar, where] “rationalization” is less rapid and less clear. (19)

With this in mind, then, it would appear that Larkin’s cognisance of the high up, scrawled messages may be attributed to ‘the rational zone of intellectualized projects’, one such ‘intellectualized project’ being, ironically, ‘The Dream Diaries’ themselves. That the text is a reflexive ‘project’ at all, reasserts Larkin’s deeply pragmatic *modus operandi* around this period during which he claims to have written ‘continuously as never before or since’ (*RW* 24), and, by consequence, hoped to better understand his own writing style.<sup>87</sup> Whether or not Larkin’s attempt to force rationalisation into his art has the effect of ceding the image of decomposition is difficult to deduce, yet its inclusion in ‘Mythological Introduction’ a few months later suggests, on some level, that this ‘rationalized project’ – Larkin’s own ‘rationalized project’ – bore fruit.

Contrasted with the rational heights of the “high up” writing are the irrational depths of the garage and its foreboding trapdoor. I would argue that the garage and trapdoor represent Bachelard’s irrational cellar in much the

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<sup>87</sup> Bruce Montgomery (pseudonym Edmund Crispin) catalysed Larkin’s eschewal of this experimental phase. Through Montgomery’s ‘irresponsibility and self-confidence’ Larkin ‘revolted [against] all the things I had previously worshipped – poetry, Lawrence, psychoanalysis, seriousness, to creative life and so forth’ (*LAL* 59).

same way that the scrawled writings over the high windows allude to the 'intellectualized projects' befitting the attic space. Unlike the attic (which 'tells its *raison d'être* right away: it gives mankind shelter from the rain and sun he fears') neither the cellar nor the garage betray their primary function through their geometry (18). As Bachelard states, the cellar 'is first and foremost the dark entity of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces' and only has its 'conveniences enumerated' in time (18). It follows, then, that these 'subterranean forces', bereft of the vertiginously opposed and intellect-inducing forces of the attic, house the half-dead, crepuscular dog. That the dream morphs into a concluding image of the garage as 'sweet and clean', with the additional suggestion that the narrator has concealed the dog yet deeper beneath the trapdoor, might suggest an "overlapping" of rational intellectualisation upon the irrational garage space. While this schematisation of dream symbolisms may feel elaborate, the recruitment in Larkin's later work of attic and loft spaces into which psychological conditions and tendencies are imbued is much more obvious. I argue that in this dream fragment, we get an insight into the embryonic dream-to-page mentation process that was later refined into more recognisable instances of spatial symbolism.

In many ways, 'Mythological Introduction' represents an awkward conflation of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century literary tropes and unrefined moments of symbolism, and perhaps even post-modern phenomenology. Unfortunately, as with other iterations of love in *The North Ship*, the lyric collapses under its own mawkishness, expressed through the ungainly presentation of

hackneyed Romantic motifs that are revealed by means of an amateurish attempt at modernist narration. As shown by the inclusion of free indirect discourse, such a stylistic self-destructiveness evokes modernism, despite never quite evidencing a full-fledged, virtuoso example of its stylistic and thematic concerns: images from Eliot's *The Waste Land* are not far removed from the 'liquid decay' which both stalked Larkin's dream and eventually achieved literary expression in 'Mythological Introduction'. One indeed wonders whether the existential fate of Larkin's decaying Christ-like girl on the 'webbed earth', grotesque in its commingling of both religious and biological degeneration, may eventually yield new life (or form) in the manner of Stetson's corpse in Eliot's final lines of 'The burial of the dead'. That the oneiric inspiration informing the poem also featured a dog, which was eventually exchanged for a 'sweet and clean' floor surface beneath which its decaying remains are purported to exist, may lend further credence to this reading. In this sense, the narrator of *The Waste Land* provides a potential answer to the existential question anticipated by the concluding image of 'Mythological Introduction'. An answer whose message is dizzyingly interwoven with the absurdity and fallibility of humankind. Nevertheless, the overriding message is one of condemnation aimed at those writers who impede the natural, organic regeneration of form made possible by the "decomposition" of old, spent literary forms, modes and genres. The extract from *The Waste Land* I am thinking of is cited below:

That corpse you planted last year in your garden

Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?

Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,

Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!

You *hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable – mon frère!*

(33)

In Eliot's poem, the fog might be read as the enemy to the proper course of decomposition and regeneration; in Larkin's unconscious, it is the *subject* of such a decomposition, with Larkin-the-narrator himself assuming Stetson's role of overseer. The existential frustration of 'Mythological Introduction's' final image alludes to the inclusion of the word 'Introduction' in its very title: the piece is a prolegomenon, reluctant to adopt the misty, didactic idiom of Eliotian high modernism – the very orthodox idiom towards which Larkin is famously hostile.

Precisely what "Mythological" refers to, however, is less obvious and shall become the topic of our next point of enquiry in this chapter. I argue that mythology relates more explicitly to Larkin's context beyond the poem, and his fractured search for a poetic heritage that might push his devotion to the Yeatsian voice beyond mere pastiche. Indeed, if Larkin's desire for true, vocal autonomy – unfettered by conspicuous pastiche – prompted the very dream analysis which we have addressed, one wonders what other singular self-improving techniques and allegiances may have been undertaken during this period. In many ways, the dreamed English garden visible in 'Mythological Introduction' is iconographic of a pent-up expression of

Victorian chastity: the very kind of sexual iconography in which Larkin's own confined, self-inflicted refuge finds itself, and which is manifest in poems such as 'Night-Music'. The poem is therefore something of a prototypical encapsulation of the ensuing tone of *The North Ship* at large: a night dream that has become indistinguishable from daydream; a dreamed England that would become the England of dreams. Thus, it is at this juncture that Larkin begins to build a mythological England whose tenor owes just as much to these initial subconscious investments as it does to Yeats whom, albeit by his own admission, became his master. I now propose that we look closely at the mythological England that resulted from these early self-educating investments; through which I hope we shall see literary technique that is every bit as forward-thinking as it is preoccupied with past forms.

'V Conscript' is the oldest poem to feature in *The North Ship*, having earned publication in *Phoenix* between October and November 1941 (*TCP* 339). Despite this early publication, however, Larkin continued to edit the poem over the next four years adding, according to Burnett, at least three amendments, including a dedication to 'James Ballard Sutton' (*TCP* 339, 693). Unsurprisingly, it strikes as stylistically singular compared to many of the other poems in the collection, with Larkin himself deeming it 'a relic of a style I have [*sic*] discarded, before I had begun to "sing"' (qtd. in *TCP* 339). The comparatively lengthy timespan between the original and collected versions of the poem is relatively unusual for *The North Ship* (the majority of

whose poems are composed either during or after 1943)<sup>88</sup> and might suggest that the poem, similar to 'Mythological Introduction', may have functioned in a heuristic capacity for the poet; a versatile "form-template", or scratchpad, upon which he could present, amend, and eventually cement ideas over time. The final version of the poem is cited in full below:

### **V Conscript**

*for James Ballard Sutton*

The ego's country he inherited  
 From those who tended it like farmers; had  
 All knowledge that the study merited,  
 The requisite contempt for good and bad;

But one Spring day his land was violated;  
 A bunch of horsemen curtly asked his name,  
 Their leader in a different dialect stated  
 A war was on for which he was to blame,

And he must help them. The assent he gave  
 Was founded on desire for self-effacement

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<sup>88</sup> According to *TCP* 687-694

In order not to lose his birthright; brave,  
For nothing would be easier than replacement,

Which would not give him time to follow further  
The details of his own defeat and murder.

(CP 8)

It is difficult to ignore the poem's prominent, almost overbearing, sense of ancient English feudalism. This 'ego's country' is described through a sense of indefiniteness; more an "atmosphere" expressive of the coarse medieval farming life than a real description. Indeed, although one feels that the reference to 'land' denotes a physical terrain that has been 'violated [by] a bunch of horsemen', a re-examination of the poem reveals that this ravished land is in fact little more than a synecdoche for 'the ego's country' at large. This synecdoche would not be yielded were it not for a certain figurative inconsistency: the first quatrain merely *likens* the pronoun 'he' to a farmer, while the second quatrain, *assumes* the pronoun 'he' *is* a farmer. The effect of this problematic jump (and given Larkin's long-term commitment to the poem we might assume it was a laboured decision) seems to fuse together the notion of the nation as a *whole*, and the nation as *local* and personal; the political abstractness of 'country' and the concrete physicality of farmland.

Akin to many of Larkin's evocations of England that come later in his *oeuvre*, as well as those of his 20<sup>th</sup> century contemporaries,<sup>89</sup> we feel here that the *genius loci* is both an "essence" of England, and its own, somewhat reflexive yearning to be re-imagined. While the adumbrative dream of ancient England may impress a domineering sense of nationhood, Larkin does not allow the notion of top-down political control to sit comfortably: the horseman's 'different dialect' suggests that he, too, is a yeoman seeking to reorganise and repatriate land civically. It is not until the third quatrain, however, that the poem's principal message begins to unfold; the subject recognises that 'nothing would be easier than replacement', a process which would undercut his own capacity to pass on 'The details of his own defeat and murder'. It is a reminder of the poem's own status as an outmoded form and the logical impossibility of simultaneously dying and remaining in control of your death's retelling. The positioning of this final message on the rhyming couplet is significant, and adds to Larkin's already strong argument for the organic nature of symbolic replenishment – a concern that, as we have seen, manifests itself both in 'The Dream Diaries' and 'Mythological Introduction' particularly with regards to the latter's tentative nod to *The Waste Land*. Like 'V Conscript's ousted farmer, fearful of his story being lost by mere 'replacement' (that is to say, the victors rewriting history), so Larkin is himself acutely conscious, not only of the idly rehashing of old, hackneyed literary

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<sup>89</sup> Henley's jingoistic 'Pro Rege Nostro' (1890; reprinted in Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse*), and Heaney's 'England's of the Mind' (1976) demarcate both the thematic breadth and span of 20<sup>th</sup> century visions of England.

forms but of their utter and thoughtless banishment too. In 'V Conscript' unlike 'Mythological Introduction', however, Larkin seems less concerned about the *methods* behind the continuance of old histories and symbolisms, and more worried about the *permanence* of their expunction. In this sense, 'V Conscript' speaks more pointedly to its immediate context – the Second World War – despite the distinctly ancient, mythological English landscape around which intellectual ideation, and conservation, takes place. Such an expression of regeneration was more in keeping with Larkin's personal thoughts concerning the propagation of artistic form, and was later articulated in a letter to Monica Jones.<sup>90</sup> To say that the poem's 'myths and symbols and languorous cadences' are indicative of a writer 'luxuriat[ing] in depression' as Chatterjee states is therefore, in my view, a slightly superficial reading of the poem that upstages the weather-beaten, acerbic caricature of Larkin to avoid elucidating a challenging poem (Chatterjee 108). Equally, the poem's lengthy compositional timeframe should encourage us to take pause and question to what extent it might truly be considered amateurish, parodic or wantonly nostalgic given the carefully considered, nuanced nature of its imagery. Of course, parody and nostalgia are far from alien to Larkin, but are purposely rendered and, I argue, arrive later in the Larkin canon.

I wish now to pursue a more polemical reading of 'V Conscript's fractured depiction of national, or indeed regional, identity by highlighting an ostensible stylistic allegiance with a poet whose self-consciously esoteric

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<sup>90</sup> I feel the only thing you can do about life is to preserve it, by art if you're an artist, by children if you're not.' (*LTM* 222).

style gives rise to a similar ‘spiritual, Platonic old England’ (qtd. in *Misreading England* 195). Like Heaney, or as with Lawrence in ‘England, my England’ where ‘The spirit of place linger[ed] on primeval, as when the Saxons came’ (2), Geoffrey Hill’s *Mercian Hymns* was more preoccupied with nationhood before England’s union with Britain and, in being so, took advantage of the ‘elegiac tinge to the air’ which had permeated the post-war literature scene, and whose vaunted regionalism, in many ways, had primed a readership especially for Hill’s poetic (Haffenden 80). As with Larkin’s ‘V Conscript’, in Hill’s *Mercian Hymns*, we see a similar interest in a secular, medieval *genius loci* whose presence, as much as a stylistic feature, appears to influence, and even *react against*, poetic form. Unlike the Romantic aesthetic to which Larkin is reputed to pay homage, often with ill-deserved vigour, the landscapes in *The North Ship* are no more enlivened by their narrating subject’s encounter; a similar thing may be said of Hill’s Mercia, in which the latter’s fecund vocabulary is sufficient to “evoke” a sense of Englishness rendering the recruitment of an all-seeing, feeling “Wordsworthian” narrator unnecessary. As with *The North Ship*, the fragmentary nature of Hill’s Mercian poems are similarly demarcated with Roman numerals with Larkin’s ‘songs’ equating to Hillian ‘hymns’; and at the moments in which Larkin’s breathy euphony provides a sense of Yeatsian music to the text,<sup>91</sup> so the

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<sup>91</sup> I am thinking specifically of balladic poems such as ‘The North Ship’ whose opening line ‘I saw three ships go sailing by’ takes as its derivation, the Christmas carol ‘I saw three ships’ which, in turn, owes its melody to ‘Greensleeves’. Larkin’s duplication of the second line of each ‘verse’, with only the verb in the second clause varying, renders the metre of the poem markedly conspicuous.

logopoeia of Hill's colourful, fiercely intellectual lexicon delivers a verbal musicality to the text. Both poets' ethereal narrators, formal organisation and recurring preoccupation with the voices, dialects and *genius loci* of a mythopoeic and strictly *regional* England, which gestures to a thematic and formal alliance that, due to the radically opposing image the poets have both consciously and unconsciously sustained in public opinion, could be easily overlooked.

A particularly noteworthy dissimilarity, for instance, manifests itself in the poets' diverging stance on high modernism, especially in terms of the self-consciously "difficult" hue cast upon a poem executing "high modern" styles and subjects. While I have argued that Larkin does indeed apply modernist techniques and tones, their application is both reluctant and cloaked; Hill, conversely, has been deemed by Tom Paulin as a veritable 'parasite upon Eliot's imagination', such that 'any account of [Hill's] work must face this frankly in order to argue the ultimate authenticity of the style' (281).<sup>92</sup> While Paulin's statement is perhaps a little too damning in its unflinching denunciation of the regurgitative nature of Hill's style (I'd argue like, Dodsworth,<sup>93</sup> that there is a degree more originality in Hill's style than

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<sup>92</sup> Hill's definition of himself as a 'simple, sensuous, and passionate' poet reminds us of Steinberg's observation on Larkin's disarmingly charming media appearances and 'how misleading these self-persuasions are' (qtd. in Knottenbelt 23; Davie 8).

<sup>93</sup> Dodsworth is a little less absolute in his account of Hill's literary influences, opening them out to include proponents of literary "grandiosity" in their strident 'response to the imperial and at times imperious dreams of Eliot and St.-John Perse' (61). Dodsworth and Paulin take fiercely opposing stances on the nature of Hill's debt to politics and metaphysics as can be seen played out colourfully in the *LRB*'s 'The Case for Geoffrey Hill'.

Paulin expresses), we must nevertheless be thankful to Ricks, I think, for being one of the relatively few Hill critics of recent times who resists succumbing to the 'reverential gullibility' broadly exhibited by Hillian criticism (282).<sup>94</sup> Another stark difference might be the bold radicalism of *Mercian Hymns* compared with the frail conservatism of *The North Ship*. I would argue that Hill required such a radical approach in order to force his depictions of Englishness through a milieu increasingly dominated by post-structuralism: the seismic arrival of which made little effort to conserve or accommodate the effervescent, waning poetic of a pre-war, pastoral England. Indeed, while post-structuralism may be thanked for 'sever[ing] texts from their historical and cultural moorings' – a process which might have caused Hill's dreamed England to be more laboriously rendered – such an England might, for Larkin, still be seen as an expectation (Ingelbien 2).

Arguably though, both poets latterly found a degree of unity in their work's shared endorsement of Gervais's famous quotation. Declared in 1993 and broadly contemporaneous with the emergence of ecocriticism, Gervais stated that 'England is always a country of the mind . . . the notion of a real England must always be a chimera' (16). It is upon this notion of chimera that I propose we briefly examine the Larkinian narrator's concordance with Hill's Offa in *Mercian Hymns* whose England, as well as being 'like a dream' (XV

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<sup>94</sup> Ironically, Christopher Ricks has supplanted Hill as the lead enticer of the *argumentum ad auctoritatem* in much the same way Motion has for Larkin. Tom Paulin's 1992 chapter 'A Visionary Nationalist: Geoffrey Hill' in *Minotaur* affirms this, unflinchingly stating that his essay will critique 'by applying the critical principals which Ricks enunciated in a recent consideration of Empson's work' (227).

75), upheld a similar interest in depicting *simulacral* presentations of nationhood and genealogy, and whose very tropes and techniques often draw attention, simultaneously and, at times, metapoetically, to the very literary processes by which these mythopoeic visions are recounted.

Hill's *Mercian Hymns* open with a panegyric song that lurches temporally between the present and seventh century, and spatially between the different features and locations in Mercia (The Midlands). The song is directed towards and overheard by the legendary Offa, King of Mercia, who appears, simultaneously, to feature in the song's lyrics as an omnipresent fixity, or *genius loci*, imbued within the features of the Mercian landscape both in the *past* and the *present*. It is not until the fourth hymn, however, that we are confronted with the emergence of a first person narrator. Appearing to evoke an undying sense of sovereign prowess, the tone of the hymn is high-handed and pompous; a supernatural, panegyric affirmation of Offa's own dominance, unfettered by the time and place. Soil features prominently as a motif and seems to exist as a physical nexus into which Offa's *genius loci* is both memorialised and memorised: a phenomena which is developed in the hymns immediately following, in which the shape of plant-life shifts to embody the instruments of writing and recording. Both hymns are cited in full below:

#### *IV*

I was invested in mother-earth, the crypt of roots and end

-ings. Child's-play. I abode there, bided my time: where

the mole

shouldered the clogged wheel, his gold solidus; where dry-dust  
 badgers thronged the Roman flues, the long-unlooked-  
 for mansions of our tribe.

V

So much for the elves' wergild, the true governance of  
 England, the gaunt warrior-gospel armoured in engraved  
 stone. I wormed my way heavenward for ages amid  
 barbaric ivy, scrollwork of fern.  
 (Hill 65)

As in 'V Conscript' we receive a faded vision of England. It is both  
 unexperienced and un-romanticised; an ostensible "teleported" *genius loci*  
 imbued with an enigmatic sense of governance and possession.<sup>95</sup> Offa's

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<sup>95</sup> The technique of championing an esteemed individual is also mirrored in *TNS* fragment II. Here, Larkin recalls Pope's use of *genius loci* in paying homage to his friend Bruce Montgomery, who assumes – with perhaps unintended satire – the caricature of Lord Burlington. Larkin's lauding, omniscient "eye" spies Montgomery 'pausing at a picture's edge / To puzzle out the name . . . with a hand / Resting a second on a page' in much the same way as Pope extols his master 'advanc[ing] with majestic mien' about his library (5; 127). Furthermore, like Hill, the *genius loci*'s advances are inextricably connected with a simulacral past and present England: the 'daytime palace / [the] miracle of glass, whose every hall / The light as music fills' is most likely Montgomery's St John's College, and yet simultaneously, evokes the more wistful, archaic grandeur of an 18<sup>th</sup> century estate.

investment in 'mother-earth' as 'Child's-play' matches a similar "investment" made by Larkin in *The North Ship's* 'Winter' in which the narrator's 'thoughts are children' as he roams among 'buried places' while 'miracles / Exhume in each face / Strong silken seed'. Broadly speaking, the preoccupation with the dead, alongside childhood, and the narrator's attempts to retrace lineage through the earth, is evident across both Larkin and Hill's fragments, while the reference to Roman numerals that head the poems evoke the archaic script etched on grave headstones and constitute a more *specific* stylistic similarity. Hill's use of the compound noun 'warrior-gospel' aligns profoundly with 'V Conscript's' deep concern with the appropriate recording of history, thus ensuring its continuance through writing. Writing which is, quite literally, carved out in 'engraved stone' or else magically imbued in the connective 'scrollwork of fern' and 'crypt or roots' in Hill's poem.

The *anxiety* driving such conscientious recordkeeping, however, is best illustrated in 'V Conscript' with Larkin's narrator stating that 'nothing would be easier than replacement'. More than just a truism, the comment recalls the Churchillian maxim that 'history is written by the victor', and implies a similar belief to the one incentivising the narrator's decision to have his land requisitioned in 'V Conscript'. Quite the opposite to cowardice or martyrdom, standing up to the 'bunch of horsemen' would mean death, but more specifically, a death that would go unrecorded. Indeed, to 'follow further / The details of his own defeat and murder' would require apt recordkeeping, by way of the supernatural and physical methods described in Hill's poem. Moreover, the logical impasse in 'V Conscript's' concluding couplet (the

impossibility of exerting power over the means by which one is memorialised if already dead) alludes to Offa's supernatural ability to do *just that*. Hill's attribution of *genius loci* to Offa's childish, pernicious character allows him to oversee the very means by which he is being commemorated, thus serving to champion an altogether new means of supernatural commemoration whose nod to occultism would naturally preclude it from influencing Larkin's milder quasi-Romantic philosophical gambit.

Both poems appear to celebrate the cultural and political derivations of a regional England; however, while 'V Conscript' aims to forge a memorialisation of the past through the established lexicons of warfare, conquest and social responsibility (an approach which is mirrored in the literary decision to frame the poem as a Renaissance sonnet), Hill advances an entirely new rubric through which a truer memorialisation can be attained. As fragment V acknowledges with Offa's return in the first person, this new mode surrenders the normal material of the 'wergild' the 'solidus' and the Roman 'flues' for a bigger imaginative leap which recruits, instead, the lexicon of *literature*. The 'scrollwork of fern' not only conveys the interconnectedness of literature, but also firmly enlists its symbiotic relationship with the earth itself. It is only 'the scrollwork of fern' which enables Offa to worm 'heavenward', while the ironised 'true' governance of England stalls with the benign, unenlivened relics and artefacts of 'engraved stone'. One might conclude that the innocent imaginings of 'Child's-play' which Hill refers to as the 'crypt of roots and endings' at the beginning of his fragment is a necessary component in achieving both a vivid and true

account of the past, as opposed to the adult, 'rational' adherence to the minted coins and engraved tombs favoured by archaeology. Paradoxically then, both imagination and literature's *expression* of imagination, are necessary to access the true, full spectrum of suffering felt in the past.

By this point, one can begin to appreciate that Larkin's understanding of England is somewhat bifurcated, vacillating between "night dreams" (of current anxieties relating to literary form, sexuality and accomplishment), and "day dreams" (of ancient myth, regions and politics). On a single page of paper shoved into the second workbook, Larkin's efforts at keeping a dream diary concluded along with a rather insipid addendum scribbled by their writer claiming that the exercise 'no longer interests me' (*AL* 12). It is with this despondent sign-off that Larkin ultimately draws his dream recording effort to a close (though some loose pages, deemed by Booth to have been 'misdated'<sup>96</sup> imply more dream records may have taken place). To borrow the title of the lecture which inspired its genesis, Larkin's little-known 'Night journey' had concluded. One of the final dreams, recorded on 7 December 1942, retells Larkin's envisioning of 'Porteynon' [*sic*] on the Gower Peninsula. In the footnotes elucidating the dream,<sup>97</sup> Don Lee connects the dream to 'the summer of 1942 [in which] Larkin and Philip Brown took an idyllic holiday in

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<sup>96</sup> I cannot say I am convinced by Booth's claims that the diary continues based on a single, ambiguous biographical reference to Gillian Evans in 1946 (*LAL* 117 n37). The similarities between Evans and the girl in the dream seem rather incidental, especially since the latter only appears in scattered marginalia. The significance of which is rather overstated by Booth in *AL* 32, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Number 56 cited in *AL* 28 (2009). Annotations on page 12.

Borva House Cottage on the Gower Peninsula, recollected in Poem XXXI [sic]<sup>98</sup> commencing 'I dreamed of an out-thrust arm of land' (12). Poem XXI was composed a few weeks after the Port Eynon dream and represents, according to oneirologist Wim Tigges, a 'dream-paradigm', since it contains many of the 'component features [that] predominate in literary epiphanies',<sup>99</sup> namely: the '*elements* (earth, water, air, fire), *motions* (patterns of movement that are independent to whatever it is that moves), and *shapes or geometric features* (such as lines of circles' [353]) (emphasis mine). The poem is divided into two stanzas of eight lines, the first describing the narrator's dream of 'an out-thrust arm of land', and the second detailing the narrator's apparent amnesia upon waking from the dream, and concludes with a sense of emotional catharsis and purgation:

XXI

I dreamed of an out-thrust arm of land  
 Where gulls blew over a wave  
 That fell along miles of sand;  
 And the wind climbed up the caves  
 To tear at a dark-faced garden  
 Whose black flowers were dead,

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<sup>98</sup> The lines actually come from Poem XXI.

<sup>99</sup> Unsurprisingly, Tigges credits Bachelard for much of his methodology in bringing to bear spatial, motional and elemental modes of interpretation simultaneously, though adds that his methods 'are more systematic than the procedures of Bachelard' (353).

And broke round a house we slept in,  
 A drawn blind and a bed.

I was sleeping, and you woke me  
 To walk on the chilled shore  
 Of a night with no memory,  
 Till your voice forsook my ear  
 Till your two hands withdrew  
 And I was empty of tears,  
 On the edge of a bricked and streeeted sea  
 And a cold hill of stars.

(*CP* 12)

The temporality of the oneiric depictions is confounding: on closer investigation, both stanzas appear to describe the same location, while only one credits it as the subject of a dream. The use of the definite article on the second line of the second stanza would seem to denote, against all reasonable doubt, that the ‘chilled shore’ is the same shore upon which the ‘out-thrust land’ previously described is situated (the use of an indefinite article would seem the natural choice otherwise). Consequently, the dream seems to “speak back” to itself, or – at very least – the waking sentience of the dream’s narrator appears, rather bizarrely, to suddenly occupy the geographical topography of his dream, as if some of the dream’s ‘existential residue’ remains in waking life. The second stanza is, to put it more directly, a daydream about a night dream. The ‘dark-faced garden’ contains ‘dead . . .

black flowers', reminiscent of Baudelaire's eponymous and morally impoverished *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and again alludes to the same, spent, decomposing symbolism as outlined in 'Mythological Introduction'. Tigges argues that this is no accident, and that the poem is, in effect, one third of a triptych consisting of two other accompanying 'corollary-epiphanies' (358): the first, 'Mythological Introduction', and the second, 'Disintegration', written in 1942.<sup>100</sup> Uniting all three, Tigges states, is a preoccupation with 'horizontal' which is recruited as a portable phenomenon, between both daydream and night dream, to freight notions of loss and subjugation through outstretched arms, and outstretched land:

Horizontal motion is deadly . . . arms are horizontally held out, like the arm of land or of the lover, but the love sought is not forthcoming. [In, 'Disintegration', horizontal motion] "spreads" an ice sheet on the lawn that is as "shaven" as human heads', [and in 'Poem XXI',] a horizontally extended arm, whether of land or of a person, encounters either a threatening power of betrayal, a nothingness (357-358).

Tigges reading of the symbolic interchange of oneiric and wakeful horizontal motion is compelling. Horizontal motion indeed represents a zombie-like attraction in 'Mythological Introduction', the territory of rotting plants and frigid love in 'Poem XXI', and a scythe lacerating crops and human hair in 'Disintegration'. A tad less convincing is Tigges's claim that 'verticality' is

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<sup>100</sup> Written for the *Oxford University Labour Club Bulletin*, February, 1942. (TCP, 2012)

'horror'. For me, the 'cold hill of stars' that the lovers ascend at the end of 'Poem XXI' is not so much alarming as illustrative of a transcendental hope. Likewise the 'promised . . . steeples and fanlights of a dream' is the one isolated image of hope in 'Disintegration'; and while it is the girl's standing posture bolt upright in 'Mythological Introduction' which reveals that the 'webbed earth [had] eaten away her side', the decomposition had taken place when she was laid down in a horizontal position. Either way, one is reminded of Larkin's geometric preoccupations when diagrammatising his dreams, and particularly the associative correlation of rationality and irrationality with the *y-axis* employed in the dream of his father's tool shed, and later, more profusely, in the collection *High Windows* (see chapters five and six). Given that 'Poem XXI' was the final poem in Tigges's 'trptych', I argue that the ascent to the stars at the poem's conclusion is less a frigid impasse than a transcendental hope: similar to 'The Dream Diaries', which, around this time, reached a juddering halt on a 'torn off page' with an addendum that the project 'no longer interests me'. The narrator in 'Poem XXI' awakes from a what appears to be a protracted dream and, much like the organic features in the poem which appear depleted, drained and unfruitful despite the strong endurance of the physical, one feels that some aspect of the dreamer has both died and persevered (*AL* 28, 12).

The subject of the poem, while supposedly feminine, could also be the poet's friend, Bruce Montgomery to whom the beginning of these poetic fragments is dedicated. (Indeed, the space given over to homoerotic accounts between Larkin and his close friends and strangers in 'The Dream

Diaries', albeit worthy of its own separate investigation, would add weight to such a claim and may well explain the strange absence of physical attributes in 'Poem XXI' and 'Disintegration', save the peculiar preoccupation with 'stubble' and 'shaved' heads in the latter). The poem, then, in many ways both describes, and is contemporaneous with, a kind of methodological conclusion: Larkin's preoccupation with tapping the subconscious derivations of poetry has, at this point, concluded. This is not to say, of course, that his interest in dreams did not continue; rather, that his methodological interest, or *modus operandi*, in tracking his dreams, and exploring the *effect* they exerted on both his writing process and his poetic symbolisms, temporarily ceased.

Although the dream poetry included in *The North Ship*, together with 'The Dream Diaries' themselves, possess precious little of the poise and imagistic dexterity and subtlety for which their creator would later become famous, they are useful in demystifying aspects both of the poet's technique and of his character. In studying both texts simultaneously, we begin to see the veiled mechanics behind much of Larkin's thinking about place, space and England. Towards the latter, it soon becomes clear that Larkin upheld a shifting standpoint depending on whether he thought about England during sleep or while awake. While sleeping, the concept of England was frequently one imbued by events of the present day: one that was interspersed with the activities of the Second World War, and interactions with his contemporaries at St. John's College, Oxford. Conversely, during the day, Larkin's England was one stubbornly conjoined to the past in both formal techniques and

imagery. Evident throughout (and contradicting the prevailing current of criticism directed towards the collection), is a marked interest in the *genius loci* of English regionalism whose fragmentary voice and sleepless fear of the unchecked replacement of tropes and histories, together with its quasi-supernatural perseverance through the earth, anticipates the regional fragments of Hill's *Mercian Hymns*. Running parallel to these ideas, Larkin demonstrates a previously unforeseen interest in the pictorial, geometric and trigonometric aspects of place setting. An interest which may be elucidated through Bachelard's phenomenology of architecture and the dream theory of Wim Tigges. The apotheosis of these early discoveries work themselves into the poetics of Larkin's final collection *High Windows*, whose eponymous poem concludes with its narrator's symbolic deferral of darkened thought into enlightened *heights*. Both suggest that Larkin's method was perhaps more "modernist" than initially apparent. Furthermore, we see during this period that Larkin used both dreams, and poetry to heuristic ends, hoping to better understand and improve his poetic aesthetic. What drove this venture is difficult to deduce, and could be attributed to many things, ranging from the poet's rigorously intellectual environment, a personal desire to achieve publication, a need to achieve emancipation from a clinging literary heritage, or a homoerotic desire to impress Bruce Montgomery – to whom several of the poetic fragments are dedicated. To this end, several poems which are published as polished pieces of art are in fact prolegomena: encapsulations of a work-in-progress; waypoints along a road of subconscious discovery; adumbrations of a poetic ideal. At the points at which both dream and

daytime rumination intersect, we see a certain conflation of interests: in 'Mythological Introduction' we observe a night dream that was subjected to the beliefs and inspiration of a daydream to create a scene both stubbornly descriptive of the poet's sexual anxieties and habituated locales of the present, while nevertheless effused with the tropes and scenes of a mythic past. Poem XXI, in many ways, marks the completion of Larkin's dream project, coinciding closely with the finalisation of 'The Dream Diaries' themselves. I hope I have demonstrated, therefore, that the importance of 'The Dream Diaries' extends far beyond that of mere anecdotal, biographical trivia. Meanwhile, and partly by consequence, I hope to have demonstrated that *The North Ship* itself is far from ready to have its case written off by Larkin scholarship at large.

## 3

**A “Modern” Flâneur: Larkin’s Journeys and the Emergence of “Elsewhere”.**

‘Here’ – the opening poem of *The Whitsun Weddings* – sees Larkin deploying a rhetorical technique whose effect is as striking as it is uncharacteristic of the poet’s usual stylistic mode. The poem’s opening three stanzas feature a single sentence that, by Larkin’s own admission, ‘is frightful to read aloud’ owing to its dizzying extension across ‘twenty-four-and-a-half lines’ (*FR* 59). During the stanza, Larkin uses one verb, ‘swerving’, which he repeats in the present continuous tense three times, separated by semi-colons, to form what is perhaps the poet’s most elaborate display of epanaphora in his entire *oeuvre*. The effect is arresting: a repeated use of an identical verb may seem bold and confounding enough, but the very choice of verb and its connotations with ungoverned, reckless motion, mesmerises the reader, and causes our attention to linger. These connotations, too, are in turn deconstructed and considered: from ‘swerving east, from rich industrial shadows’, to the more ethereal image of ‘swerving through fields’; eventually culminating, ironically, in the figurative ‘swerving to solitude’; by which time the word’s visceral and kinetic associations seem to be dispelled, and subsumed within the very linguistic dexterity which Larkin, as poet, forces the word to uphold. Thus, the word ‘swerving’ becomes a nexus for a kind of

semantic and syntactical gambit, pressurising the sentence with innumerable synonymic and syntactic possibilities and strategies. The pressure that the repeated word exerts upon one breath is, itself, exhausting, and the conjoined result of all these elements seems to forcibly lift the reader's attention above semantics and onto the reading *experience*: one's eye is drawn into the very slipstream of the sentence-moment, it seems, with the verb continually reaffirming a visceral sense of dynamism, both in a literal sense of 'swerve', and in a figurative sense in terms of connotative exploration. On one level, 'motion' seems to be uppermost in the narrator's mind, given the frenetic succession of urban and rural scenes that flicker, in panoply, behind the text itself.

Consequently, the opening stanza of 'Here' almost demands from its reader a second reading; one which is more meditative, with a lingering focus upon semantic value, both of which demand a certain pace-abatement from the reader that in turn begins to destabilise the enduring image of Larkin-the-man as a curmudgeonly homebody, averse to "movement" in both poetic form and vehicular travel.<sup>101</sup> The character that replaces this Larkin is strikingly youthful – a poet replete with a vitality for both the experience and the poetic recapitulation of adventure beyond the environs of his home. The

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<sup>101</sup> James Booth describes the poem as 'the peak of [Larkin's] achievement on both professional and literary terms' (*LAL* 258). Larkin's public persona, by this point, had largely settled on the image of the parochial hermit, and, as such, continued to corroborate Larkin's own 'hatred of abroad' as first voiced after a childhood holiday in 1936 (21). Motion concurs, stating that the poet's disapproval of racy pastimes and adventures eventually even lead to him feeling 'agoraphobic when walking out of doors' (*AWL* 490).

vehicle that transports the narrator upon this journey travels ‘all night north’ and veers in a mixture of compass orientations: first ‘east, from rich industrial shadows’, then ‘north’, and eventually, at dawn, ‘to the surprise of a large town’. By the poem’s conclusion, the agglomeration of different environments that flit across the page is so colourful, yet detailed, that the reader may be forgiven for feeling they have witnessed the poetic equivalent of a pictorial phantasmagoria. The final stanza constitutes a kind of detumescence: instead of a continual repetition of the word ‘swerve’, Larkin takes the structural blueprint established in his opening stanza, and substitutes the word ‘Here’. (‘Here silence stands / Like heat . . . Here leaves unnoticed thicken . . . Here is unfenced existence.’) The effect is much the same. The reader’s attention lingers across the descriptive and semantic pressure that the single noun is forced to uphold, replacing connotations of movement instead with a sense of stasis and calm.

For the Larkin scholar, reading ‘Here’ directly after *The Less Deceived* is somewhat arresting. Its unannounced arrival and the vertiginous relief with which it positions itself as separate from Larkin’s two previous collections – both of which possess a tone and pace that seem broadly reflective of the poet’s careful, fastidious nature – strikes of a new poetic agenda; a poetic breakthrough or a change in direction or voice. And yet reading beyond ‘Here’, one quickly senses that this new characterisation of Larkin as an adventurer withers almost as quickly as it is constructed, and folds back into the poet’s more tried-and-tested route of *in situ* meditations upon places and their people. It is – as is not untypical for Larkin – a stylistic false alarm. A

prolegomenon that reneges upon its promises almost as quickly as it yields them and, in doing so, raises many more questions than answers. While it confirms, indeed, that the breathiness of Yeats (whose voice haunted *The North Ship* and lingered, despite Hardy's influence, throughout much of *The Less Deceived*) has been finally eschewed, it refuses to confer any new, *clear* set of literary allegiances from which one might claim Larkin's new stylistic and topical interests are derived. The incantatory lyricism that percolates through much of *The North Ship* seems wholly antithetical to 'Here', which presents Larkin traversing and describing unknown geographies and subcultures with the *presentness* and near-panegyric spirit of Bradshaw;<sup>102</sup> and yet, despite this, one still gets the impression that a poem such as 'Here' remains sufficiently *local* so as to leave unchallenged Robert B Shaw's claim that Larkin's poetry is 'stubbornly *indigenous* [and] not been made for export' (Shaw *PN Review* 6; emphasis mine). Indeed, the poem is enduringly "English" and demonstrates no transgression of England's borders – either explicit or implicit – despite its narrator's frisson for exploration beyond his home.

One is tempted, on reading 'Here', to extract some form of biographical elucidation out of the nine-year gap that separates *The Whitsun Weddings* from Larkin's previous collection. Even the most stalwart Formalist

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<sup>102</sup> George Bradshaw helped popularise railway travel throughout the Victorian period and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century by offering experiential accounts of travelling the railway network. See *Bradshaw's Railway Handbook Complete Edition, Volumes 1-4*. Typical examples of poems in earlier collections are *The North Ship's* 'V Conscript' and even *The Less Deceived's* 'Wedding-Wind'.

critic would be tempted to peek behind the text at the circumstances in Larkin's life that might have impelled this new interest in the poetic expression of travel and/or adventure. Larkin, however, is – superficially at least – obtuse and unforthcoming in revealing any change in artistic temperament during this period, stating with characteristic elusiveness that the nine year lacuna between *The Less Deceived* and *The Whitsun Weddings* owed itself to 'finding out what to say as well as how to say it, and that takes time'.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, his words on the poem 'Here' itself are cryptic and contradictory: initially claiming that the poem 'is pushing on into a bloodier and bloodier area'. The implication behind these words is soon undermined in a letter to Robert Conquest in which Larkin refers to the poem, rather diminutively, as a 'plain description' (*FR* 59). All other attempts to explain the poem's pace, wayward set of geographies, and oscillatory directional bearing are limited: either to cross-references with Larkin's prose accounts of Hull in essays such as 'A Place to Write',<sup>104</sup> or hidden in letters such as that to Professor Laurence Perrine in 1980 about a train journey to the Holderness Peninsula (Burnett 392).<sup>105</sup> Little matter, one might think, given that 'Here's later stanzas go on to denunciate 1960s urbanity in a

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<sup>103</sup> from *The Paris Review, The Art of Poetry, No. 30*. Interview with Robert Phillips. 84, 1982.

<sup>104</sup> 'A Place to Write' can be found in *A Rumoured City: New Poets from Hull, 1982* edited by Douglas Dunn.

<sup>105</sup> Writing to Professor Perrine, Larkin states, 'I was thinking of a journey I took many times, catching the Yorkshire Pullman from King's Cross (London) at 5-20 [*sic*] p.m., changing at Doncaster'.

register and tone far more characteristic of Larkin-the-poet, and so far more appealing, and striking, to the contemporary Larkin scholar.

At this point, it might seem understandable why critics have, by and large, eschewed approaching the topic of travel and 'foreign influence' in Larkin's writing. The subject appears to be the focus of an unending series of uncertainties and anxieties for the poet – both personal and creative – which makes the isolation of any one 'travel-agenda', or influence, difficult to identify. Indeed, seeking a broader, contextual elucidation of 'Here' by means of investigating Larkin's personal interest in travel in general, is equally inchoate. This is compounded by the fact that critical interest in Larkin's poetic manifestation of travel, or its experiential derivations, are almost non-existent. James Booth goes some way towards redressing this in his marked coverage of Larkin's family holidays in Europe, together with the topographic and cultural derivations that inform *A Girl in Winter's* heroine, Katherine Lind (LAL 18-19; 103-106), while Burnett's anthology lists a clutch of previously unpublished travel poems. Neither, however, meditates lastingly upon the profound critical opportunities that lie within this field, such as those centring around Larkin's presentation of places and spaces while on the move.

Yet if we do linger on this subject some remarkable things come to the fore. Firstly, a close look into the tendencies of Larkin reveal that he did cosset a personal interest in travel. This interest is corroborated, in no small way, by the significant number of holidays he undertook regularly to distant quarters of the United Kingdom, often as far afield as the Inner Hebrides,

primarily with Monica Jones.<sup>106</sup> Though prone to misadventure (A minor car crash rather soured the mood of a trip to Scotland in 1968.<sup>107</sup>) such holidays were regular, and – more to the point – begrudgingly enjoyed. Oddly, such trips rarely informed the content of his poetry; instead, travel appeared to exact a much more indelible mark on Larkin’s sense of self as a poet – a sequestered portion of *self* that was fraught with anxiety, and went largely unpoeticised during his lifetime. The relationship Larkin’s poetic persona had with this “mobile-self” was a troubled one, charged with frisson while at times simultaneously – and reflexively – struck by its own sense of incompatibility with the carefully-hewn image of Larkin-the-man. One noteworthy example of this can be found in his unexpected response at being issued his driver’s licence:

I creep petrified along the road in no gear at all. Oogh, groogh, urrrghgh . . . I feel I ought to go out and see that I’ve locked the boot and that no one can steal my jack, spare tyre, etc. Oh dear! Isn’t it all *untypical*! I feel as if I had somehow slipped through into a different character. Phew (AWL 342; emphasis Larkin’s).

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<sup>106</sup> A previously unpublished poem collected in *TCP*, ‘Somewhere on the Isle of Mull’, dated 1952, is an example of such ventures. The best coverage of Larkin’s personal holidays is definitely provided by Motion (1993) and covers trips, mainly in the 1950s and earlier 1960s, with Monica Jones. Anna Farthing’s recent exhibition, ‘New Eyes Each Year’, explores Larkin’s previously hidden stash of souvenir tea towels.

<sup>107</sup> ‘At the top [of Applecross] I pull off the road with all the expertise of a practised driver and tear off my front registration plate’ (AWL 385).

The '*untypical*' phenomena of driving, it seems, bestows upon Larkin the uneasy feeling that his character has altered. The choice of the phrasing in 'slipped through into a different character' is interesting, and seems to evoke less a sense of *heightened* existence and more a sense of *parallel* existence (he might well just have sooner 'slipped through' into another dimension). It is a baffling comment, and accompanies an anxiety-inducing, character-altering depiction of unwieldy movement that seems to reflect the swerving train journey in 'Here', together with the narrator's peculiar disembodiment from his surroundings. The narrator in both instances is an individual subjected to frenzied motion that is conspicuously at odds with his incumbent persona. In this sense, it might seem obvious why travel – in the main at least – was detrimental to Larkin's work as poet: rather than a supply of inspirational content, travel threatens to dissolve the act of writing poetry given that it projects the narrator further *away* from the cherished banality of his familiar environments which he requires, as a poet, to incubate relevant feelings of social disconnectedness and alienation. In short, travel seems, in these examples at least, to separate Larkin from himself.

Despite only sporadically remarking on Larkin's personal disinterest in travel,<sup>108</sup> Larkin scholarship has nevertheless taken a marked (though still insufficient, I would argue) interest in the poet's fondness for European

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<sup>108</sup> Booth cites Larkin's correspondence to Amis in which the former describes two family holidays to Germany. The excerpt evokes the same melange of comedy and fear in its speaker as that found in Larkin's description of his first drive cited above: 'I found it petrifying, not being able to speak to anyone or read anything, frightening notices that you felt you should understand and couldn't' (21).

thought and literature. Such critical focus has predominantly centred upon Larkin's devotion to symbolism, and – by proxy rather than by obvious connection – its key progenitors in Mallarmé and Gautier. Barbara Everett has made much of Larkin's debt to the symbolists in 'Larkin: After Symbolism', with her argument most convincing during its close textual analysis of 'Arrivals, Departures' alongside Baudelaire's 'Le Port'. Everett recognises, and draws attention to, the discordance between the poem's apparent debt to French symbolist forms and Larkin's own well-documented denunciation of "non-British" poetry; a dismissiveness which is no better summed up than in Larkin's interview with *The London Magazine* in 1964.<sup>109</sup> The connection, Everett claims, is a subtle one, with poems like 'Arrivals, Departures' alluding to 'a whole phase of French Symbolist verse with [a] kind of ironic casualness' (236). Booth, without offering much up-close critical engagement, recalls Larkin's Brunette Coleman years, and his recollection of Baudelaire's 'Femmes Damnées' in *Trouble At Willow Gables*. However, rather than existing as a symbolic influence in a typical sense, Larkin calls upon Baudelaire's rubric of 'hectic moralism', as a reason for legitimising a swathe of sexual imagery including lesbianism and belt fetishism, which for Booth, acts as means 'of refining and testing his English voice, or more radically, of evading his Englishness' (74; 76). Indeed, Larkin's later admission that his poem 'Absences' 'sounds like a slightly unconvincing

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<sup>109</sup> 'Foreign poetry? No!' from Ian Hamilton's 'Four Conversations' *London Magazine* vol. 4 no. 8, 1964, and collected in *FR* p. 25.

translation from a French symbolist' led him to confirm his wish that he 'could write like this more often', thus betraying his former outspoken xenophobia, and offering a certain credence to Booth and Everett's belief that he upheld a begrudging tie with French literature, and that, on occasion, he actively 'tries to write like a foreigner' (*LAL* 159; 103). Beyond Europe, Larkin's attitude to American literature and thought was far from complimentary: his attitude to the poetry of Sylvia Plath was obtuse, dismissing the latter's confessional style as that which recounts an 'experience with which we can in no sense identify', and his frosty reception of Robert Lowell's compliment that he [Larkin] was the best poet since Dylan Thomas, was snubbed due to Larkin's opinion that American writers, like those of Bloomsbury, were sycophantic and fraternised closely and openly within "mainstream" literary circles (*RW* 279; *AWL* 429).

The hostility aimed at his transatlantic compeers' apparent frivolity would ultimately be the subject of a creative project in its own right. In 2000, Zachary Leader's *Letters of Kingsley Amis* revealed a previously unknown set of poetic parodies on which Amis and Larkin are believed to have collaborated.<sup>110</sup> The collection, contemporaneous with Larkin's formulation of *The Whitsun Weddings*, is entitled *All Aboard the Gravy Train* (hereafter,

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<sup>110</sup> In a letter dated 9 September 1956, Amis seemingly nudges Larkin to forward what appears to be Larkin's agreed-upon collaborative contribution: 'I send you All aboard the gravy train, with a space for you to insert your poem if you care to. Hurry up with that, eh? Because it would be nice to get the whole thing off to Spender soon' (Leader 477). It is possible that the pair's decision to feature railways heavily was an attempt to win Spender's attention over.

'*Gravy Train*') and features, almost without exception, colourful, lavish depictions of travel and adventure, undertaken by an array of Movement and American poets under the editorial pseudonym 'Ron Cain'. Amis and Larkin's reason to feature travel, and particularly train travel, so heavily in the collection is a little unclear: it may, in part have been an attempt to flatter, or indeed rile, the editor Stephen Spender whose poem 'The Express' was an unflinching euphonic celebration of the lavishness of railway travel (see note 6). Perhaps more likely, was Amis and Larkin's intention to depict travel as the embodiment of unthinking bourgeois frivolity. After all, the *Gravy Train's* parodies wage a scathing indictment upon Amis and Larkin's Movement compeers: painting travel as both glitzy and gratuitous, the indulgence of which might threaten to detach any self-respecting Movement writer from their level-headed founding principles of 'anti-romanticism [and] commonsense [*sic*]' (Burnett 617). Larkin's 'Outcome of a Conversation', for instance, sees a caricatural Enright engage in a lofty conversation with 'Mr. Hakagawa' in a busy Japanese city about the 'fall of the yen', before shifting its focus dramatically onto a deliberate bastardisation of Keats's famous lines on the importance of clarity in poetry.<sup>111</sup> Leader affords little time to the poems, other than anthologising them in the appendix, a move replicated by Archie Burnett in *The Complete Poems*, albeit with limited additional extrapolation. Beyond recruiting travel, symbolically and exclusively, to

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<sup>111</sup> In Larkin's poem, the posturing Enright mires Keats's words in farcically ambiguity, undermining the need for clarity that is stated therein. Keats's line 'if poetry comes not naturally as leaves to a tree it had better not come at all' becomes Enright's, 'May my words come as naturally as leaves or their words' (618).

denunciate the comparative frivolity of their Movement compeers, one gets the impression that Larkin and Amis, too, feel that travel writing constitutes a betrayal of the Movement's founding principle: describing *topoi* unknown to the reader after all, suggests the means to travel, as well as constituting, in and of itself, an attempt at alienation; the latter which Amis, and especially Larkin – in typical Movement martyrdom – deem to be a burden that only the poet himself need bear. Such beliefs find a degree of biological corroboration too: the *Gravy Train* poems mark the beginning of an ongoing enmity Larkin upheld towards fellow Movement poet Davie and his apparently showy love of travel. In April 1977, Larkin wrote to Monica, 'Davie's off to California again . . . Couldn't we do a parody?' (*TCP* 654) followed by reference to yet another cutting parody and indictment against travel in his poem 'California, here I come' written during the same year.

Travel, then, is a deeply multifaceted and slippery subject for Larkin. His personal comments, tastes and poetic *modus operandi* all appear to flit around in a frustrating stand-off. Time now to engage with these concerns, and further the discussion as to what informed Larkin's construction of 'elsewhere', and indeed, what influences of 'elsewhere' engaged in its own construction. In this chapter, I aim to argue that aspects of *The Whitsun Weddings*, in many ways, embody Larkin's attempt to reconcile his narrator's true sense of 'self' with the geospatial 'otherness' that tries to force his personae in other directions. In attempting to continually "reset" the narrator back to its original Larkinesque character (and through the depictions of travel themselves) I suggest Larkin effects a series of singular poetic

techniques. The successful completion of these processes is embodied, I argue, in his rendering of an all-new place phenomenon: namely, the phenomenon of 'elsewhere'. A notion which, much like in 'Here', is often in turn drawn into a reflexive and reactive stand-off with the compositional moment. In addition, I argue that the anxiety of subjective fragmentation extends to Larkin's treatment of foreign literary influences, a handful of which, notably Baudelaire and Foucault, succeed in having their ideas penetrate Larkin's xenophobic guard, allowing them to influence, in turn, Larkin's presentation of place and space. In so doing, I claim that the ambivalence of opinion Larkin upholds towards "elsewhere" – both in real life and in his poetry – is no reason to assume that his poems are not cognisant with, critical of, or – at the very least – analogous with contemporary and pre-existing French notions of place and travel. Therefore, I argue that Larkin did not so much abscond from critical discourses of the time, but rather situated himself covertly within them, allowing him to engage freely with contemporaneous (and pre-existing) discourses connected with travel, movement, and their presentation in art. While some such critiques were contemporary to Larkin's period of writing during the 1950s, I argue that the poet also looked further back, and in doing so, upheld a cognisance of modes of travel writing that predates the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Key among the latter is the 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of the *flânerie* popularised by Baudelaire – a

writer to whose debt Larkin seemed to owe more and more as his *oeuvre* developed.<sup>112</sup>

In addition, and partly by way of contrast, I also wish to look at the place/travel poetic that exists in *The Less Deceived*, and especially how this alters as it approaches the juncture with *The Whitsun Weddings*. The earlier collection, I argue, does display instances of travel, but these are predominantly either *imagined* journeys, or meditations upon the *phenomena* of travel compared to similar poems in *The Whitsun Weddings* which seem more preoccupied with the physical or “real” journey to an oft-undisclosed ‘elsewhere’. The manner in which the imagined journeys of *The Less Deceived* manifest is, itself, varied and encompasses abstract or “possible” journeys (‘Poetry of Departures’), or journeys that are utilised paradigmatically to provide conceptual ‘space’ across which a conceptual notion may be displayed (‘No Road’). Consequently, the image of the *flâneur* is inchoate, mired as it is within the poems’ conceptual freight, and only later moving into prominence in *The Whitsun Weddings*. A benefit of the “imagined” journey might be that that Larkin himself need not be physically present in the places that he describes, unlike much of *The Whitsun Weddings* where the narrator’s journeys are depicted as palpable, real events replete with visceral details and descriptions. This notion of the

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<sup>112</sup> In addition to Everett’s indispensable ‘Philip Larkin: After Symbolism’, Sam Perry also touches on Larkin’s symbolic influences in “‘Only in Dreams’: Philip Larkin and Surrealism’. We shall return to Perry in more detail in chapter five.

“abstract journey” in *The Less Deceived* is described by Larkin himself, in his commentary on a poem collected therein, itself called ‘Absences’:

I suppose I like ‘Absences’ . . . because of its subject matter – I am always thrilled by the thought of what places look like when I am not there (*FR* 17).<sup>113</sup>

The comment confirms, in no uncertain terms, Larkin’s interest in the abstract journey. Implicit in the extract above is the suggestion that abstract journeying supplies a “sense of distance” to the poem, with the narrator needing to physically acquire distance in order to compose. The conceptual distance attained is thus sufficient to project poet and reader, with an almost supernatural freedom, into an unpeopled space that offers its own advantages and freedoms for aesthetic and emotional renderings. Travel, then, rather than providing the visceral source of inspiration as in *The Whitsun Weddings*, is often merely used to imagine the possibility of a given environment by creating the necessary separation of subject and object. An example of this abstract journey may also be found in the opening poem of *The Less Deceived* itself. Quite the contrary to ‘Here’, the opening poem of Larkin’s preceding collection, *The Less Deceived*, presents the concept of travel in an altogether different sense: in ‘Lines on a Young Lady’s Photograph Album’ (hereafter ‘Lines’), rather than being that which dizzies

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<sup>113</sup> Interestingly, Booth implies that ‘Absences’ is a kind of prototype ‘symbolist ode’, which would later find its equivalent in poems such as ‘The Card Players’. Booth’s reasoning turns to the ‘final apostrophe’ in these poems which ‘recall[s] similar effects in Gautier, Baudelaire and Laforgue’ (*LAL* 361).

and disorientates in the present moment, travel – and, specifically, the space across which one travels – is repositioned within the conceptual field of the mind. Physical space is supplanted by conceptual space, with a sense of distance inscribed not by miles of railway track, but by time. Indeed, time supplies that very distance which ‘we yowl across’ in the space between ‘eye to page’; or the progression of years between youth and adulthood.

The journey, then, between subject and object, does not need to be physical for Larkin; it can exist solely within a notional plane and may still garner the components necessary for the affective separation of subject and object. Paradoxically, it is this more conceptual mode of journeying or “distance-making”, rather than the visceral journeys portrayed throughout much of *The Whitsun Weddings*, that seem to have achieved the more enduring hold on the imaginations of Larkin’s readers. Indeed, one might be forgiven for thinking that Alan Bennett had not even read ‘The Whitsun Weddings’, or any of Larkin’s railway poems for that matter, when he made his famously sweeping comment on Larkin’s cognisance of travel in 1981:

When Auden writes about place, and in a way when Betjeman does, they are actually visitors to the place... they are tourists... they come and then they leave. Whereas Larkin is there, living there... imprisoned there.<sup>114</sup>

Bennett’s conspectus appears cogent, but is actually highly generalised. After all, it is difficult to imagine what status Larkin assumes in poems such

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<sup>114</sup> *The South Bank Show: Philip Larkin*, broadcast 30 May 1982.

as 'An Arundel Tomb' if it is not that of a tourist who is ultimately bound to 'come and then . . . leave'. Partly as a result of this generalisation, Bennett's point becomes noteworthy for other reasons: it reminds us once again of the enduring power of Larkin's public persona . . . of Larkinland itself and its capacity to beguile even the most discerning readers into building a picture of Larkin-the-man as the eternal stay-at-home hermit, shackled emotionally and poetically to the Humber estuary.

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I wish to start our discussion by looking at one of the more energetic poems in *The Less Deceived*, with particular focus upon the way in which notions of travel are imagined, rendered and subverted. 'Poetry of Departures' was completed by the end of January 1954 and consists of four stanzas each comprised of eight lines. The narrator commences in an almost jocular tone, meditating on a colloquial piece of reported speech: '*He chucked up everything / And just cleared off.*' Over the next two stanzas, Larkin's narrator evokes his own cravings, and suspicions of the 'purifying, / Elemental move' that such a dramatic exit from daily existence would afford. Eventually the suspicion wins out, and in a typical Larkin turn, one gets the impression that fantasising about such an exodus offers just as much satisfaction, if not more, than undertaking the physical act itself.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, the narrator does not walk out on his humdrum daily responsibilities; instead, he wallows

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<sup>115</sup> Larkin's preference, throughout much of his life, for auto-eroticism over shared sexual congress is well documented and described particularly well in *TPP* 69 and *LAL* 285 as well as, more broadly, by Freeman.

in the conceptual space of a fantasised, *potential* journey. Like other poems in the collection – notably ‘Lines’ and ‘Absences’, where the narrator envisages an ‘attic’ and a secular ‘heaven’ respectively – the imagined space is both unpeopled and unpoliced; an almost bordello-like environment of unchecked pleasure in which the narrator can indulge the auto-erotic and auto-sensuous desires of the self.

Unsurprisingly, the final two stanzas evoke an image of the wandering Lothario, whose quest for fulfilment is knowingly undermined by the very stereotype that it confers on the artistic world:

So to hear it said

*He walked out on the whole crowd*

Leaves me flushed and stirred,

Like *Then she undid her dress*

Or *Take that you bastard;*

Surely I can, if he did?

And that helps me stay

Sober and industrious.

But I’d go today,

Yes, swagger the nut-strewn roads,

Crouch in the fo’c’sle

Stubbly with goodness, if

It weren’t so artificial,

Such a deliberate step backwards

To create an object:

Books; china; a life

Reprehensibly perfect.

(CP 64)

These final two stanzas express more than a mere meditation upon the phenomena of travel: in addition, between the penultimate and final stanza, one recognises the queasy undertones of a thwarted sexual response cycle. Rather than deriving arousal, as one might expect of Larkin, from the Chatterley-esque literary portrayal of nudity, '*And then she undid her dress*', the narrator instead recruits this instance as a simile for the *actual* source of arousal, the 'walk[ing] out'. It is from this description of walking out that the narrator becomes 'flushed and stirred' – two verbs that are reflective of orgasm and arousal respectively. It is only in the second instance that he compares this feeling to the denuded Romantic muse, and the jealousy-induced punch-up whose subject – either male or female – is robbed of an identity. The thought of travel plays two roles: it fields the unsavoury sexuality of the poetic subject while, lexically speaking, rendering the actual gender of Larkin's punch victim unclear. Like 'Deceptions' which precedes it, Larkin mires his own preoccupation with sex and violence in a semantic kinesism which, itself, is highly evocative of landscape and movement. The 'stalks, he made you gulp' in 'Deceptions' might be read as the equivalent apotheosis of Larkin's equivocally-rendered fixation with sex and violence, and repeats the

same imagery of the newly harvested field ‘stubbly with goodness’, inserting a comma between ‘stalks’ (the phallus) and ‘he’ (the violator) to potentially separate subject and object into two separate clauses. To linger at the juncture, for Larkin, is to rally the full force of poetic expertise to blur, and potentially conceal, the sexual deviousness which lurks beneath.

The use of italics in the poem constitutes another instance of wily syntactical play, partly dissolving the certainty that the voice is that of an undisclosed persona and not Larkin-the-man himself; a move which, in turn, softens the unpleasant suggestion of violent copycatting in the line ‘Surely I can, if he did?’ In a sense, Andrew Motion noticed this arrival of subtle lexical play in *The Less Deceived* in his comment that, in poems like ‘Poetry of Departures’, ‘Toads’ and ‘Born Yesterday’, Larkin stopped seeing his ‘feelings of exclusion [as] something which must be resolved, and regarded [them] instead as means of self-definition’ (AWL 237). Blake Morrison develops the idea further, touching on Larkin’s use of equivocation to cloud the endorsement of devious sexual politics in his statement that *The Less Deceived* possesses ‘a rather strained element of self-consoling.’<sup>116</sup> Both critics focus on the hardship felt by Larkin – an understandable approach given the glib quality of its surface-level jocularly employed to conceal, or at least obfuscate, the narrator’s restrained desires.

It is in the final stanza that Larkin’s fantasy eventually concedes the image of the idle adventurer and stroller. In many ways, the scene evokes

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<sup>116</sup> Stated in a personal correspondence to Motion on 17 March 1992, and quoted in *Such Deliberate Disguises*, p.130.

spatially the same frisson of sexual possibility that the preceding stanza evokes lexically. The Lothario or 'stereotypical Hollywood rebel', walks a seemingly endless road, fecund in its 'nut-strewn' scattered harvest, in a manner that recalls agricultural themes of Virgil's *Georgics* or Aeneas's wanderings in the *Aeneid*<sup>117</sup> (LAL 190). The scene then dioramas to the image of a stowaway, squatting in the foredeck of a boat again, 'Stubbly with goodness'. Larkin's choice to use the syncope 'fo'c'sle' rather than the writing 'forecastle' both aligns itself with the parahrime of the stanza which straddle alternate lines, ('fo'c'sle / artificial; goodness / backwards; object / perfect'), but also mimics the more edgy, quipped idiolect of 'adolescent adventurism' (Bradford *FBTF* 116). The furtive image of the crouching stowaway is an antithesis of the preceding image of the proud, virile path-treading adventurer. It is voyeuristic and its arrival in the narrator's daydreaming mind, rather than in reality, once again betrays a need in the narrator for unhindered access to the permissive, albeit conceptual, space of unpoliced auto-eroticism. It anticipates the 'Peeping . . . Tom' in Larkin's *Gravy Train* parody, 'A Midland Syllogism' penned two years later in 1956, and its inclusion alongside agricultural imagery evokes the anthropomorphised steam train ('The local [that] snivels through the fields') in another poem in the parody collection (qtd. in Osborne 145). In both instances, by projecting himself through sexual fantasy into spaces of the mind, the narrator is, to

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<sup>117</sup> 'Wandered the airy plain and viewed it all' Trans. Robert Fitzgerald, 1984, 1203-1210.

borrow Booth's reading of 'Absences', 'rapt out of himself by the idea of a place beyond human observation' (*LAL* 159).

Booth is not the first to succumb to the mystique surrounding the lusty traveller in 'Poetry of Departures'. Barbara Everett, in 1980, writes that the title alone 'refers to a whole phase of French Symbolist verse with a kind of ironic casualness' (236). Indeed, the chimera-bearing travellers described at the opening of Baudelaire's 'Chacun sa Chimère' bear no small resemblance to the existential inchoateness of Larkin's narrator and his barren surroundings, while echoing, simultaneously, the plaintive despair of the narrator of 'Going' who is mourning the loss of their reciprocity with the surrounding landscape:<sup>118</sup>

Sous un grand ciel gris, dans une grande plaine poudreuse,  
sans chemins, sans gazon, sans un chardon, sans une ortie, je  
rencontrai plusieurs hommes qui marchaient courbés. Chacun  
d'eux portait sur son dos une énorme Chimère, aussi lourde  
qu'un sac de farine ou de charbon, ou le fournement d'un  
fantassin romain.<sup>119</sup>

Like Larkin's 'nut-strewn road', the Godot-like desolation of Baudelaire's environment juxtaposes the great burden that exists on the traveller's shoulders. Both sets of travellers are embarking on a journey with an

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<sup>118</sup> Where has the tree gone, that locked / Earth to sky?' (*CP* 51).

<sup>119</sup> Translation: 'Under a vast grey sky, on a vast and dusty plain without paths, without grass, without a nettle or a thistle, I came upon several men bent double as they walked. Each one carried on his back an enormous Chimera as heavy as a sack of flour, as a sack of coal, as the accoutrement of a Roman foot-soldier.'

undisclosed end-point and seem to bear a burden: in Larkin's case, the sexual affliction of voyeurism; in Baudelaire's the supernatural clinging chimera – from which they have no real desire to be freed. Both are bent on completing the journey, and this *yearning for completeness* itself seems to confer a sense of satiated desire. The journey *itself* is the aim, and Larkin craves its open-ended freedom. The final five lines of the poem sees the narrator checking his own susceptibility to be carried away within his own conceptualisation of unfettered adventure. The imagined journey, in which unpoliced desires may rend newfound sexual freedoms, collapses into a sharp image of Larkin's bedroom and the humdrum banality of 'books; china'. The world it confirms, unlike the imagined journey is one in which the essence of Larkin's character is expressed through objects: the 'books; china . . . [the] specially chosen junk' . . . The good book, the good bed'. As such, it is 'reprehensibly perfect' not simply because it is the perfect time-accrued collateral of the narrator's desires and will, but because – in its mere physicality – it fails to account for the narrator's own need, or indeed 'space', for sexual expression. This is compounded by the fact that such "perfection" is only accredited on account of its summation of the narrator's past character, not his undisclosed desires for present and future actions, the expression of which is censored in real life. These desires are therefore forced to express themselves in the form of a highly conceptual and codified poetic image of aimless travel. Thus, the poem concludes with a resurfacing of the sardonic image of Larkin-the-man; stubbornly conservative and resistant to change, while reasserting that such a persona only endures on

account of the small moments of imaginative escapism and dreamed journeys, that the persona engages in to re-affirm his own sense of freedom.

While the journey in 'Poetry of Departures' remains analogous with 'Chacun sa Chimère' solely in terms of its scenery and the atmosphere of existentialism that exudes from it, Larkin's persona bears a much more explicit similarity with the archetypal *flâneur* in Baudelaire's prose piece 'The Painter of Modern Life'. In this essay, Baudelaire outlines the characteristics of the *flâneur* through a description of the fictitious 'Monsieur G':

For the perfect *flâneur* ... it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; [...] The spectator is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito . . . [T]he lover of the fair sex who builds up his family from all the beautiful women that he has ever found, or that are – or are not – to be found [...] He is an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I', at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive' (10; emphasis Baudelaire's).

The description details many of the visual aspects, but also the intellectual qualities, thought processes and desires that Larkin evokes in the latter half of 'Poetry of Departures'. Indeed, the *flâneur's* need 'to be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home' is, in many ways, the very

paradox that forces the narrator's fantasy to collapse. Baudelaire's citation is shot through with a queasy sense of scopophilic sexuality, whose gender configuration aligns the male as a constant observer over the female. That the flâneur is 'incognito', with a desire that is equally satiated by 'beautiful women' who both 'are – or are not – to be found', dissolves any sense of agency attributable to the female, instead loading the flâneur with a kind of hyper-subjectivity and freedom. Although the 'ebb and flow of movement' is perhaps more indicative of an urban environment, the conflation of nouns 'fugitive' and 'infinite' definitively point to the desolate expanse of Larkin's 'nut-strewn' road and its narrator fleeing their everyday responsibilities. In this space, the 'insatiable appetite for the non-I' evokes the *flâneur's* fraternisation with multiple selves, all of which are capable of achieving simultaneous life in the 'unstable and fugitive' world of the landscape upon which the *flâneur* maintains complete anonymity. The last sentence of Baudelaire's citation, in many ways, aligns itself to the very authorial *intent* in Larkin's poem: like the *flâneur*, the narrator fails to physically enact his escapism, but instead resorts to 'explaining it in pictures'; pictures which given their momentary flicker across the text are themselves 'unstable and fugitive', and stand the best chance of conveying the experience of multiple selves.

There has been a frisson of critical interest recently around Larkin's sense of pictorial evocations, partly on the discovery of Larkin's active role as an 'auto-erotic portrait photographer' (see Freeman). Richard Bradford, in his monograph *The Importance of Elsewhere: Philip Larkin's Photographs*

(2015) credits, rather dramatically, Larkin's composition of 'Poetry of Departures' with his move to Belfast, a time which 'wrought the transformation of Larkin from frustrated novelist to the finest English poet of the late twentieth century' (80). While Belfast might not have exacted quite the level of stimulation over the poet's evolving sensibilities as Bradford suggests, it should not be overlooked that Larkin's move to Belfast was analogous with his emerging interest in travel and the ways in which the phenomena of travel could influence not only content but style.<sup>120</sup> Much like the fantasised journey set in the heart of 'Poetry of Departures' and its troubled dialectic with the passions and behaviour of the self, so Larkin 'relished the tensions of being at once part of and different from [Belfast's] new environment' (81). This time also saw an increase in Larkin's activity as an amateur photographer: a banal picture of a small attic room taken by Larkin during this time appears to show 'the good books, the good bed'. However, unlike the middle section of 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album' which, in John Osborne's words upholds a *real* photographic image as 'the *ne plus ultra* of realism', in 'Poetry of Departures' Larkin transplants the photographic moment to the existential nut-strewn road and, in doing so, renders it the embodiment of transitoriness; a transitoriness which, despite its

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<sup>120</sup> 'Church Going' was inspired following a cycling trip during Larkin's time in Belfast. Bradford upholds the poem as the 'first of [Larkin's] great poems' surmising that it embodied a stylistic turning point in which the poet's voice ever-after adopted 'something parochial, familiar yet rather bizarre'. Equally, and perhaps more relevantly, Bradford acknowledges the simulacra of real place and imagined place in which Larkin begins to display a heightened interest following his arrival in Belfast, noting that he 'tells us [as] much about his sense of being elsewhere, not committed to a particular location nor alienated from it' (82).

amorphous status, is nevertheless, I would argue, a desirable asset to the auto-erotic self (63). The reasoning for Larkin undertaking a shift in the placement of the “photographic moment” is, I think, quite clear: the semi-detached middle-class china-strewn home, excessive in its unnecessary junk, demarcates a symbolic, yet static, embodiment of the narrator’s character. Such objects are far from symbolically impoverished; indeed they confer an absolute value upon their owner. It is, rather, their role as the *static* embodiment of intrinsic value which causes the narrator’s displeasure. Such objects are not the preserve of the free-thinking *flâneur* and their sleepless need for altering stimuli from which to derive multiple vindications of their multiple selves. Consequently, Larkin requires the open country road, or the sunken foredeck of an ocean bound vessel: at once free, yet never quite eschewing all possibility of human interaction or capture; and in doing so, moves narrative attention away from the verbalised photograph of his bedroom, to that of an entirely imagined landscape. The photographic image of exodus thus *haunts* the poem, and foregrounds Larkin’s own fractured relationship with ‘other’ places and – moreover – the inculcation that ‘other’ places lend to the imagination.

I wish to take this autobiographical fragment of Larkin’s arrival in Belfast to examine briefly ‘Arrivals, Departures’, and direct our exploration away from the traveller’s interest in imagined departures *per se* and look instead at their portrayal of the moment of arrival. I have already acceded, before now, to Barbara Everett’s argument that ‘Arrivals, Departures’ is ‘a beautiful imitation [...] of Baudelaire’s prose-poem ‘Le Port’; however, neither

Everett, nor Regan later in 1997, fully unpacked the full set of implications such a connection might exert upon the poem's imagery and style. The poem, first published in *The Fantasy Poets* in March 1954,<sup>121</sup> is cited in full below:

### **Arrivals, Departures**

This town has docks where channel boats come sidling;  
Tame water lanes, tall sheds, the traveller sees  
(His bag of samples knocking at his knees),  
And hears, still under slackened engines gliding,  
His advent blurted to the morning shore.

And we, barely recalled from sleep there, sense  
Arrivals lowing in a doleful distance –  
Horny dilemmas at the gate once more.  
*Come and choose wrong, they cry, come and choose wrong;*  
And so we rise. At night again they sound,

Calling the traveller now, the outward bound:  
*Oh not for long, they cry, Oh not for long –*  
And we are nudged from comfort, never knowing  
How safely we may disregard their blowing,  
Or if, this night, happiness too is going.

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<sup>121</sup> As cited in *TCP* 388.

## (CP 74)

Unlike 'Poetry of Departures', the subject of the poem is deeply obfuscated, and their place in time though indicated grammatically as the *present* is mired with a certain temporal ambiguity. Indeed, rather than use first person narration in the first stanza, Larkin instead adopts the third person ostensibly to *distract* the reader's attention away from an individual's subjective account, and instead focuses on the experience of 'arriving' itself. By reading what 'the traveller sees . . . / And hears', Larkin, in one sense, universalises an experience which through its various *topoi* of 'water lanes, tall sheds' and 'sidling' channel boats, appears (somewhat paradoxically) to depict a *specific* place. The second stanza opens by compounding this notion: 'we . . . sense / Arrivals lowing in a doleful distance.' The introduction of the pronoun 'we' at the very outset of the second stanza, reincarnates the narrator figure, thus lurching the reader back into the familiar Larkinian territory of a conspicuous, 'front-facing' narrator. Formally, the ABBA; CDDC (etc.) rhyme scheme endures, and prohibits the semantics from clotting around this unorthodox perspective change. The 'doleful distance' segues into the affirmation that 'Horny dilemmas [are] at the gate once more'. Situated perfectly in the centre of the poem the line absorbs, and embodies, much of the poem's ambivalence of mood, perspective and place while simultaneously embroidering within it an encoded sexual message. Like the furtively observant traveller in 'Poetry of Departures', the phrase 'Horny dilemmas' ramifies beyond a mere *in situ* instance of lexical punning; indeed, it actively describes the cossetted sense of sexual indecision that inhabits the

narrator's will. Given this, the '*come and choose wrong*' refrain stands as a response, and is presented ambiguously without inverted commas to suggest a hinted or unspoken desire for anonymised sexual consummation. Unlike 'Poetry of Departures' in which the sexual moment is depicted as auto-erotic and voyeuristic, in 'Arrivals, Departures', the 'Horny dilemmas' themselves become the chimeras baying for consummation.<sup>122</sup> The narrator desires and is simultaneously fearful of a holiday romance; a sexual event whose enactment upon territory that is symbolically and geographically not his, would yield the paradoxical concoction of alienation and freedom for which his fractured subjectivity perpetually craves. The final stanza reaffirms this idea, with the 'Horny dilemmas' bidding a wistful farewell to the adumbral traveller, leaving them to ponder 'how safely we may disregard their blowing': a statement which inscribes a lingering sense of foreboding at the narrator's seeming inability to wholeheartedly accept or reject the call of the 'Horny dilemma'.

The obfuscation, and slippage, between a city's exhortation for sex, and its visitor's own desire for it, is described neatly in Italo Calvino's *flâneur*-like evocation of the city of Anastasia in *Invisible Cities*. Like the nameless city in 'Arrivals, Departures' one feels that the *genius loci* of Anastasia itself is at once malevolent and coercive upon the vulnerable and sexually frustrated traveller:

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<sup>122</sup> The cry recalls the deceitful call of Rossetti's goblins in 'Goblin Market' to the innocent impressionable Laura: 'Sweet to tongue and sound to eye; / Come buy, come buy' (lines 1130-1131).

Anastasia awakens desires one at a time only to force you to stifle them. The city appears to you as a whole where no desire is lost and of which you are a part . . . Such is the power, sometimes called malignant, sometimes benign, that Anastasia, the treacherous city possesses . . . and you believe you are enjoying Anastasia wholly when you are only its slave' (10).

At the heart of Calvino's musing on Anastasia is a paradox: the traveller, while by definition free to roam becomes captive in the city along with their desires. In 'Arrival, Departures', Larkin injects a life of its own into this 'malignant' captivating force, as the disembodied beckoning call of the 'Horny dilemma'. More than simply a crisis of sexual self-realisation, Calvino, like Larkin, opens out the existential entrapment to afflict the narrator's entire character: Larkin questions whether 'happiness, too, is going', while Calvino acknowledges the traveller's consequent diminution to 'slave' status. Ultimately, the cities stall the narrators' desires: by miring them within a context of alien notions and voices, all of which jar the process of emotional reciprocity, and which, in turn, preclude them from attaining sexual assertiveness and fulfilment. Thus, desire becomes the very agent by which freedom, paradoxically, becomes its own mechanism of entrapment.

'Arrivals, Departures' is not a peregrination; its obfuscation of voices and tones aligns it much more to the category of a philosophical imagining. Much like 'Absences' before it, one feels that its composition was a response to Larkin's being 'thrilled by the thought of what places look like when I am

not there'. That the narrator is the actual traveller, the imagined traveller, a local or an omniscient observer of all three, is rendered deliberately unclear. Instead the poem appears to represent Larkin's desire to harness the travel experience sexually, while encoding within it, at the same time, those very features of place that both encourage and simultaneously thwart that sexual fulfilment. Shortly, I wish to discuss 'The Whitsun Weddings', a poem in which, unlike the poems hitherto discussed, the narrator is depicted as flagrantly present within the very journey he is recounting. Its occurrence some 12 poems into *The Whitsun Weddings* demarcates the apotheosis of Larkin's sharpened interest in the physicality of travel; a shift which, while not existing in a negative correlation with a reduced interest in *imagined* journeys, seems to elevate, nevertheless, the verisimilitude of place to a greater prominence in the collection. 'Elsewhere' becomes the eponymous 'Sunny Prestatyn': the rush 'to catch my Comet / One dark November day' ('Naturally The Foundation Will Bear Your Expenses'); the 'furnace-glare of Sheffield, where I change, / And ate an awful pie' ('Dockery and Son'); and, of course, 'the river's level drifting breadth . . . / Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet' ('The Whitsun Weddings'). The emerging frisson with adventure is not, as is often the case, justified and elucidated in Larkin's own prose commentary; rather, it is smuggled in as an axiomatic line within the very collection in which his new interest is demonstrated: in the ironically titled 'Reference Back', the narrator states, with an almost epitaphic boldness, 'We are not suited to the long perspectives'. The line aphorises what the collection's travel poems do *in praxis*: the cherished 'kodak-distant'

mode of hyper-subjectivity with which past places were frequently imbued in *The Less Deceived* is directly problematised in a seeming apostrophe by Larkin-the-man. Indeed, rather than encapsulate desirous past forms 'like a heaven' ('Lines'), the act of travelling back to the past now affirms regret through the insistence in 'Reference Back' that 'By acting differently we could have kept it so'. This is not to say that Larkin's new interest in travel came at the cost of a dissolution of his famous need for alienation; rather, as Janice Rossen states, within Britain at least, 'travelling and staying at home produce different kinds of isolation' (55).

The train is the principle vehicle through which Larkin is able to yield this 'different kind . . . of isolation'. For Larkin, it is something more than just a setting: it has an expansive effect on his perpetual exploration of time and space, and the relationship between the two. As such, it also engenders the formulation of new tropes and images. Indeed, Margaret Kelleher is correct in stating that, 'Larkin was especially drawn to train travel as a way of developing a poetic perspective' (25), but more than this, the train for Larkin was, to use Michael Baron's words, 'a device which collapses spatial and temporal distances and creates a striking effect of simultaneity and change' (63). Within this melange, Larkin upholds his *flâneur*-like view of the world. While, indeed, the train's rapid pace in 'The Whitsun Weddings' is at odds with the *flâneur*'s slow tread, the measured way in which Larkin *records* the scenes through the carriage window, is similar to the *modus operandi* of the *flâneur* such that we may,

liken him to a mirror . . . or a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life . . . he absorbs it all pell-mell; and in a few moments the resulting 'poem' will be virtually composed (Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* 10-11).

That Baudelaire's depiction of the *flâneur* is analogous with the poetic sensibility is deeply telling. Both artists observe, and distil, the maelstrom of life into language from which a 'poem' (Baudelaire's quotation marks) invariably results. However, rather than adhering to Wordsworth's Romantic dictum of 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', the "*flâneur-poet*" appears to eschew recollection instead positioning their verse as much in the *presence* of the so-called 'pell-mell' itself as the verse is capable of being. Indeed, the poem is composed in a mere 'few moments' after the *flâneur*'s exposure to the stimulus. The dazzling panoply of this pell-mell is described in the sharply disparate images that jostle for prominence across the page in the second stanza of 'The Whitsun Weddings':

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.

Like the phantasmagorical series of images in the opening stanza of 'Here'. that induct readers into *The Whitsun Weddings*, Larkin's flitting description of all he sees is largely deprived of end stop punctuation, giving the impression that the scenes are stumbling over each other at high speed, in the very manner in which they are being observed in the moment. It is perhaps the eclectic choice of images, as much as their description, that most imparts the proximity to the *flâneur's* 'kaleidoscopic' view from beyond the train's window. This is underpinned with numerous rhetorical techniques. The opening spondee of '**Wide farms**', against the sibilant '**short-shadowed**' confers a sense of pace, while the juxta-posing of 'wide' with 'short' tacitly communicates the sheer range of objects being observed. The strobe of the sun-reflecting 'hothouse' momentarily compresses the observation to a split-second instance, while the dipping and rising hedges restores an arpeggio-like oscillation of visual stimuli. Within the narrator's careful enumeration of images, the 'smell of grass' displaces the 'reek of carriage-cloth' thus invoking a sense of competitiveness to the sensory stimuli, with each scent jostling for prominence within the 'phantasmagoria' moment.

At the same time, however, the stanza manages to embody a certain democratising of stimuli which, when expounded out to the level of theme, seems to confer a sense of competitiveness between the natural and the lived world. The earthy 'smell of grass', momentarily eclipses the more perpetual 'reek of carriage-cloth', while the similarly bucolic image of the 'short-shadowed cattle', is briefly overshadowed by the 'Canals with floatings of industrial froth'. In the following stanza, the power struggle between the

natural and human switches through the aphorised mention that ‘sun destroys / The interest of what’s happening in the shade’. We learn that ‘the whoops and skirls’ – the evidential manifestation, and consequence of, the institution of marriage – are ‘At first’ vanquished through the sun’s brightness. On such occasions, the reader is reminded of the determinedly empirical mode by which Larkin perceives his surroundings, with all cognitive meditation seeming to originate from an initial instance of sensory observation. This highly poised sensory alertness is arguably enabled via the receptiveness generated as a result of the narrator’s almost dandy-like lackadaisicalness: the opulent, hot-cushioned train carriage is ‘three-quarters-empty’, and the narrator’s tardy arrival at the station – (he was ‘late getting away’, with ‘all sense / Of being in a hurry gone’) – projects an untypically relaxed image of Larkin-the-man. This not only marks a stark contrast with the more ‘pursed-up’ narrators of similar “wandering” poems,<sup>123</sup> but, more significantly, suggests that a variation exists across the personae of the travel poems, with ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ narrator existing as a pale shadow of the ‘Arrivals, Departures’ anxious day-tripper.

Indeed, rather than exhort his usual preference for asocial poetic stimuli, the narrator of ‘The Whitsun Weddings’, in spite of himself, seems to amalgamate the humanity around him together with the very institution of

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<sup>123</sup> From ‘Spring’ (*The Less Deceived*); ‘and me / Threading my pursed-up way across the park’. The poem locates its speaker amidst the hubbub of an urban park. His *flâneur*-like wander through the scene, is strongly subverted with a sudden focus on the narrator’s own deeply restrained demeanour; an antithetical persona to the free-moving, free-thinking persona required of the *flâneur*.

marriage, which will later become the focus of gentle mockery. The pronoun 'I' becomes 'We' in a shift away from narrative autonomy which would, on other occasions, seem wholly abhorrent for Larkin. As a result, the narrator seems to quietly confide upon the reader his begrudging acceptance that he – in his role as a mere spectator – is also, in a sense, a guest at the wedding event, much like the shunned 'fathers' and their 'seamy foreheads' with whom he shares no small physiognomic similarity. His vilification of marriage, while apparent, is delivered lexically and, in so doing, appears to work in the opposite direction to his personal subsumption into the crowd: the indicting 'religious wounding' of marriage is quickly softened through the communal spirit inculcated in the jubilant 'We hurried towards London', while the 'happy funeral' secrets shared by the women, and 'frown[ing]' bored children have their sadness diluted through Larkin's warm, reaffirmation of communal spirit conveyed in the deliberately amphibolic phrase 'we moved'.

In the penultimate stanza, a vignette appears in which the narrator suddenly returns to his earlier enumeration of line-side content: '– An Odeon went past, a cooling tower, / And someone running to bowl –'. The sharp set of descriptions, isolated conspicuously between dashes, re-positions the reader back into the kinetic "now-ness" of the poem. Abruptly, the evocativeness of train travel is vibrantly re-imagined with excruciating lexical and imagistic efficiency. Through the three scenes described – an Odeon, a cooling tower, and bowling scene – Larkin evokes the entire gamut of common rail-side vistas that one might expect to see in Britain, depicting popular culture, industry and community in turn. As a result, this dash-

separated closure appears almost to constitute a miniature panegyric – a sudden centrifugal conflation of several quintessential images of late-1950s British life. Simultaneously, the fusion of all three “snapshots” reiterates the kaleidoscope-like panoply of stimuli experienced by the *flâneur*, without compromising the narrator’s newfound commitment to democratising his narration through an unusual self-enrolment into a wholly *communal* event. Indeed, the snapshots pass through the stanza quickly with the speed and lurching motion of the train itself, segueing into a meditation on London at which ‘we were aimed’, and towards which ‘we raced across / Bright knots of rail’ (emphasis mine). Tony Judt excellently describes the railway’s unique ability to recalibrate the relationship away from the self-centred towards the social in an otherwise private individual. His critique is homologous with ‘The Whitsun Wedding’s momentary abandonment of the arch disdain and remove that so characterises the personae in much of Larkin’s *oeuvre*. Judt states:

The railways [are] a collective project for individual benefit. They cannot exist without common accord . . . and offer a practical benefit to individual and collectivity alike. [We] have become gated individuals who don’t know how to share public space to common advantage . . . It would mean we had done with modern life’ (emphasis Judt’s).

Judt’s gloomy vision of the impending collapse of ‘modern life’ anticipates – intertextually – Larkin’s sharpened denunciation of modern Britain in *High*

*Windows*; an agenda that is already prototypically laid out and glimpsed in Here's bargain-hungry 'cut-price crowd'. Interestingly, Judt's critique of the railway's capacity for prompting social fluidity does not eschew *all* sense of the individual; rather, he incorporates one concept within the other. The railways are 'a collective project' *within which* the 'projects' – that is to say the subjective agenda – of the individual are contained. Thus, railways foster the interests of the individual *by way of* the communal, thereby benefitting both in a kind of symbiosis. Contrary to his pervasively individualistic nature, Larkin, as Judt ascribes, appears to lay aside his peevish nature in order to profit from the railway's ability 'to be socially responsive', so much so that the railway's "socialising" effect is felt not only at a lexical level but, more profoundly, at the level of narration and voice. More than simply a means of governing poetic content, Larkin, by becoming the unwitting subject of social pluralism, engendered by the phenomenon of railway travel, actively uses the railway to confirm, and in many ways *update*, the *flâneur's* method of societal observation. Indeed, Larkin's observation of society and – more particularly – his 'Thought of the others they would never meet / Or how their lives would all contain this hour', bestows upon him an almost identikit persona of *flânerie*, given that 'he is the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity it contains' (Baudelaire 5). Resultantly, it is no surprise that the poem ends on an image of high-Baudelairian symbolism: the 'sense of falling, like an arrow-shower / Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain'.

This teetering conclusion is affirmed by Hans Osterwalder as ‘the most salient example [of the] symbolic mode’ in Larkin’s *oeuvre*, while Jason Harding develops the affirmation arguing that the poem is a ‘symbolic apprehension of regenerative processes’ (90; 362). While Harding understandably attributes this sense of ‘regeneration’ to the reoccurrence of life anticipated upon the marriage’s consummation, there is also a second way in which ‘regeneration’ might be seen to underscore the poem’s agenda: Larkin is regenerating a proto-modernist instance of symbolism within the comfortable, unpressured context of modernism’s recession. In this sense, he is finishing the work that Baudelaire started. The latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was, according to Friedberg, ‘a “frenzy of the visible”’ (xi) with railways appearing to propagate a disturbing new ‘annihilation of space and time’ (Pecqueur qtd. in Schivelbusch 31). Furthermore, the railway’s new capacity to offer an ‘extension to the field of the visible’ could neither be uniformly appreciated across class and society, nor celebrated literarily by the artistic milieu (xi). By placing the sharp-eyed *flâneur* on board the train, Larkin is able to relocate the *flâneur*’s sweeping gaze to behind the railway carriage window; a space which, though firmly established in the cultural mind-set, is newly unfettered by the anxieties and fears that surrounded its arrival during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, Larkin’s persona is temporarily communalised while never quite managing to shake off a

personal desire to self-alienate; a notion which also arguably, ‘festers at the roots of modernity’ (Friedberg 16).<sup>124</sup>

In many ways, however, Larkin’s blithe reintroduction of the *flâneur* in his travel poetry belies a theoretical or, at the very least, a personal discordance with prevailing notions of travel and observations populated during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975) depicts the societal observer in a manner that is broadly at odds with Larkin’s free-moving, unhindered observer in ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ as well as his unobserved, furtive voyeur in ‘Poetry of Departures’. In ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ itself, neither the observer nor the observed appear to engage in any kind of power struggle, be it imprisonment or entrapment, over the other. Both are characterised by a freedom of movement, fluidity and expression that seems to strike a contrast with Foucauldian theories of gaze “imprisonment”. Friedberg explains how Larkin’s anachronistic use of *flânerie* might be seen to deliberately counterbalance contemporary theories of the imprisonment wielded by the observer upon the observed:

The *flâneur* will serve as a model for an observer who follows a style of visuality different from the model of power and vision so frequently linked with modernity – what Michel Foucault

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<sup>124</sup> I would not go so far as to suggest, as Harding does, that ‘the social drama of “The Whitsun Weddings”’ – in its presentation of ‘the discomfiture of the alienated intellectual’ – is a ‘poem surprisingly complicit with *The Waste Land*.’ (379). Of all Larkin’s poems, the claim is a little oddly attributed to ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ given that, in this particular poem, Larkin’s typical stance of alienation is side-lined with a rather atypical frisson for social engagement.

dramatically described as “un régime panoptique.” The trope of *flânerie* delineates a mode of visual practice coincident with – but antithetical to – the panoptic gaze. Like the panopticon system, *flânerie* relied on the visual register – but with a *converse instrumentalism*, emphasizing mobility and *fluid subjectivity* rather than restraint and interpellated [*sic*] form (16; emphasis mine).

Friedberg’s statement tacitly describes the key paradox that sits between Larkin’s evocation of *flânerie* versus the Foucauldian panopticon: namely, that the ‘visual practise’ of *flânerie* in order to be deemed antithetical to the panoptic model of observation must simultaneously be seen as ‘coincident with’ it. In other words, despite an individual’s affirmations to the contrary, Larkin must, in some sense, participate within the Modern school of Foucauldian thought in order to render the more retrograde mode of *flânerie* that seeks to undermine it. The central *tu quoque* style reasoning at work behind the paradox is analogous with many of Larkin’s generic allegiances, especially with those of modernism: one notes, yet again, that a public castigation of modernism and its tenets does not necessarily absolve Larkin from moments of modernist participation, realised through a sort of tacit antagonism. If we assume this standpoint, then Foucault’s panopticon *is*, in many ways, similar to Larkin’s train carriage. Foucault’s description of a panopticon as ‘a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad’ outlines the very nexus of scopophilic and voyeuristic freedom that Larkin’s narrator exploits in ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ (201-202). The parodically unattractive

'fathers . . . with seamy foreheads' and 'mothers loud and fat', express, by way of their very description, a blasé indifference at being the subjects of constant observation and external scrutiny. Larkin's carriage, much like the panopticon, is a 'machine for creating and sustaining a power relation' and, in being so, recruits the wedding's guests as 'caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.' Like the 'swivel eye' that 'hungers from pose to pose' in 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album', Larkin's narrator in 'The Whitsun Weddings' delights in the omniscience and freedom that the unexpected moment of anonymity brings. Moreover, rather than cast a bleak impression on the communicative dissociation between observer and observed (a phenomenon which – if ramified – would yield the panopticon itself) Larkin generates a "new" community. The repetition of the pronoun 'we', as we have examined, implies a movement *to* a sense of greater socialisation, rather than a distancing *from* it.<sup>125</sup> As such, Larkin imagines himself across Foucault's unbridgeable gulf: in his receptiveness to the spectacle, and the wedding guests' indifference at being observed by a passing train, a kind of subject/object symbiosis and harmony forms; indeed, it seems that the very occasion of a wedding provides the necessary impetus to dissolve the traditional power dichotomy of the Foucauldian prison. Consequently, Larkin is able to diminish some of the adumbrations forecast within Foucault's envisaged dystopia. It is a diminishment which is paradoxical in both its recruitment of outmoded notions of social observation

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<sup>125</sup> For more detailed analysis of deixis and lexical "distances" in Larkin, see chapter six.

and participation, and its decision to evoke a vision of society which is, at its heart, non-interactive. Indeed, Larkin's own imagining of society is one which offers a nod to both contemporary and pre-existing modes of watching, the spectacle and societal observation. Thus, to return to the categorising labels outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the *physical* journey creates initially a greater sense of *spatial* verisimilitude, but subsequently, is used as a platform to evoke the narrator's own brand of social participation – one which, like an inversion of Foucault's panopticon, confers meaning and relationship politics through an osmotic sense of *proximity* rather than physical interaction.

This debate has shown that, while interested in the stylistic and thematic potentiality offered by describing both physical and imagined journeys, Larkin is able to use *physical* journeys as a platform to evoke imagined *notions* that sit within the matrix of the poem's semiotics of language and image. The final poem I wish to address is 'The Importance of Elsewhere' which, in many ways, constitutes the summation of different notions of travel and journeying which Larkin deploys within the poems I have hitherto addressed. Out of the poems discussed, 'The Importance of Elsewhere' is the penultimate poem that Larkin chose to anthologise in *The Whitsun Weddings*. The poem arrives at a point during which the narrator lurches between a highly-ironized voice, and a condemnation of England's stance towards civic duty and memorialisation. The axiomatic line 'O when will England grow up?' in the final stanza of 'Naturally the Foundation will Bear Your Expenses', is perhaps one of the most critically evaluated

instances of such satire-veiled denunciation. In it, the narrator's contempt for the 'mawkish' yearly Armistice commemoration, expressed in the display of 'Wreath-rubbish in Whitehall', seems to stand apart from the overt irony of 'Larkin's' ostensible journey 'To the sunshine of Bombay'.<sup>126</sup> 'Broadcast' develops the idea, pulling it away from the axiomatic, and into the metonymic with 'the Queen' herself embodying England's 'Cascades of monumental slithering' – an ostensible hangover from the Victorian era and its preoccupation with royalty and ceremonial pageantry. Indeed, Larkin's recognition of England's injured civic pride goes further still: the 'awful pie' consumed at Sheffield station, and 'Sunny Prestatyn's ruthlessly defaced Edwardian-esque railway advert, confirms that these instances of post-war deprivation are not mere isolated moments but achieve, collectively, the status of a fully-fledged leitmotif. So far, we have established that Larkin was interested in depicting both physical and conceptual journeys, both for intrinsic aesthetic value but also, on occasion, for the insight they offer into the multifarious operation of the narrator's subjectivity, and society as a whole.

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<sup>126</sup> Chatterjee connects the moment to Larkin's problematic relationship with "patriotism", while Rácz reads the moment as a tense, oscillating relationship for and against modernism, through its commingling of war imagery and the adumbration of E. M. Forster, with a veneer of ironic scorn aimed at the academic 'ivory tower'. Perhaps most compelling is Tijana Stojkovic's reading which argues for Larkin's examination of the above through the lexicon of "campus novel" typical of the 1950s. Stojkovic's argument is also given texture through her astute reading of the imagery of flight (the 'Comet' / 'I was airborne'), thus suggesting Larkin is engaging with these ideas through a position of ironic "aloofness".

In several ways, 'The Importance of Elsewhere' embodies the consolidation of several earlier instances of experimentation relating to the poïesis of journeys and, as such, reads with an almost self-conscious air of virtuosity. More significantly, the journey is depicted as *both* a literal journey *and* an opportunity for "journey-centred" phenomenological rumination. It is a physical journey which contains within it, a self-referential acknowledgement of the conceptual forces that instruct its verbalisation. In the poem, the narrator is a physical (literal) traveller and a conceptual "traveller" – two modes which, in the poems hitherto discussed, rarely exist simultaneously. The narrator is an intradiegetic presence in his own retelling, and is depicted as both an abstract and concrete presence within his foreign locale. Key to rendering such effects is the dexterous application, and interrelation, of lexical and semiotic features. The poem is cited in full below:

### **The Importance of Elsewhere**

Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home,  
 Strangeness made sense. The salt rebuff of speech,  
 Insisting so on difference, made me welcome:  
 Once that was recognised, we were in touch.

Their draughty streets, end-on to hills, the faint  
 Archaic smell of dockland, like a stable,  
 The herring-hawker's cry, dwindling, went  
 To prove me separate, not unworkable.

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.

(CP 105)

The poem's opening sentence is intricately balanced metrically, both at the phrase and the sentence level. 'Lonely in Ireland' and 'Strangeness made sense' are both amphimacers, while the sentence as a whole with its five monosyllabic words between the two amphimacers is, in itself, a kind of overarching, sentence-long amphimacer. This strict regularity and symmetry counteracts artfully the deep obscurity of the sentence's meaning.

'Strangeness made sense' is, in itself, a hypallage: strangeness, by definition, implies an undermining of "sense". This contrasting of formal regularity with semantic obfuscation carefully shepherds the reader into the elusive realm of phenomenology; one equates themselves with the poet's "feeling", despite the realisation that this feeling is rendered in an exclusively subjective realm and, as such, evades practically all attempts of expression.

'The salt rebuff of speech' is a highly evocative phrase, which utilises the lexical multifariousness inherent in both 'salt' (wit, seafaring, seasoning, pungency, etc.) and 'rebuff' (blunt, brusque, gruff, etc.) to conceptually *merge* the indigenous population with place. Again a hypallage, 'salt' is an awkward adjective to connect to 'speech' and yet manages, by way of its odd

placement, to centrifugally draw the atmosphere and imagism of a foreign seafaring town into its very inhabitants. The narrator feels 'welcome', a closeness which, much like in 'The Whitsun Weddings' prompts the narrator into an uncharacteristic display of inter-societal connectedness via the pronoun 'we'. Once again, the narrator feels himself part of a community, and the very means by which this sense of "common" is rendered is deeply singular. The final two words 'in touch' are a climactic hypallage to this paradoxically "asocial" act of communal integration: no "touching" is involved, and the solitary narrator is no more at the brink of intimate corporeal proximity than 'the salt rebuff of speech' is able to 'Insist . . . on difference'. Both sets of rhetorical devices help delineate Larkin's curious sense of phenomenological connectedness to this foreign locale as a solitary traveller.

The second stanza departs from the conceptuality of the first stanza, instead engaging in a far more conservative enumeration of spatial *topoi*. Sight (the 'end-on' hills), sound ('herring-hawker's cry'), and touch ('draughty streets') are all described in a manner that, unlike the preceding stanza, is ostensibly stripped of a contrapuntal grammatical or lexical agenda. Consequently, the reader senses a somewhat refreshing lucidity take hold in the verse, lifting it free from the miring ambiguity of subjective mentation. Certain features, particularly the 'Archaic' smells of the hill-flanked streets, evoke both the industry and broad, dramatic hillsides of a northern, or coastal town. The faint clamour of the locals' tongue is 'dwindling'. A verb which could relate as much to the ebbing away of a native culture as it could to a dipping lilt of a regional dialect. The combination of both features yields an

almost unambiguous sense of Ireland. Larkin reminds us, much like Yeats before him, that this foreign sense of nationhood, from which he is paradoxically deriving a connection with his native England, is a nationhood that undertakes, and is perhaps even characterised by, its dialectical relationship with a deeply inchoate mythic heritage; a nation that is, as Heaney puts it, keeping 'open the imagination's supply lines to the past' (qtd. in Cavanagh 151). Heaney famously lends credence to the poem's subtle conveyance of a markedly "Irish" set of spatial furnishings, and the enigmatic sense of indigenous nationhood that this confers upon the narrator. In his collections of essays *Preoccupations*, Heaney states that in 'The Importance of Elsewhere', the narrator '[gives] thanks, by implication, for the nurture that he receives by living among his own'.

Heaney's critique is convincing, yet Ingelbien, more recently, has argued against Heaney's reading, believing the sense of estrangement that the narrator derives upon arriving in Ireland has nothing to do with Larkin's well-accounted interest in the Yeatsian mode and its penchant for celebrating place through mythic heritage. Ingelbien instead argues, calling upon excruciatingly detailed moments of phonetic pararhyme, that the poem 'actually points back to the 1930s writings of Cyril Connolly, who had been a major influence on Larkin in his student days' (*Misreading England* 474). That Ingelbien believes Larkin's debt was owed far more to his English contemporary allows him to claim, rather dramatically, that Heaney foisted upon Larkin's writing his own, famed understanding of place poetics.

I argue, much like Heaney, that the poem's central idea, much like in poems hitherto discussed, derives from the narrator's happy willingness to *use* an unknown place to unclog channels of emotional and subjective mentation. Channels that would otherwise be tacitly impeded by the 'customs and establishments' of his native England. Far from, as Heaney and Ingelbien imply, making a critique of nationhood the poem's *raison d'être*, I argue that Larkin uses this new unimpeded mental consciousness to triumphantly reaffirm, once again, his primary poetic interest: namely, the emotional awareness and pleasures of *the self*. The suggestion is that even the simple realisation that he is 'Living in England', unburdens the poet, thus showing that the purity of the self – Larkin's most cherished state of being – can never be *fully* attained in his homeland. Indeed, in his homeland, Larkin will always be quietly encumbered by an assortment of cultural and political factors – his 'customs and establishments' as he tersely describes – that, in his view at least, delicately impede his attainment of a complete sense of self.

'The Importance of Elsewhere', then, is a poem about the individual's quest for subjective liberation; a level of existence which is – somewhat illogically – both hampered by and enabled through place itself. As a traveller embarking on a physical *and* imagined journey, Larkin allows himself the greatest opportunity yet to develop a variety of place-making styles. More than the railway journey of 'The Whitsun Weddings', where the eponymous weddings impress Britain's 'customs and establishments' upon the narrator in a veritable barrage, or 'Poetry of Departures' where the yearning for an

unfettered, unpoliced existence is but a hankered-for dream, 'The Importance of Elsewhere' demarcates the apotheosis of Larkin's personal execution into place's capacity to enact complete subjective liberation. It is little wonder, then, that 'The Importance of Elsewhere' tends to be upheld as Larkin's one and only concerted foray into the tropes of travel and exploration; a belief which, as we have seen, could not be further from the truth.



**4****War & Weather: Seasonality, Time and Xénos Poetics  
in *A Girl in Winter*****The Winter Palace**

Most people know more as they get older:

I give all that the cold shoulder.

I spent my second quarter-century

Losing what I had learnt at university.

And refusing to take in what had happened since.

Now I know none of the names in the public prints

And am starting to give offence by forgetting faces

And swearing I've never been in certain places.

It will be worth it, if in the end I manage

To blank out whatever it is that is doing the damage.

Then there will be nothing I know

My mind will fold into itself, like fields, like snow.

(CP 211)<sup>127</sup>

The reasoning behind Archie Burnett's decision to omit the above poem from his canonical *The Complete Poems* is logically justified. The poem is, after all, according to Larkin's notes neither 'completed' nor 'self-contained' – both prerequisite features that qualify a poem for inclusion according to Burnett's editorial remit. Notwithstanding, even a quick read of the poem impresses upon the reader substantial symbolic depth such that a momentary re-evaluation of Burnett's editorial remit – and its capacity to elide poems of merit – is tempting and almost unavoidable. The poem deals with a seldom-addressed topic for Larkin – that of amnesia – and freights this core theme upon a set of symbolisms that would seem, in themselves, to occupy a rather singular place within the Larkin canon. Central among these symbolisms is the image of snow, or 'coldness', which, on a superficial level, evokes a sense of pristineness, calm and beauty. More crucially, the poem appears to fuse this established, typical (and possibly rather hackneyed) appropriation of snow as metaphor for aesthetic purity to a more complicated notion concerning snow's ability to seemingly *lock* or *store* time, matter, or emotion in a given place. The poem's mobilisation of snow's more elaborate symbolic function as "memory" is subtly filtrated into verse at the end of the third stanza. A point which, in itself, demarcates the temporal centre of the

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<sup>127</sup> Original 1988 edition.

reader's experience of reading the poem. The phrase 'public prints' might refer equally to the newspaper printing of names, the printing of an artist's piece, or the *imprinting* of the public's footsteps in the snow. This inchoate image lingers in the reader's mind until the poem revisits the notion in its final two lines; lines which, more typical of Larkin, take the form of an elucidating, punchy closing couplet.<sup>128</sup> The narrator's belief that his 'mind will fold into itself, like fields, like snow' is expressed with a kind of relief; a blissful and surrendering acceptance of the paradox that total memory loss is, in some senses, preferable to partial memory loss on account of the latter's incapacity to *reflect back* on its own deterioration. A bolder critic might call this 'relief' a concerted *desire* for the cerebral nullity that such mental oblivion would deliver.

Although the death-drive lexicon makes up, for the most part, a relatively small part of the Larkin canon, and an even smaller part within Larkin criticism,<sup>129</sup> the reader cannot help but feel arrested by its ostensible presence here, nestled discretely within the image of a picturesque white field. Moreover, it is virtually impossible to read the moment without a myriad

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<sup>128</sup> 'The Art of Poetry' *Paris Review*. The last line of a poem, by Larkin's own admission, was often a seal upon its semantic completion: 'I used to find that I was never sure I was going to finish a poem until I had thought of the last line'. Such a technique was clearly transparent, and later had its apparent reductiveness derided by John Lucas who stated, 'what tends to happen [in Larkin's poetry] is that you reach the end of a poem and you know Larkin has a kind of Q. E. D . . . all sown up' ('Without Walls').

<sup>129</sup> Booth profoundly notes in his introduction to *LAL*: 'No poet was less likely to contemplate suicide. To a writer like Graham Greene life is intrinsically empty. It requires Russian roulette, a dangerous career in espionage or a fear of Hell to give it relish. Larkin possessed the opposite temperament' (12).

other literary aphorisms coming to mind. Indeed, writers who coningle snow, memory and the desire for death are far from backseat players in early-20<sup>th</sup> century poetry: Robert Frost's 'Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening' (1923) is one such example. Aside from the poem's meditation on the passing of time, Frost's verse depicts snow which dissolves the perceptible contours of the land, blanching colour from trees, and cryogenically "locking" the landscape's features. On one level, Frost's snow – like Larkin's – is undoubtedly beautiful, but on another, beyond Frost's majestic woodland clearing the icy expungement of spatial co-ordinates reveals the forest as an ominous 'dark and deep' void (13). It is disturbing that Frost presents this void, and the symbolic death it represents, as the possible target of the narrator's desires, with the rejection of its apocalyptic lure favoured only because they 'have promises to keep' (14). Less suicidal, but equally cerebral, Wallace Stevens' 'The Snow Man' (1921) describes the 'mind of winter' carefully outlining a phenomenological, and coterminous, relationship between the mind, the landscape and winter itself. In fact, it might be argued that the poetic combination of winter, memory and the death-drive did not reach its apotheosis until 1971 in Plath's posthumous publication of *Winter Trees*.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> 'Memories growing, ring on ring, / . . . Waist-deep in history' Jo Gill describes the trees in 'Winter Trees' as upholding a sentinel-like observance over both their own symbolic heritage, stating that 'they see above and beyond the immediate and the local, offering a reassuring sense of the bigger picture' (67). I would take this further and state that *Winter Trees*, in its posthumous publication after *Ariel*, constitutes the final, abiding symbol of the Plath canon, irrevocably binding winter to the death-drive, memory and place.

While the writers mentioned above may fall beneath the banner of ‘modernism’ with some degree of reticence, Eliot’s place within this category is nigh-on unequivocal. Thinking of *The Waste Land*, one cannot help but recall ‘forgetful snow’ as one of the poem’s most memorable, and complicated, motifs. The function of ‘forgetful snow’, on one level at least, is paradoxical: it is an attempt to both exercise the unserviceable idiom of High Victorianism so that the full horror of the Great War might be realised, while, at the very same time, evoking the desire to expunge such lurid half-visions from the mind. Indeed, in this sense at least, Eliot’s snow is the closest in function to that used by Larkin in ‘The Winter Palace’ while Frost and Plath do, indeed, recruit snow as the nexus of symbolic concerns pushing its status beyond that of a mere image. Only through Eliot do we see snow evoke the need and convey the *method* by which one might forget “visual” trauma; or, to recall Larkin’s appropriately psycho-militaristic lexicon, ‘To blank out whatever it is that is doing the damage’. Interestingly, while Eliot’s ‘forgetful snow’ – amnesic in itself – possesses undertones of the Wordsworthian *genius loci*, in its apparent ability to express *intrinsically* the cognisant state of a human being,<sup>131</sup> Larkin’s snow manages to retain the descriptive status of pure allegory. Equally, at the heart of all appropriations, is snow’s ability to *conceal* the topography of the landscape it covers: a landscape which – explicit in Larkin’s case but more obscure in the other authors – might be

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<sup>131</sup> The Romantic era is demarcated as the time in which the *genius loci* began to express the thoughts of *humans* rather than exclusively those of spirits or “sprites” as it had prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Scott Hess states, during this period, “the “genius loci” or presiding spirit of place, became gradually conflated with the emergent notion of “authorial” genius’ (72).

read as analogous with that of the human mind itself; or, more specifically, indicative of a truth contained within the narrator's mind that they do not wish to confront. If the landscape does indeed become memory, it follows that the contours of landscape might become the vicissitudes of memory, or the "landscape" of the brain, thus bestowing upon memory a certain physicality or *concreteness* that the common lexical definition of the noun does not possess.

Even if we are to read 'The Winter Palace' in isolation, then, it is clear that it possesses the capacity to enhance the debate surrounding Larkin's treatment of place and symbol, and perhaps even push it beyond its current bounds. However, its importance in our discussion is emphasised further still when we note a key parallel it upholds with a moment recalled much earlier in Larkin's career. The particular interplay between mind, memory and landscape in 'The Winter Palace', and to which snowy weather is held as analogous with thought, seems to be a rather singular appropriation of the symbolic mode. However, a close examination of Larkin's early output reveals that this intricate and unique fusion of snow with human thought, memory and mental disturbance is not entirely without precedent: an identical moment appears during the Winter of 1945, some 33 years previous, when Larkin was midway through writing *The Kingdom of Winter* (latterly to become *A Girl in Winter*). At this time, Larkin's letters reveal the poet as being in regular correspondence with his former undergraduate friend, James Sutton, who had assumed the title of 'Driver Sutton' in the 14<sup>th</sup> United Kingdom Light Field Ambulance, among the Central Mediterranean

Forces.<sup>132</sup> Larkin's own existence during this period – marooned in Shropshire and unable to serve owing to his poor eye-sight – is described in his own diary notes which depict him as an irritable figure, no less curmudgeonly than the solitary, library-dwelling poet he would later be celebrated as by the British public.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, Larkin recoils from BBC Radio war bulletins (which the poet considered 'a bastard way of rotting the mind') while 'continu[ing] to work, drink, smoke [and] talk . . . in descending order of fluency.'<sup>134</sup> Of note, however, is the curious manner in which even these colourful expressions of irritation seem to pale alongside the poet's avid preoccupation with the weather conditions of that winter, especially the physical aspects of what was a particularly cold three months between 1944 and 1945. Corroborating this fact, is a Met Office archive for January 1945, reporting that the 'Mean temperature [for Shropshire] was very low . . . 6.3°F. below the average in England and Wales and Scotland', with the period of the 20<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> being 'intensely cold'. Larkin's lodgings at 'Glentworth', Wellington, were situated near the Welsh border, 89 miles beyond which Cardiff was experiencing 'the lowest [temperatures] since observations were first taken in 1904'.<sup>135</sup> On 9 February 1945, Larkin writes to Sutton bemoaning the fact that he is, rather predictably, 'wrapped in a large rug which seems to warm me not at all' while his 'fuses are dead and [his] bones aching with cold'. All the time, Larkin repeats how his misery is compounded

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<sup>132</sup> UDP/174/2/103

<sup>133</sup> Larkin abides in Wellington, Shropshire at this time, and is engaged in what would become his first librarianship.

<sup>134</sup> UDP/174/2/113

<sup>135</sup> Meteorological Office Weather Report. M. O. 471. Vol. 62. No. 1.

by BBC Radio's 'childish inanity' ('It's time somebody stuffed something up the BBC'). At times, even the cold itself seems to hijack Larkin's epistolising train of thought. As late as April 1945, Larkin interrupts his self-evidently heartfelt inquiry into Sutton's imminent demobilisation with a recapitulation of a recent April shower which, itself, appears to take on the malevolence of the nearly-concluded war: 'there is a cold wind searching for marrow in living bones'. This time, as with Eliot's 'forgetful snow', there *is* the suggestion of *genius loci* in the weather, with Larkin's sinister marrow-searching wind embodying the malice of a dark spirit. The moment betrays Larkin's awareness of weather, not simply as a symbolic device, but as a kind of "voice" – an autonomous, spirit-imbued figure that seems to reflect, embody or even promote the hideousness of the war itself. Suddenly, and ostensibly unbeknownst to Larkin, a blurring occurs between the anxieties of war and the symbolic value of weather as a literary trope in effectively conveying them. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Larkin concludes his letter with the admission to Sutton that the title of his new novel 'will have something to do with winter' followed by a tender epilogue wishing for his friend's safe return ('It is no good wishing you were here but I do wish it'). Indeed, it is not simply the conflation of winter and war that touches upon modernist anxieties, and one might argue that the poet was aware of weather's capacity to blur the distinction between Larkin-the-man and his personae. Slipped among the leaves of these letters to Sutton dated between October 1944 and February 1945, Larkin had decided to cut out and archive the following Louis MacNeice quote from a local newspaper:

'For writing poetry is the way that the poet returns to normal'

– Louis MacNeice

The interruption of the newspaper clipping among Larkin's carefully catalogued letters to and from Sutton might initially seem discordant; however, a closer reflection aligns the MacNeice axiom with those emotions and desires felt by Larkin during that superlatively cold winter of 1944-45. Emotions and desires that were a reaction to the perpetually blaring radio, and the desire for the safe return of his conscripted best friend. And yet the significance behind Larkin's affinity with MacNeice's words may extend further still: indeed, the axiom's wording implies that Larkin not only wishes the war to be over, but wants the *consequences* of war that negatively influence his writing habits to be eradicated also. If winter was the symbolic device he chose to realise that end *artistically*, so writing itself might be seen as his attempt, made evident through his careful extraction of the MacNeice snippet, to 'return to normal' as an *individual*.

Clearly, then, winter – as a season but also as sophisticated symbolic device – was important to Larkin. Virtually non-existent elsewhere in his canon, the evidence above shows that the poet spent an almost inefficiently disproportionate amount of time trying to understand the ways in which winter – and in particular snow – might be utilised as a multi-faceted, dynamic trope in the business of writing. An ability which, while providing inspiration in a literary sense, was stalling his ability to write in a physical sense. Naturally, one might expect Larkin's principal project during this time,

*A Girl in Winter* [hereafter *Winter*] to be a virtuoso enactment of the thematic and symbolic concerns outlined above, as well as a novel which – given the filing of MacNeice’s inspirational quote – fuses these with an unshiftable adumbration of Larkin-the-poet, desperately battling against the bitter winter of 1944–45, and hoping to fan away the whiffs of juvenilia during a time in which his style itself was beset by a sense of ‘entrapment’ and the ‘quest for new directions and meanings’ (SW 110).<sup>136</sup> Definitely, in terms of the latter, quite the opposite is true: rarely in the Larkin canon is the figure of the poet himself more obfuscated than it is in *A Girl in Winter*, thus asserting, to some extent at least, Larkin’s own dictum that ‘novels are about other people and poetry is about yourself’ (qtd. in Motion 39).

The conspicuous absence of Larkin-the-poet in *Winter* – that enigmatic and enduring presence from which Larkin’s critics and readers continue to nourish themselves – is perhaps the reason why *Winter* has received even less critical attention than *Jill* – a novel whose protagonist, John Kemp, is regularly compared to the undergraduate Larkin himself.<sup>137</sup> *Winter*’s protagonist Katherine Lind is a female migrant whose status as an emancipated, displaced woman is dramatically antithetical to Larkin’s typical

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<sup>136</sup> M. W. Rowe in ‘On being Brunette: Larkin’s schoolgirl fiction’ supports this wish to expunge the image of the poet himself in his work through a concerted and stubborn determination to inhabit the voice of a female in the ‘Brunette’s schoolgirl stories. Larkin’s Brunette phase, which occupied the writer prior to his embarkation on *Winter*, percolates into the narrative choices made in Larkin’s first novel, not least of all through its elliptical, near-sexualised obsession with the female narrative voice itself.

<sup>137</sup> Liz Hedgecock outlines the similarities perhaps most comprehensively in her essay ‘Mythology and Exile in the Novels of Philip Larkin’ (*New Larkins for Old*).

phlegmatic male narrator – a factor which, no doubt, might chime an awkward note of discord for the critic who arrives at the novel poised to discount such stylistic decisions as futile, juvenile attempts at style experimentation. The critical *fait accompli* here reminds us of one of Larkin scholarship's most timeworn axioms of Larkin's pre-*Less Deceived* "developmental" period; namely, that 'the two novels are worth examining if only because they may shed some light on [Larkin's] practices as a poet.' (O'Conner qtd. in Domnarski 5). To fall victim to such an approach, in my view, leaves the critic open to the same accusations of misogyny in which the poet himself has been irredeemably mired over the recent decades.

Through Katherine Lind, Larkin invites his reader to consider England through the perspective of the refugee, newly arrived from a war-torn Europe.<sup>138</sup> Katherine's native country, as John Osborne notes, is rendered deliberately unclear. A decision whose 'thematic purpose' appears to be its success in '*keeping readers guessing as to Katherine's origins*' (emphasis Osborne's; *AL* 29). While Carol Rumens' instinct is that it is 'likely that [Katherine] is Jewish', Osborne develops his argument around Larkin's apparent ambivalence towards Katherine's nationality suggesting that she has been 'categorically' identified as French, German and Polish by various authors. With great dexterity, Larkin manages to gently redirect the reader's attempt to deduce Katherine's nationality towards an attempt to better understand her through the very lexicon of winter and weather that describes

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<sup>138</sup> Ingelbien supports this, claiming that *Winter* 'broods on one day in the empty life of a wartime refugee' (81).

her. A move which, in addition to being artistically bold, would seem to realign the poet's political leanings along more sympathetic, even liberal, lines.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, the difference between winter and Katherine herself becomes almost imperceptible. Longino, in her dissertation thesis 'Smaller and Clearer as the Years Go By', corroborates Katherine's indiscernibility by noting that Katherine is 'a creature of winter [whose] life is *bound by winter*' (87; emphasis mine). That Katherine has a hazily drawn heritage and yet is described *through* winter, paradoxically affirms rather than diminishes Larkin's commitment to 'strongly control his symbols, themes and characterisations' in the novel (Domnarski 12). Consequently, Larkin's decision to withhold Katherine's nationality from the reader draws greater attention to his symbolic poetics, forcing character and symbol, in many ways, to coalesce.

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In order to substantiate these claims, I propose now that we look at the novel itself in greater detail. *Winter* is split into three parts. The beginning and end of the novel take place in winter, with the centre section taking the form of an extended analepsis describing Katherine's former summertime visit to

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<sup>139</sup> Aligning Larkin with liberalism, while opposing the grain of mainstream criticism's long-held Thatcherite tarring, is not entirely without precedent during the poet's Movement period. Ingelbien, in his article 'A Girl in the Forties', states that 'Larkin's relation to Thirties poetry places at least part of his work in a poetic tradition of English left-wing radicalism' (81). Furthermore, Larkin's choice of title in 'The Winter Palace' is important, and gestures toward the oscillating, unstable nature of the USSR's social history (The Winter Palace itself situated in Communist Leningrad at the time of composition).

England and the affluent Fennel family. The tale is principally one of thwarted love and misled expectations on the part of Katherine who develops an attraction to Robin Fennel from his letter-writing prior to her visit to England some months earlier. In this sense, Larkin is right in his assertion to Sutton that the novel 'picks up where John [Kemp] left off' (qtd. in *PLW* 59); however, unlike *Jill's* logophilic protagonist whose infatuation disintegrates when his attraction is forced to take place in the "real world" outside the moment of epistolical communication, Katherine actively *seeks* out Robin in his home country in order to ratify, or indeed challenge, her own preconceptions about his character. In this chapter, I aim to split our investigation into three parts in accordance with the novel's three sections: section I (winter), section II (summer), and section III (winter).

In section I (winter), we will examine how winter is used interchangeably with aspects of scene setting, characterisation and mood. In so doing, I shall argue that, through the season of winter, Larkin establishes an array of characters and settings that uphold key parallels with the scene-setting techniques and characterisations of Dickens. Sitting in contrast to this is Katherine herself, a new librarian and expatriate, whose status, equally elliptically, seems to recall the Derridean *xénos*, or 'outsider' who yearns for hospitality and acceptance within an environment of challenging social moeurs.

In part II (summer), we shall turn to Katherine's visit of the Fennel family, and examine the ways in which Larkin uses aspects of seasonality, weather and place in order to promote a sense of female emancipation for

Katherine while eroding the vestiges of an already “weathered” British empire – as conveyed through Robin Fennel. A melange of Romantic idylls, juxtaposed against often-parodic scenes of post-war deprivation, Larkin seizes the opportunity of describing the Fennels’ quintessential England through the foreigner’s gaze to subvert established models of gender and English place-making. In so doing, I argue that Larkin, rather than engaging in the type of xenophobic rhetoric frequently attributed to his quasi-Middle England mature alter ego, actually champions Katherine’s status as a foreigner; an attitude that is realised especially vividly through Katherine’s ability to transcend the ailing interpersonal relations incumbent within an aristocratic, post-war England. As we shall see, Katherine achieves this by undertaking a sophisticated, Woolfian relationship with place, as seen demonstrated during her and Robin’s excursion to Oxford.

Finally, in section III (winter), in keeping with Woolf, I argue that Larkin allows modernism to haunt the narrative further. A tactic that is compounded by the novel’s dramatic return to winter in its final section along with a series of strong, unmissable allusions to Eliot’s sense of loss, melancholia and amnesia as depicted in *The Waste Land*.

## **I. Winter**

I wish to start our discussion by addressing the novel’s opening description of winter, and the way in which the snow-covered landscape of this passage is

used as a symbolic investment through which, and against which, the malevolent character of Mr. Anstey – Katherine’s boss at the library – is constructed. The portrayed scene is an eerie one, at once confiding in conventional tropes of winter in literature, while, at the same time, disfiguring them through an unsettling choice of colour and imagery. Part of the novel’s first scene-setting page is quoted below:

[T]here was no sun, only one vast shell of cloud over the fields and woods. In contrast to the snow the sky looked brown. Indeed, without the snow the morning would have resembled a January nightfall, for what light there was seemed to rise up from it . . . a puppy confronted with it for the first time, howled and crept under the water-butt (11).

This extract not only demonstrates a careful, almost enumerative deconstruction of the descriptive motifs that usually connote snow in a positive way, but goes one step further in *reverting* the usually beautiful appearance and effect of snow characterising it instead as something malign and threatening. Rather than the clear sky associated with a recent snowfall, the sky is ‘brown’ and a ‘vast shell of cloud’ alludes to an unpeopled, barren landscape. In keeping with this sky/land reversion, the source of light is not the sky but the snow itself from which light ‘seemed to rise up’. Here, snow almost evokes the lurid glow of a radioactive lake, with the lightless brown sky and January darkness suggesting a complete expungement of all human life. These factors, along with the implied ubiquity of crustaceous mutation that is delivered through the canny lexical duality in ‘vast shell of cloud’,

conjure a scene that is almost reminiscent of the Wellsian idiom of pre-war science fiction. However, Larkin's objective in describing the land and sky through the technique of inverted features does not segue into a commentary upon the inferred and expected social dystopia; instead, the chaotic environment appears to freight its malignity through the individual's *instinctive* reaction to the setting. This is shown through the response of the puppy – an animal and so the embodiment of instinct – who, rather than bound joyfully through the snow, whimpers and hides.

The brevity of this opening chapter sears these images into the reader's mind; moreover, the sharp, arresting set of depictions forces the excerpt to assume the status of a terse prolegomenon, alerting the reader firmly (perhaps *too* firmly to be deemed graceful) to the symbolic and tonal agenda that underpins the action over the forthcoming pages. Accordingly, it is perhaps no mistake that the subsequent chapter immediately sets about introducing Katherine's employer and nemesis, Mr. Anstey, a character who Larkin describes through the contrasting lexicon of heat, and with a focus on water in its fluid, rather than solid, state. Furthermore, Larkin's conjuration of Anstey's mean, cantankerous persona is coloured significantly by his tendency to hoard all the library's heat for himself:

[Anstey's] room was prodigiously warm, with a vehement gas fire turned up to the fullest extent so that the tips of flame licked the air. A china bowl of water stood in front of this, where a disintegrated cigarette-end floated . . . A telephone stood by a large tin of cigarette-lighter fluid.

[Anstey] was giving his usual performance of being too engrossed in matters of importance to notice [Katherine's] entry . . . his pipe gripped by his teeth with a snarling grimace (16).

Unlike the preceding chapter, Anstey's office is characterised through abundant, oppressive heat. Water, rather than existing as impassable and somehow malicious, is instead depicted as stagnant and contaminated by the detritus of Anstey's detestable smoking habit. In a converse symbolic agenda to the opening chapter, Anstey *himself* is recruited as the malevolent presence, with his 'gripped teeth' and 'snarling grimace' biting the cigarettes and pipe that would later be snuffed in the putrid tub of water. Unlike the snow covered expanse of the opening page which seems to draw in heat, Anstey, inversely, radiates heat 'prodigiously'. The name 'Anstey' is an aptonym, describing the nature of the irascible, obtuse individual who bears it, and the vignette at large seems to evoke an almost Dickensian sense of caricature. Indeed the pointed, snarling Anstey, with his accentuated yet sparingly deployed character traits and environment to match, upholds no small resemblance to a Creakle or Scrooge.<sup>140</sup> Like Dickens, whose character names, as John A. Stoler rightfully attests, 'form part of [a] novel's metaphoric pattern and often are designed to advance the work's major theme', Larkin establishes for the reader a symbolic network of juxtaposing

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<sup>140</sup> The sadism of the power-corrupted jobsworth in Creakle is tonally concordant with Larkin's Anstey: 'I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite.' (Ch. 7 qtd. *The Personal History of David Copperfield* 65).

notions, beneath the text, having effectively “primed” their thematic sensibilities from a symbolically loaded opening scenic vignette chapter.

Having thusly drawn the scene at a symbolic level, Larkin redirects our attention to Anstey’s xenophobic dialogue. The effect of the move not only firmly underscores Katherine’s status as a foreigner, but also insinuates her inherent intellectual inferiority – according to Anstey – based solely on her status as a non-English native. Anstey builds his case around an apparent absence of *instinct* in Katherine, an attribute which, when we recall the snow-fearing puppy in the opening chapter, is already depicted as a trait which misleads its bearer with false information making it inherently untrustworthy. Anstey claims Katherine’s clerical error would not have occurred had she possessed ‘an ounce of what we English call savvy or gumption or . . . *nous*’ (17; emphasis Larkin’s). A comment which is later reinforced with a blustering assertion that ‘it doesn’t do to stop and think. That way madness lies’ (20). Like Dickens’ character Josiah Bounderby who professes to ‘know the bricks . . . the works . . . the chimneys . . . the smoke [and] the Hands of [Coketown]’, Larkin’s portrayal of Anstey links him inexorably to the surrounding space of the library, fusing him to it, thus paradoxically drawing attention to Katherine’s alienation from it, in both spatial, as well as cultural, terms (113). Simultaneously, her intellectual and emotional faculties are underscored in sharp relief to Anstey’s pompous, self-celebratory dictum of “success-through-instinct” – a quality that he affirms, in no uncertain terms, is somehow inextricably linked to being “English”. Even Anstey’s choice of the word ‘*nous*’ on a lexical level offers a certain comic irony as its spelling is

identical to the French '*nous*' – the plural (and so communal) version of the solipsistic pronoun 'I'. If Larkin's critique of the Englishman's overreliance on instinct seems indirect here, the writer compounds the notion, beyond question, in a moment of extradiegetic contemplation on the following page. Speaking about the nation's attitude towards war, Larkin writes that:

[The] English . . . were characterised in time of war by antagonism to every foreign country, friendly or unfriendly, as a simple matter of instinct (22).

At this point, Larkin's already uncharacteristic indictment against the small-minded, xenophobic attitude of wartime England, is furthered through another cunning expression of the innate perils of a dependence solely upon instinct. Foiling this is Katherine, whose contrasting open-mindedness and university education – despite her political status as an imposter – receives Larkin's support. In this sense, Larkin appears to cast Katherine as the Derridean 'outsider' or *xénos* – an "alien". Derrida's *Of Hospitality* is a subtle work, and requires some exposition if we are to properly understand its ramifications for Katherine's migrant status. In it Derrida depicts hospitality as a multifaceted process enacted by the 'host' upon the '*xénos*'. The host, for Derrida, is obliged to enact the 'law of hospitality' (which includes the act of giving 'the new arrival all of one's home and oneself . . . without asking a name, or compensation'); and the '*laws of hospitality*' ('those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional, as they are defined from

the Greco-Roman tradition' [77])<sup>141</sup>. At the very least, Derrida's intentions here are clear: the correct administration of hospitality is a legal transition, but also, more importantly, an *emotional* act of unrequited generosity on the part of the host whose tenets are rooted in Western antiquity. Put simply, political acceptance is not enough. Derrida complicates the notion further by suggestion that the *xénos*' successful assimilation into a foreign land's sensibility is dependent on his/her usurpation of the 'paternal' side of a family. The very act of the *xénos*' arrival, states Derrida, 'shakes up the threatening dogmatisation of the paternal *logos*'; a conflict which, if not correctly resolved, runs the risk of making the foreigner appear 'deranged' (Derrida's emphasis 9).

At this point, Derrida's relevance to Katherine's plight becomes clear. After all, Katherine is constantly seeking English acceptance from a potential 'host'. Anstey is a potential father figure – Derrida's 'Parmenides' – and, as such, risks having his dictum influenced, amended or in some way 'shaken up' by the *xénos*, in order for her to gain his acceptance. Furthermore, assimilation into the nation's sensibility is achieved, according to Derrida, through 'the act of offering place', a process which Anstey, in his paper-colonised, cigarette strewn office, is reluctant to provide. Katherine's bid for intellectual asylum within England is refused by Anstey's staunch favouring of instinct; a process which is variously demonstrated via Katherine's inability

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<sup>141</sup> From *J Derrida Of Hospitality*, Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond.

to usurp, topple or influence his position as her *de facto* paterfamilias in England. As we shall see later in this chapter, the closest Katherine comes to receiving hospitable acceptance comes at a point during which Larkin temporarily purges all male characters from the prose, leaving the women free to bestow the required emotional components of hospitality which the males are so desperately unable to comprehend.

Much like the time-freezing effect of winter itself, Larkin holds the notion of the foreigner's repatriation in a kind of thematic stasis. Over the subsequent pages, we see Katherine finally becoming happy in her surroundings having assumed the role of carer to her frail and cantankerous colleague, Miss Green. The latter, suffering from toothache, is accompanied by Katherine to a dentist, during which the freezing winter temperatures provide the only relief for her agonising jaw. Miss Green's comment that 'It's so cold it almost stops my tooth from hurting' elevates winter away from a mere temporal state, into becoming coterminous with a sense of locked time and cryogenic frigidity. As in 'The Winter Palace', the coldness of winter is as able, not to cure the toothache, but 'To blank out whatever it is doing the damage' – to temporarily mute the pain, rather than address and cure its source: in the same way that 'The Winter Palace's narrator wishes to remain blissfully amnesic of his own forgetfulness. The recruitment of the expansive trope of winter to symbolically undergird such an intricate and *specific* paradox is a process in which Larkin, ironically, is deeply aware. A little earlier, the poet describes lucidly winter's capacity to be shrunk into the very water of a drinking fountain cup:

Together they crossed to the green and went up the path to the shelter, crushing a light layer of frozen snow . . . Katherine looked at the chained iron cup. "Well, if there are any germs the frost will have killed them." She ran the water again momentarily, to test it once more. It numbed her hand, *like a distillation of the winter*. (32, 34; emphasis mine).

Just as the cold water is a 'distillation' of winter, so too this little vignette is a 'distillation' of Larkin's symbolic agenda for seasons throughout the novel at large. The extract is replete with an arresting set of erroneous information, yielded for stylistic effect. 'Frozen snow' is a pleonasm, since snow is 'frozen' by definition; similarly Katherine's wrongful assertion that the frost has 'killed' germs (as heat would), rather than merely arrest their proliferation, implies Larkin is attempting to focalise attention upon an otherwise banal moment in time. It is perhaps the first moment in which Larkin treats winter not as a mere conduit for various symbolisms and atmospheres, but as a single, physical entity: cold water, a fluid whose contact with the skin from the font-like fountain tacitly suggests an act of religious anointing. Intriguingly, it is at this point that Katherine, having ministered to the unwell Miss Green and escorted her back to her home, finally begins to feel a sense of *belonging* (and happiness) in England. As such, we begin to see the Derridean tenets for the happy assimilation of the *xénos* being gradually fulfilled: Katherine, in her role as nurse, has '*influenced*' the otherwise cantankerous Miss Green such that her 'ugliness [and] petulance . . . faded to unimportance' (34). Equally, Katherine is welcomed into Miss Green's home; a 'shelter she never

knew existed in the very centre of the city' (35), and so is a recipient to the Derridean 'act of offering *place*' to the non-native *xénos*. That Katherine fails to be influenced *by* Anstey, and instead engages *her* influence upon the pathetic Miss Green implies a reversal of the usual set of parameters by which the *xénos* feels welcomed within the host country. Consequently, Katherine's ability to move beyond the impasse levelled against her by Anstey in effect allows her to part-inscribe her *own* hospitality that underscoring in no small way her power and agency as a female protagonist within an altogether new environment. As the chapter concludes, Larkin sustains this feminist application of the Derridean principle of hospitality, and reweaves it back into the theme of winter which, in itself, takes the form of a kind of symbolic coda:

[C]hance heelmarks [*sic*] seemed eternally printed in the frost.  
 Through the light mist [Katherine] could see the ornamental  
 front of the Town Hall under the flat shield of the sky, dark and  
 ledged with snow (35).

The use of the word 'heelmarks' suggests, with an unmissable degree of specificity, the bullet-like indentations impressed into the snow by a woman's high heeled shoes. While 'eternally' seems an odd choice of word – snow being a temporary manifestation of weather – the word lends a certain defiance and timelessness upon the very agency and skill with which Katherine has successfully forged a place within England and its frigid, seemingly obtuse citizens.

## II. Summer

It is at this point that Larkin embarks upon the analepsis that details Katherine's arrival in England the previous summer. At the outset, Larkin's agenda in describing summertime in England seems to eschew the symbolic investments established in describing winter: Katherine's transit to Dover via cross channel ferry is devoid of the former focus on seasonality, temperature and weather. Instead Larkin signals a change in his commitment to render meaning via place, by giving rise to an unexpected, and deft moment of *genius loci*, with both the natural features of the land ('gulls') and mechanical features ('a whirring plane above') seeming to take on a human-like sentience and character. Bereft of the emotional reassurances that would otherwise have been freighted through language, the narrator briefly occupies the sensibility of the uncomprehending Katherine, giving rise to an altogether new language, or 'word', vectored exclusively through futures of the landscape itself. The passage in question is cited below:

As time drew on, the quality of the early morning, like paper-thin glass, grew deeper and more clear; high above the harbour an aeroplane, like a tiny silver filing, climbed and tumbled in the sky so that an enormous word drifted on the air, emphasizing the stillness of the day. The gulls met them . . . wheeling and

screaming as they escorted the boat slowly towards the stone jetty, and their cries added to her mistrust (73).

The opening simile is awkward; while ‘the quality of the early morning’ could feasibly become ‘deeper and more clear’, it is grammatically and semantically infelicitous to compare this to ‘paper-thin glass’, since the former can neither *grow* nor *appear like* ‘paper-thin glass’. Perhaps Larkin’s clumsy attempt at zeugma, much like the ‘frozen snow’ solecism we addressed earlier, is a concerted attempt to “fix” the reader’s attention for the carefully engineered vignette that immediately ensues. Central to this vignette is the ‘enormous word’ spoken by the aeroplane overhead, which itself appears to be engaging in a training exercise in preparation for combat. Notably, Larkin declines to tell the reader what the ‘enormous word’ is, instead focusing on the context around its “utterance”.<sup>142</sup> This context, for the German-born Katherine, is both jingoistic and threatening: the Battle of Britain-style whining of the plane subverts the otherwise tranquil ‘stillness of the day’, while the ‘screaming’ gulls actively ‘escort . . . the boat slowly’, and

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<sup>142</sup> The moment has echoes of Auden’s ‘Journal of an Airman’ in which Auden’s narrator expresses the more *emotive* role of aircraft during wartime by yielding a sense of folkloric foreboding. Auden writes, “The aeroplane has only recently become necessary, owing to the progress of enemy propaganda, and even now not for flying itself, but as a guarantee of good faith to the people, frightened by ghost stories, the enemy’s distorted vision of the airman’s activities” (from *The Orators* 52). Here, Auden implies the aeroplane is less a vital constituent in an arms race, but instead the gatekeepers to Churchill’s propaganda machine of national pride and sovereignty; the very forces that Katherine is alienated by upon her arrival. Larkin’s debt to the piece is abundantly clear, with the poet remarking that reading ‘Journal of an Airman’ was ‘like being allowed half an hour’s phone conversation with God’ (*AWL* 44).

remain eerily reminiscent of the manner in which a pilot boat might escort a vessel of convicts. Undeniably, the ‘enormous word’ is not a greeting, and the only language Katherine confronts is the terse *Daily Mail* headlines which seem ‘as intelligible to her as Icelandic’ (73).

The mimetic nature of Katherine’s symbolic welcome to English shores is expressed cogently by Gregg Lambert’s reading of Derrida’s politics of hospitality in *Philosophy After Friendship*, particularly the way in which an individual’s rightful status of ‘stranger’ is frequently undermined by an inordinate focus on the bureaucratic ‘performativity’ of their transit into a specific place (in Larkin’s case, a symbolic performativity):

This moment of identification – one could even say “interpellation,” since in this moment the stranger is “*hailed*” and must submit himself or herself to the rule of a Master, or potential Host – is constantly threatened by ambiguity and possible lapses that overdetermine [*sic*] it as a performative event (15; italics Lambert’s).

Indeed, Katherine’s status as a foreigner entitles her, according to the Derridean dictum, to receive the appropriate ‘hailing’ – or ‘welcome’ – by England (the ‘Host’), a procedure which is stealthily undermined by the very metaphorical performativity of the *genius loci*; the latter being employed, in turn, to render her emotional state instead.<sup>143</sup> Given the circumstances of

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<sup>143</sup> Victoria Longino develops her critique in ‘Smaller and Clearer as the Years go By’ to reveal some preliminary thoughts on Katherine’s emotional state, focusing upon the nexus of semantic duality around the word ‘terrain’.

Katherine's need for hospitality, one begins to understand why Larkin's creative proclivities, at this point, seem to "bubble over" into what might be considered the "ultimate" example of metaphoric conceit; namely, the *genius loci*. With Larkin thus occupying the circumstances of the *xénos* in a literary-symbolic sense, our focus is diverted to Robin Fennel – Katherine's actual 'host' for her summer holiday – to determine whether he is capable, or indeed willing, to supply Katherine with both the intellectual and emotional components necessary to dissolve Katherine's over-reliance on place, and to offer her instead a sense of hospitality; components which, given Katherine's solitary arrival to English shores, she desperately requires to feel temporarily patriated within England.<sup>144</sup>

As we discovered in the previous section, for a Derridean sense of hospitality to emerge for the *xénos*, it is necessary that the 'host' engages in 'the act of offering *place*' – a process which requires the host's cognisance of (but not over-reliance on) a particular locale. This process of existing within place, and possessing the intellectual and emotional faculties to "offer" it to

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Longino states that 'it is not just a different geographical terrain we are seeing Katherine encounter; Larkin turns England into a metaphor for the emotional and psychological terrain she encounters as a sixteen-year-old girl and then as a woman' (94). Despite sounding rather aphoristic, Longino's critique exposes a subtle moment of Larkin symbolism; namely, the poet's tendency to relate a geographical landscape, with the landscape of "the mind". Conversely, however, the "mindscape" here refers to the development of a *young* mind, rather than the gradual degradation of an old *one* as depicted in 'The Winter Palace'.

<sup>144</sup> In part III, Larkin sharply reasserts the emphasis upon Robin as host, recalling Katherine's arrival to Dover: '[Robin] was in the forefront of a time when she had come to this same strange country, and had been welcomed by strangers and taken in among them' (216).

the *xénos*, is something that Larkin is quick to establish Robin to be utterly incapable of. Upon meeting Robin at the train station at Dover, he and Katherine partake of a meal in the restaurant coach of their train up to London. Larkin states:

It was impossible to imagine what [Robin] was thinking: he seemed perfectly adjusted to all his surroundings – including her – and able to withdraw his real personality elsewhere. This was not at all as she had pictured him (77).

As we saw in chapter three, the word ‘elsewhere’ shouldered a complicated and multifaceted set of meanings for Larkin. Here, the ‘elsewhere’ into which Robin extricates his personality prompts the reader to consider the existential possibilities that govern the combination of place and character. Indeed, the passage infers that Robin is wholly adept at extricating his personality away from its current setting, into another as-yet-undisclosed, possibly existential, “space”. Despite being ostensibly comfortable in his surroundings, his personality seems to exist within this separate space which, in turn, prevents Katherine from being able to ‘find anything about him to fix on’ (78). The implication suggests a certain palpability of character such that it is only ever tangible, or *complete*, when merged within the *physicality* of a given location in the present. The phenomenon is subsequently compounded, albeit from an antithetical perspective, when Larkin remarks emphatically upon the status of a group of cricketers who, conversely, do appear to be emotionally cognate with the very place that they currently occupy. The cricketers’

conspicuousness, in ghostly white, against a landscape of colour and detail that might have otherwise distracted the reader's eye, is telling:

[T]here were innumerable hoardings, empty petrol drums and broken fences lying wastefully about. Occasionally she saw white figures standing at a game of cricket. These were the important things, and because of them the town never seemed distant (80).

There is a gentle stylistic irony at play in the passage. The cricketers are depicted as almost spectral as they stand, eerily motionless, against a backdrop of dereliction whose 'innumerable hoardings [and] empty petrol drums' confer a contradictory narrative of frenetic industry and motion. Yet the cricketers are entirely *real*, and the industrial detritus – contrary to the clamorous industries that spawned them – are now the mere skeletal vestiges of a decaying effort. It is the cricketers that are deemed 'important' by Katherine and, rather than allow the cricketers' symbolic life as adumbrations to overpower meaning, Larkin insists, paradoxically, that their simulacral half-presence is the *very reason* that the landscape seems immediate and real.

As Katherine's stay with the Fennels unfolds, Larkin's application of the above techniques begins to diversify and alter in subtle ways. One such moment occurs while Katherine is watching Robin at a game of tennis. At this point, Larkin refracts Katherine's role as *xénos* away from the poetic moment of *genius loci* production, and instead positions it within the flux of

Katherine's memory. As Larkin enumerates Katherine's thought, he begins to recall the sophisticated, expansive 'passage of time' evocation of place frequently demonstrated in the works of Virginia Woolf, through a focus on a thought's original stimulus, and its meditation on place. Jane Duran rightfully underscores the multifariousness of scholarship's approach to Woolf's unique brand of place as rendered through ultra-subjectivity and the movement of time, by stating that 'Woolf's high modernist style lends itself to a number of readings with respect to sense of self, the passage of time, and a sort of phenomenological reflection' (300). Indeed, I would offer my own critical amendment here and argue that 'high modernism' may well be a label whose inherent power hinders the opportunity to discover similar evocations of place in works which may not otherwise adhere to the tenets of 'high modernism'. As Larkin demonstrates in the following citation, the Woolfian depiction of place is just as comfortable situated within narratives that possess a more 'Movement' tenor, such as that of *Winter*, as it is in more virtuoso examples of modernism contained in *Mrs. Dalloway*.<sup>145</sup> Watching Robin play tennis, the narrator inhabits Katherine's thoughts:

At this, half-effaced impressions rushed upon her, details of the journey and passengers, the shine of the sea, the lifting of the waves that was the slumbering of strength, the gulls at Dover, and above all her surprise that after so many miles and hours

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<sup>145</sup> In a rare interview with John Haffenden, Larkin even articulates *Winter's* apparent conflation with Woolfian and Post War modes, defining *Winter* as 'Written, shaped, a Virginia Woolf – Henry Green kind of a novel' (116). See *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (1981).

and different vehicles, after threading her way along so many platforms and quays, through ticket-barriers, entrance halls, customs-houses and waiting-rooms, she should have reached the point she set out for . . . (91)

Katherine's reverie, prompted by idle gazing, appears to "pan out". This expansive movement of the narrative not only introduces a sense of temporal organisation to her perception of the various spatial *topoi*, but also colours it with a certain energy and vitality. This energy and vitality seems to stem from the process of remembering, rather the moment of living, despite ironically comprising itself of the very features that were actively lived, and surmounted, in order to deliver her to the present. Interestingly, these *topoi* relate almost exclusively to the policing of her carriage into England, as an immigrant. The gulls are reintroduced, elevating their symbolic status to the level of motif, while the plethora of objects and enforcements threatening to restrict her admittance to England begin to organise themselves, and recede, thereby instilling across the passage (and Katherine's mind) a sense of serenity prompted, ironically, by the very act of their recollection. The colour and welter of competing images, which seem to tumble over each other during the course of the short overture, imply a certain euphoria, borne out of the solitary moment of contemplation, whose ebullience has run away with itself.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> The expansive recollection of place through reverie is perhaps best evoked by Woolf herself in a diary extract: 'London is enchanting. I step out upon a tawny coloured magic carpet, it seems, and get excited into beauty without raising a finger. The nights are amazing, with all the white porticoes &

It is at this point, having thoroughly expounded upon the consequences of the *xénos*'s inadequate treatment by the host, that Larkin begins to offer some solutions to the concerns raised. In so doing, we are offered some elucidation as to why Larkin specifically decided to cast a female protagonist for *Winter*. From Part II, chapter three onwards, Katherine spends an increasing amount of time with Robin's sister, Jane. It is important to note that Jane's condemnation of the prosaic manner in which her brother speaks about place is mirrored, precisely, by Katherine. On a day trip to Oxford, both women make clear their preference for a more 'immersive' appreciation of place, over Robin's systematic, enumerative 'guide-book style' breakdown of the various sights, sounds and facts (Longino 102). Jane remarks tersely:

"I like to *know* about places." Jane's voice took on a curious, younger-sister note of defiance. "All [Robin] care[s] about is the birthrate [*sic*] and the standard of living. I want to know what I should feel like if I lived there" (96; emphasis Larkin's).

Larkin's use of the adjective 'curious' is important; it masks, or dampens, the aphoristic strength of his own authorial comment which, itself, is clamouring to achieve vindication by the reader at this point. Jane's paroxysm is, indeed, 'curious' and has its roots as much in Larkin's desire to assert an authorial message as it does with the repressed ethos of the Fennel family as a whole.

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broad silent avenues. And people pop in and out, lightly, divertingly like rabbits; & I look down Southampton Row, wet as a seal's back or red & yellow with sunshine, and watch the omnibus going & coming, & hear the old crazy organs.' (*A Writer's Diary* 61).

The juxtaposition that Jane's outburst establishes, separates tersely the stereotypical constitutions of the emotionally immersive female against the fact-driven male. Robin's cold, statistical view of place portrays him as a politician or a colonel-in-waiting, defiantly blind to the *human* component, and enabling Larkin to reintroduce the Dickensian theme of "Gradgrindism", and solidify its status to that of a motif. Larkin sustains the moment by allowing Robin – again in the style of a Gradgrind and Anstey – to enumerate scientifically the aspects of Oxford in an extract that twice references and underscores the ubiquity and prowess of the British Empire:

"Take what you see now . . . Small fields, mainly pasture. Telegraph wires and a garage. That Empire Tea placard. And you know, don't you, that Britain is a small country, once agricultural but now highly industrialized, relying a great deal for food on a large Empire. You see, it all links up" (96).

Robin's overture is patronising, impressing upon the female company an overbearing opinion of the strength, and importance, of the Empire. That the ubiquity of Empire is expressed in advertising ('Empire Tea') and infrastructural dependency (on 'food') both emphasise and undermine Robin's stalwart allegiance and self-definition by it. Indeed, the Empire's new reliance on foreign powers for food – a vulnerability to English prowess that

Robin unintentionally divulges – identifies a potential snag to his automatic inheritance of it as an upper-middle class male.<sup>147</sup>

Shortly afterward, Jane and Katherine leave to speak alone, whereupon the dichotomy between the opposing male and female attitudes towards place eventually reaches a climax. Freed, temporarily, of male company, the pair's relative isolation facilitates an important shift in the way place is evoked and described. Comparable with Katherine's equally solitary arrival to English shores, the women's feelings appear to seep into their surroundings; prompting life and sentience to inhabit their otherwise inanimate features and fixities. It is interesting to note that the dramatic burgeoning of the *genius loci* upon the landscape takes place at a point in which the female characters who inhabit it are suddenly able to speak without fear of male derision. The purgation of feelings of threat and condescension that result from this emotional emancipation recalls the sudden outflow of ebullient feeling that emerged as Katherine regarded the tennis match. However, it is not equalled by a similar expansiveness of time. By rooting time within the *present*, Larkin is forced to replace the Woolfian expansive mode, given that place, in the present, cannot easily exist on a trajectory across which it can be "remembered". Instead, the *genius loci* is

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<sup>147</sup> The irony, and cause, of Robin's faith in a collapsing Empire – given his status as an upper-middle class boy in the 1940s – is expressed excellently by Joseph Bristow in *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World*. Bristow states: 'Imperialism made the boy into an aggrandised subject – British born and bred – with the future of the world lying upon his shoulders. But the country of his birth was not in itself the guarantee of his ability to participate in ruling a globe with ever-increasing amounts of red on it' (19).

accompanied by the pathetic fallacy as the moody weather competes to both mimetically *respond to* the women's disencumbered emotions, and act *with* them as a metaphoric accompaniment:

[The] rain echoed behind her. It was falling now with astonishing vehemence, making the grass dance, whirling across the field in sudden silver ghosts . . . The hiss of the rain slackened abruptly, and it fell gently in front of the open doorway, running in tiny rivulets in [*sic*] over the stone flags, that were dusty with chaff. The clouds had huddled onto one side of the sky [*as*] they heard the liquid croaking of a full stream . . . "There ought to be a rainbow somewhere about."  
[Jane] squinted upwards. "I can't see it" (115).

The above passage opens with a tone that is eerie and crepuscular. Like the spectral cricketers hidden amongst 'innumerable hoardings', the velvety grass is paradoxically rendered conspicuous by virtue of its translucence. The weather appears to goad the landscape; despite the violence of the downpour, however, the grass responds peacefully, assimilating the energy of the storm's force into a tranquil scene of gentle silver shimmering. Unlike the cricket scene, the extract is saturated with verbs that denote human sentience, whose tone is carefully managed by Larkin. The grass can 'dance' with ethereal beauty, while the rain responds with a malevolent 'hiss'. The clouds are conspiratorial in their 'huddled' position at one end of the sky, and the stream engages in a 'liquid croaking'. The latter, like the 'frozen snow' we addressed earlier, is a pleonasm and suggests that even Larkin's grammar is

succumbing to the odd effulgence which courses through the landscape. The welter of conflicting presences within the land and weather, along with their interrelation, recalls the *genius loci* famously depicted by Alexander Pope in 'Epistle to Burlington'. Existing as a *multitude* of competing indwelling spirits each recruited to protect, oversee, and instruct a human's emotional cognisance with the landscape they govern,<sup>148</sup> Larkin not only recalls the democracy of voice within Pope's *genius loci*, but further draws attention to the individual human's engagement *with* these voices. It is no mistake that Larkin recruits Katherine and Jane as his authorial mouthpiece; both women, like Larkin, are set against the insensitive male-dominated world they are forced to inhabit, and this virtuoso refrain at the end of chapter three is the capstone of the women's emotional and intellectual prowess. Larkin's final acknowledgement of the Popean *genius loci* is the women's acknowledgement of the metaphoric polyphony of the weather they are witnessing:

"We can get home in this, though our shoes will be soaked," she said. "There ought to be a rainbow somewhere about." She squinted upwards. "I can't see it." (115).

The rainbow is the expected meteorological phenomenon that results from the weather conditions the women are experiencing. Also, however, through its vast spectrum of dazzling colours it is an emblem of the metaphoric

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<sup>148</sup> William Jones describes this technique as an attempt to 'personify the most abstract notions [by] plac[ing] a nymph and a genius in every grove, and almost in every flower' (qtd. in Teignmouth 280) Pope's appropriation, in turn, recalls the landscape poetics popularised by Palladio.

multifariousness of the competing voices, temperaments and literary heritages duelling within this particular landscape. Much like the scene at large, the rainbow is shot through with a quasi-supernaturalism akin to the ethereal shimmering grass and the troll-like gurgling of the stream. Interestingly, though, the women are denied the satisfaction of the symbolic apotheosis because the rainbow never appears. Consequently, the prose seems ‘beautiful but somewhat sterile’: a denouement that does not achieve the colour of its anticipated climax (Ingelbien 81).

The above moment is important: it exposes Larkin’s symbolic commitments on a local level, while gently pointing to *Winter*’s unique place in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century literary canon. Regarding the former, Larkin’s careful manipulation of symbolic momentum, his constraint in denying us the ultimate symbolic payoff in the rainbow, and the polyphonic voices that compete, all the while, *behind* the landscape suggest that Larkin’s move to deny his readers the rainbow is no accident. Indeed, like Katherine’s arrival to English shores, the *genius loci* seems to “feed” off this very sense of thwarted, near-completion; however, unlike the Dover scene where the ferry is the agent upon which the symbolic crescendo is freighted, in the Katherine-Jane exchange above, the *genius loci* appears to burgeon from *Larkin*’s own struggle to keep a handle over his symbolic powers, which all the while are attempting to slip out of his control.<sup>149</sup> At this point, one cannot

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<sup>149</sup> The moment reminds us of the *genius loci*’s capacity for imbuing not just place, but also the artist who inhabits place, with a pernicious or negative “energy”. In some cases, the effect of this is to sabotage the clarity of the artist’s creative faculties. The notion still persists in contemporary writing and

help but recall contemporary criticism's eschewal of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century novel for reasons of lacklustre symbolic merit, existing as a mere 'conservative literature of retreat' whose writers had 'little left to push against' (Stonebridge & Mackay eds. 1-2). I argue that it is this very absence of a vibrant literary milieu, together with the stagnated cultural lexicon that effuses the post-war era, that *becomes* the immoveable force against which Larkin is able 'to push against'. Consequently, the stasis into which *Winter's* female characters are cast – symbolically underscored by the baron winter that lurks perpetually behind the text – becomes the very means through which Larkin is able to generate his most original voice. This voice, rather than emerge from the narrative's oppressed women, appears to transfer into place *itself* whose role, in turn, is to 'speak' for these women whose thoughts are otherwise censured by their male oppressors.

### III. Winter

We now move on to the final section of the novel in which Larkin lifts the analepsis, and resumes the narrative of Katherine's employment under Mr. Anstey during the freezing English winter. Katherine has realised that Robin

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is utilised in Jonathan Barnes's *The Somnambulist*. Referring to his protagonist Barnes states, 'the waters of history clos[ed] about his head. He found himself recalling the notion of *genius loci*, that fanciful conviction that a place itself materially affects the individuals who pass through it. If this place had any tangible effect upon its inhabitants then it was surely a malign one . . . The place had a hunger to it; it craved sacrifice' (61-2).

never wished her to visit, and that Jane, in desperate pursuit of a female compeer, masqueraded as her brother in a series of letters to encourage Katherine's visit. In the final pages of the novel Robin appears drunk, and propositions Katherine; an advance which Katherine declines. During these moments, Larkin's symbolism surfaces through the text, and the co-existing themes of coldness and amnesia that characterise part I of the novel, begin to resurface. The symbolic coda is more than a stylistic final flourish; moreover, Larkin actively reintroduces the motifs of coldness and amnesia to placate Katherine's suffering, which she has hitherto experienced at the chauvinistic hands of the novel's central male character. The effect, like that yielded at the conclusion of 'The Winter Palace', is an ability 'To blank out whatever it is that is doing the damage', and for the 'mind [to] fold into itself, like fields, like snow.' Place, therefore, becomes a vessel upon which Katherine can reach this amnesic oblivion; an oblivion that, as the penultimate paragraphs attests, becomes sharply responsive to the order and the reality-affirming capabilities of time itself:

There was the snow, and her watch ticking. So many snowflakes, so many seconds. As time passed they seemed to mingle in their minds, heaping up into a vast shape that might be a burial mound, or the cliff of an iceberg whose summit is out of sight . . . They were going in orderly slow procession, moving from darkness further into darkness, allowing no suggestion that the order should be broken, or that one day, however many years distant, the darkness would begin to give place to light.

Yet their passage was not saddening. Unsatisfied dreams rose and fell about them, crying out against their implacability, but in the end glad that such order, such destiny, existed. Against this knowledge, the heart, the will, and all that made for protest, could at last sleep (248).

The passage reads like a nihilistic, even suicidal, advancement towards death. Grossly subversive of traditional depictions of two embracing lovers, Larkin depicts the post-coital Katherine and Robin as being slowly anaesthetised, or cryogenically frozen. They are lifted off into existential limbo, and their response is a blissful acceptance of the forgetfulness that this will inflict upon their minds. The ticking watch symbolises the order of the seemingly dystopian system that is set to annihilate Katherine's consciousness. The wintry scenes that surround this give 'shape' to the limbo-world, and appear as the agents of its own reckoning. Such shapes are shot through with a funereal sombreness, unspecific heaps like 'burial mounds' or 'icebergs' and the 'orderly slow procession' alluding to the procession of a hearse and mourners.

The ticking watch, its seconds carefully enumerated along with the snowflakes, is the only source of governing order upon the pair's existential passage towards oblivion. While place warps and distorts, time continues to uphold a sense of linear order – or journeying 'procession' – in whose existence the pair can be 'glad', underscoring Katherine's previous assertion that 'the strongest bond she felt between them [was] that they were journeying together, with the snow' (237). While Katherine was previously

'hardly aware that she was unhappy, because her feelings had so nearly atrophied', the frozen realm into which she is passing – like that described in 'The Winter Palace' – promises to 'eliminate' the very reflexive thought processes by which she might regard her own lassitude' (185). The strength of time as a theme, and the assortment of symbolisms into which it is embedded, brings to mind some of modernism's most haunting apothegms,<sup>150</sup> and colours the epilogue with a bleak, preoccupation with 'clock-time' that nags at the heart of modernist thought.<sup>151</sup> The correlation with modernism here reminds us, too, of Eliot's 'forgetful snow' and a cold planet's capacity for smothering the progression of time; furthermore, it is rooted in *symbol*, and Larkin's stylistic ease in rendering it avoids the clotting narration of voice that entices the arrival of the *genius loci* elsewhere in the novel. Consequently, Larkin's parting comment is on the nature of destiny, and a reaffirmation of landscape's analogousness with the mind, along with a flamboyant underlining of snow's multifariousness as a symbol.

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It is difficult to say, with any degree of certainty, what Larkin was thinking when he penned 'The Winter Palace' in 1978; nor is it any easier to deduce

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<sup>150</sup> One thinks especially of Eliot's "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" in *The Waste Land* and 'the free flow of Clarissa's thoughts . . . constrained by the regular and predictable chiming of the clock' in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (Taunton).

<sup>151</sup> Randall Stevenson notes the irony behind modernist writers' perpetual interest in 'time on the clock', despite the époque's apparently greater, more celebrated thematic interest with: 'time in the mind'. Stevenson's recollection of Bernard's 'stare of the clocks' in *The Waves*, and the clock's 'terrific explosion right in her ear' in *Orlando* are particularly salient examples of this. See chapter three on *Modernist Fiction*.

why he failed to complete the poem – an unusual decision for the writer during the 1970s. Published shortly after the toweringly famous ‘Aubade’ was completed, a few months after the ‘depressing year’ which saw the death of the poet’s mother, perhaps the ever-atheistic Larkin took pause to re-question his own ‘desire for oblivion’ (*TCP* 495).<sup>152</sup> Far more than a mere embryonic exposition of these notions, *Winter* provides some long-sought answers pertaining to Larkin’s own search for existential meaning. Many of the novel’s themes are in line with the greater Larkin symbolic stock: a love of place and its troubled extraction from modernist styles; a sense of *genius loci*, and its appearance during points of textual clotting or crisis surrounding the ‘author–narrative–character’ nexus; a penchant for detailing the subjective melancholia and interiority of an alienated individual. However, perhaps more interestingly, *Winter* gives rise to a vast array of more surprising allegiances which almost seem to transpire by accident. Central to this technique is the quasi-liberal empowerment of a female protagonist – a migrant and an intellectual. Alongside sits the unmissable reference to Derrida’s cognisance of hospitality; the deployment of caricature; and a blatant dilution of Larkin-the-writer who, as his personal letters attest, is struggling to check-in with his usual poetic assets. These assets, due to the ubiquity of war and winter, are continually being warped and remoulded in the novel, almost against the writer’s own will. Larkin’s emancipation of the refugee in Katherine Lind – her empowerment and depth of feeling – is far

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<sup>152</sup> Final line of ‘Wants’ (Beneath it all, desire of oblivion runs’). For an excellent exploration of Larkin’s suicidal and apocalyptic poems, consult: *The End of the Mind* by De Sales Harrison.

removed from the idle titillation and chauvinist-infused casting of Larkin's other female muses. In her, Larkin adopts a sympathetic stance towards the plight of the lone refugee who is newly acquainting herself to English customs. Her emotional cognisance with England not only takes place within the confines of symbolically charged locales but, at times, has its very nature mimetically evoked, or "performed" by these loci themselves. Concurrent with this symbolism are the shadows of a more modernist voice which haunts the symbolic lexicon of the novel, rendering *Winter* not only a noteworthy text in Larkin's canon but a vital one if we are to truly understand the full gamut of quieter allegiances that sit behind the louder, more bellicose affirmations of Larkin scholarship.



## 5

**God's Waiting Room: Static Contemplation in *High Windows***

One does not have to look far to determine that critical reception of *High Windows* in 1974, like the very readership from which it had become unremittingly tied, was forthright about extolling the capabilities of its creator. This final collection, many critics seem to chime, reveals Larkin at his most graceful: as a poet whose grasp of symbolism, voice and style owes its virtuosity not so much to a career of radical shifts and experimentations, but to a lifetime of careful self-improvement and fine-tuning. Several scholars recognise this strategy of meticulous, ongoing self-improvement. Bergonzi notes in 1977, for instance, that the poems of *High Windows* reveal Larkin 'has refined and purified his style but has not really altered it' (345). Similarly, Kingsley Amis, confident of his friend's greatness and proven artistic merit, asserts plainly in 1974 that 'Larkin admirers need only be told that he is as good as ever here, if not slightly better' (213). Clive James, equally positive, celebrates the poet's apparent effortless voice, stating that 'The total impression of *High Windows* is of despair made beautiful. Real despair and real beauty, with not a trace of posturing in either' (51). While some of this contemporary criticism was negative (notably William Bedford in 1974 who vilifies the collection's 'cheap language', and Humphrey Clucas who deems it

'crude and ordinary'<sup>153</sup>), the publication of *High Windows*, in many ways, sounded the death-knell for traditionalist critics who still hoped to bring Larkin down on account of his populism and "anti-Modernist" accessibility. Sadly for them, a concerted denunciation of the expletive-heavy language with which Larkin animated many of his personae, simply did not hold much sway against the prevailing critical opinion. Alan Brownjohn no doubt assisted in the collapse of this group of establishment dissenters when he spoke on behalf of 'The Group' – a notable 'forum for young writers' between 1955-65 (Hobsbaum 75) – stating that 'it's doubtful whether a better book than *High Windows* will come out of the 1970's' (*New Statesman*).<sup>154</sup> Also speaking on behalf of the academy was John Wain, Larkin's former Movement compeer and now Chair of Poetry at Oxford, who chose Larkin as the subject of his lectures – a chair whose 'new prominence surely helped Larkin win even more readers' (Evans 43).

Such praise, issuing straight from the heart of the epoch's academic elite, cannot be underestimated. Tawdry accusations of sycophantism could now be cleanly swept aside (Larkin's promotion to the rank of poet-celebrity had been earned far away from the drawing rooms of Bloomsbury, and was undergirded by an *oeuvre* that was fast approaching 30 years). Supporting this, in no small way, were the flurry of monographs that emerged around the

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<sup>153</sup> Cited in Evans 35.

<sup>154</sup> "The Group" founded by Philip Hobsbaum is often seen as the subsequent English poetic ideal to follow "The Movement". Formerly Larkin had sported 'a jaunty mockery of tone that [had] kept him permanently out of favour at Cambridge' (Thurley 142).

early 1970s centring on Larkin's development as a poet. Lolette Kuby's now indispensable monograph, *An Uncommon Poet for the Common Man* (1974), underscored some of the aforementioned populist trends, while David Timms' *Philip Larkin*, a year earlier in 1973, anointed Larkin as 'the first Movement poet to be . . . honoured' in a monograph all of their own (Powell 99). Combine this with Larkin's own ancillary projects – the publication of *All What Jazz* in 1970<sup>155</sup> together with his 'lucrative'<sup>156</sup> editorship of *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse* in 1973 – and we begin to see why *High Windows* educed such fanfare: the ubiquity of the Larkin "brand" was starting to beguile its own readership.

Two important points stand out from the moment of *High Windows's* publication in 1974. The second relates to Larkin's explication of the theme of death, and I shall come on to this later. The first, however, relates to Larkin's ever-growing status as a poet of place, and marks the point at which critical reception, though prolific and engaged, developed a mild amnesia towards Larkin's ever-growing status as poet of national prominence and importance. Indeed, one might argue that Larkin had already become something of a byword for a British public seeking to reclaim a sense of British identity through geographical *topoi*. The growing influence that his poetic exerted over the nation's consciousness was something to which even Larkin himself

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<sup>155</sup> Originally published by Faber, 1970. Latterly reprinted as: *All What Jazz: A Record Diary, 1961 – 1971* by Faber, 1985.

<sup>156</sup> When asked on *Desert Island Discs* about his role in compiling *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, Larkin answered: 'I thought it'd be a very great honour, which it was; I thought it'd be very lucrative, which it has been.'

had become accustomed, albeit in private. Tellingly, around this time, Larkin accepted his first ever commission, and used it to pen 'Going, Going', later included in *High Windows*.<sup>157</sup> Its unforgettably elegiac line 'that will be England gone' would later be read prophetically by John Powell Ward, who recognised Larkin's account of the rise in 'split-level shopping' precincts and their associated infrastructures as one which effectively 'anticipated Britain's environmental emergency by two decades' (186). And while Larkin fought back against such homogenisation by imbuing his verse with Romantic undertones,<sup>158</sup> his personal opinion towards the condition of England remained characteristically fatalistic: England, as he knew it, was disappearing – 'I thought it would last my time'.<sup>159</sup>

Visually, at no other point was this homage to a disappearing nation more greatly demonstrated than in the accompanying image to John Bayley's three-page *TLS* review of *High Windows*. Written in July 1974, a month after the collection's publication, the review sits adjacent to an enormous page-sized photograph of a tweed-wearing Larkin sitting aloft a large county sign

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<sup>157</sup> The brief, decided by 'Robert Jackson' who, in 1972, was engaged in drawing up government report entitled *How Do You Want To Live? A Report on the Human Habitat*, was, simply: 'the environment' (*TCP* 454).

<sup>158</sup> Seamus Perry describes this tempering force as a type of 'modern romanticism' which (he says) is almost always indistinguishably tied up with a 'sort of belated, disenchanting erotic' romantic voice the likes of which is best demonstrated in 'Sunny Prestatyn' (*Looking at Larkin*).

<sup>159</sup> Vitally, Booth identifies a fundamental change in Larkin's treatment of England in 'Going, Going': 'The word "England" appears elsewhere in his mature poetry only in neutral or uncomfortably ironic contexts . . . 'Going, Going' [however] contains the only unambiguously positively charged use of the word in his poetry' (*LAL* 371-371).

bearing the word 'ENGLAND' beneath a St. George's cross.<sup>160</sup> The choice of such an image, along with its gentle undertones of jingoism, might seem to contemporary scholars of the poet, to be profoundly "Larkinesque". It reiterates subtly the poet's position as a national panegyrist in the modern canon – a poet whose very name conjures a demonstrable sense of nationhood. Symbolically, it binds the poet to a nationwide readership with whom the common, uniting tie was an understanding and quiet love of England, eschewing in its stead, any allegiance or commitment to a given stylistic school or "highbrow" poetry in general. Given this, it is somewhat surprising what little time Bayley devotes to discussing Larkin's newfound apparent cultural ambassadorship. As well as passing over the panegyric undertones of 'Going, Going', Larkin's status as 'the national monument' is effectively downplayed by the latter who argues, between his otherwise exulting praise of Larkin's style, that 'Wordsworth, or Carlos Williams, or Robert Lowell' continue to reign supreme as poets whom the nation feels 'we have with us always, as part of the family' (AWL 446; 654). Ingelbien is equally circumspect, asserting that during the early 1970s, while Larkin 'certainly had eye for the details of English life . . . it is another thing to argue, as several critics do, that he set out to speak for the nation' (196). Such a cautiousness of approach seems dramatically antithetical to the Larkin of the '90s whose voice, according to Motion, had become 'the means by which his country recognised itself' (AWL 343).

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<sup>160</sup> John Bayley, 'Too Good for this World', *TLS* (1974).

Ironically, it was an American critic, Robert von Hallberg, who emerged as the first contemporary scholar to definitely assert Larkin's burgeoning monopoly over the skirl of poetic voices that were jostling to define 'Englishness' during the early 1970s. While Hallberg's review of Timms' monograph acknowledges Ricks' praise of his compatriot, it is Hallberg himself who takes the vital extra step of asserting that, consequently, this poet now *speaks for* the nation:

"Philip Larkin is the best poet England now has." [Ricks] A poet is entering the canon . . . more than any other poet, Larkin speaks for England today. His is the measured voice of the present at its most candid, articulating cautionary strategies for the future (325).

Perhaps Hallberg's success in adroitly prophesising the dizzy heights of fame into which Larkin would be projected during the late '80s and '90s exists in his awareness that Larkin's poetic can retain a sense of everyday without compromising the intricacies of style. Indeed, the 'cautionary strategy for the future' which Hallberg sees embodied in Larkin's work may indeed be attributed to Larkin's paradoxical ability to write poetry that can be 'accommodated by modernist critical principles and yet be singularly immune to the fate of modernist poetry' (237-238).

Other critics, such as C. B. Cox, were mindful of the perils that the reviewer faces in judging a new collection, affirming that 'history records the false estimates of famous editors and writers' (99). And yet, even Cox's

diminutive tone in referring to the obstinacy of 'Larkin's admirers', in insisting that their cherished poet is 'still producing poems as successful as the best in *The Less Deceived* somehow betrays a private belief that interest in *High Windows* would remain relatively modest in the future. It is perhaps Patrick Swinden, who most comically misjudges the tastes of the English reading public in 1974. Alongside praising Larkin's 'exquisitely subdued expression of hope' in poems such as 'The Trees', Swinden strongly berates Larkin's 'bad-tempered' personae who enjoy hurling 'mud pies . . . at mums, dads, defence ministers, American academics [and] girls on the pill', all the while remaining supremely unaware that these were precisely the elements – despite their rebarbative connotations – which many subsequent readerships would appreciate and quote ceaselessly. By affording his personae expletives; by directing their discourse towards topics considered (by some) as abhorrent; by adopting a more demotic lexicon and unabashedly exposing the geographical and intellectual constituents of a declining England, Larkin was beginning to speak in a lexicon that garnered a truly universal appeal.

Evidently, then, while Larkin's reputation as a poet of great technical ability remained largely unquestioned, criticism – specifically in the early 1970s – was reticent to acknowledge and foresee the poet's continuing ascent to 'national spokesman' (Ingelbien 196). A failing characterised, ostensibly, by an underestimation of the means by which the poet generated appeal through both language and English identity.<sup>161</sup> It would be unfair,

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<sup>161</sup> It was not until a little later, in 1976, that critics conceded that the 'localization of focus and the colloquial language used to describe settings

however, to rest this oversight entirely at the door of an out of touch critical milieu. After all, leaving aside 'Going, Going', Larkin's depiction of nationhood in *High Windows* is peculiarly indeterminate – inchoate even – and will often address questions of nationhood with neither the same orthodoxy nor thematic openness of a Hughes or Hill. Conversely, Larkin's sense of nationhood flickers behind the collection, more as an atmosphere, and is difficult to define, let alone accurately forecast its future impact upon subsequent English readerships and sensibilities. Heaney comes close when he states, in a slight departure from his usual rhetorical lucidity, that the poems of *High Windows* generate 'visions of the "spiritual, Platonic old England", the light in them honeyed by attachment to a dream world that will not be denied because it is at the foundation of the poet's sensibility' (*The Government of the Tongue* 27). While Heaney's allusion to 'dream' and 'spiritual' in *High Windows* is reasonably justified (the collection, in places, makes no secret of its cynical, yet deliberate, quest for a better spiritual understanding of the self), the choice of label in 'Platonic old England' seems, perhaps, a little overstated.

Indeed, in many of the poems, if a version of England is extolled, it is done so indeterminately. It emerges as the 'by-product' of a variety of otherwise generic settings or *topoi*. England is found in the lounge of the retirement home ('The Old Fools'); within the corridors of a hospital ('The Building'); down the nameless 'valleys' along which 'young men' depart

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and emotions' had become vital ingredients which 'endear Larkin to his readers.' (*Poetry Foundation*).

(‘How Distant’); or is the symbolic ‘field’ across which the doctor and priest come bounding (‘Days’). Locations are often unnamed, inchoate, or are conveyed to the reader after having been mediated through the lens of a ruminative, or fanciful, narrator.<sup>162</sup> In ‘High Windows’, for instance, we are forced to ascertain that the narrator is a pedestrian only by reversing the perspective of his upward gaze, while in ‘Posterity’, the narrator’s culture and genealogy is ironised by two American academics who converse on Larkin’s legacy in a location projected decades into the future. On such occasions, it seems that place exists as just another trope in a series of many, all working together to yield the poem’s desired effect. Consequently, I argue that, rather than viewing this retreat of place *topoi* as an indication of Larkin’s reduced interest in the trope, one might actually view place’s newfound indeterminacy as a paradoxical *affirmation* of the very underlying reverse psychology that makes a *sense* of place loom large.

If we reread the collection from this viewpoint, suddenly modern England is everywhere in *High Windows*. It is defined, however, almost exclusively, through the *negative*: it is not the despondent sneaker-wearing American academics (‘Posterity’); nor is it the permissiveness and freedom of youth (‘High Windows’); nor, either, the disappearing ‘fields and farms’ of ‘Going, Going’. Alternatively, modern England is ‘a consumerist world steadily homogenizing to placelessness’, and as such, it is little wonder that

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<sup>162</sup> An important exception to this is ‘Dublinesque’ where the ‘stucco sidestreets’ locate the poem’s narrator immediately and clearly within Dublin (CP 140).

we have trouble finding *topoi* that are lucid, conventional or clean-cut (Porteous 4). The very *olde worlde* image that Heaney conjures in his critique of *High Windows* is exactly what is absent from the collection. Indeed, if we were to define the collection briefly, we might say that it evokes an England still reeling from post-war deprivation, where Larkin's own 'need to "different from [him]self"' is both more desperate and more difficult to fulfil' (Swarbrick 125).<sup>163</sup> This place-making, then, frequently exists as a result of reverse psychology, whose points of contrast are so carefully defined, obscured or balanced that even the likes of Heaney are fooled.

Keeping Larkin's elusive commitment to place in mind, I argue that there is one other major oversight that criticism failed to notice in 1974. Compared to subsequent scholarship's heightened interest in the subject of death in Larkin's work,<sup>164</sup> critics of *High Windows*, while indeed alive to the collection's innate 'central dread of satisfaction', were slow to pick up on the pervasive theme of death (Thurley 145). This is, perhaps, understandable considering that the poetic climate of the '60s and '70s was characterised as a time in which, as Terrance Whalen states, 'death by suicide [had] become a common way to crown a poet's career' (45). For this reason, at least, Larkin's existential bleakness must no doubt have paled alongside the

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<sup>163</sup> Andrew Swarbrick develops this notion by identifying two competing personae in Larkin's idiom: the aesthete (who, broadly, incorporated the 'lyrical moments' of Yeats and Hardy); and the philistine (who was 'iconoclastic') (126). Swarbrick argues that *High Windows* is unique in that the collision between these two idiomatic trends is 'more explicit than any earlier collection' (143).

<sup>164</sup> I am thinking particularly of Eckhard Auberlen (1991), Theo Hobson (2006) and, most recently, Sudipta Narayan Das Mandal (2015).

dramatic treatments of death being expressed through the confessional *oeuvres* of Plath and Sexton (the latter whose death was announced the year *High Windows* was published). Indeed, one can observe in the reviews of *High Windows* an airbrushing of the theme of death, considering its overwhelming presence in poems such as 'Dublinesque', 'The Old Fools' and 'The Building'. Clive James remarks that 'while Larkin wrote poems about dying, the poems were themselves so vital' (Evans 34), while Anglo-Irish poet Richard Murphy asserted that, 'Though dying is its theme, ['The Building'] seems to me a triumph not only of technique, but of the art involved with living'.<sup>165</sup> Death, for these critics, seems to be the collateral damage for a poetic that is, at its heart, somehow more life-affirming than life-annihilating.<sup>166</sup> Subsequently criticism has, on the whole, redressed this point and forced the subject of death to assume a new prominence in Larkin scholarship such that now the poet 'seems destined to be enveloped by a dark, almost impervious morbidity in the minds of many readers' (Harte 353). Indeed, in the *Encyclopaedia of British Writers* (2010) George Stade and Karen Karbiener open their synopsis of Larkin's final collection by stating unequivocally that 'In *High Windows*, Larkin deals with loneliness and death, as well as how we ought to be alive' (285).

It is at this point that we begin to notice a certain similarity in Larkin's treatment of death and place. We may well ask why both tropes eluded, to a

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<sup>165</sup> 'The Art of Debunkery' *The New York Review of Books*.

<sup>166</sup> Booth famously reflects this opinion in his introduction of *Life, Art and Love*: 'No poet was less likely to contemplate suicide' (12).

large degree, to the critical culture of the early 1970s, despite having grown dramatically in stature since. One explanation might be that the critical distance afforded by the intervening years is vital to our understanding of Larkin's treatment of these themes and, in particular, the way in which they intersect. Much of this owes itself to the new wave of popularity Larkin's work enjoyed in the 1980s, and to new developments in the understanding of place and space which effectively, one might argue, had to "catch up" with Larkin's application of these things in *High Windows*. With this critical distance, we begin to see that Larkin drew up his own set of amorphous spaces from which to ruminate existentially upon the question of death. These places and spaces are sometimes physical but more often abstract, and slip between existing as the space *of contemplation* as well as the *resulting image* of the contemplative moment in space. Ironically, as Larkin aged, the style of his imagistic comprehension of death becomes less concrete, including instead more inchoate, notional and existential appropriations of death. In an unlikely reference back to the Yeatsian voice of *The North Ship*, these spaces of death-contemplation, reflection, or even death-drive euphoria, frequently possess distinctly elemental, earthy sets of images.<sup>167</sup> I argue that the sun, stars, moon, sky, land, etc., are symbols that often manifest themselves in response to Larkin's own desperation to create

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<sup>167</sup> Motion develops this thought by saying that 'High Windows' is essentially a 'dialectic' of Larkin's two periods of influence: the Yeats era (*The North Ship*) and the Hardy era (*The Less Deceived* and after). Motion argues that the poem 'is a kind of dialectic between the Hardy-esque mode . . . (the mode the Movement sought to make a virtue of) at the beginning of the poem and then something which is more akin to the Yeatsian symbolist mode at the end.' (from *The South Bank Show: Philip Larkin* 1982).

a metaphorical, and salving, afterlife for himself; an afterlife which, in many ways, is constructed from the lexical detritus of former collections and literary heritages.

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Before I address, arguably, Larkin's most foreboding poem 'The Building', I wish to divert our attention momentarily back to the 1940s, when Larkin's interest in death as a poetic subject first became apparent. The year saw the composition of a poem that would remain unpublished during the extent of the poet's life. 'Träumerei' is an arresting and deeply singular presentation of death, expressed entirely through the lens of spatial imprisonment. It represents a key milestone in the poet's symbolic development, and yet Larkin would smuggle the piece away in Workbook 1, letting it simmer for close-on 30 years. 'Träumerei', as its title suggests, is a dream and presents the narrator as part 'Of a silent crowd walking under a wall':

### **Träumerei**

In this dream that dogs me I am part  
 Of a silent crowd walking under a wall,  
 Leaving a football match, perhaps, or a pit,  
 All moving the same way. After a while  
 A second wall closes on our right,  
 Pressing us tighter. We are now shut in  
 Like pigs down a concrete passage. When I lift  
 My head, I see the walls have killed the sun,

And light is cold. Now a giant whitewashed D  
 Comes on the second wall, but much too high  
 For them to recognise: I await the E,  
 Watch it approach and pass. By now  
 We have ceased walking and travel  
 Like water through sewers, steeply, despite  
 The tread that goes on ringing like an anvil  
 Under the striding A. I crook  
 My arm to shield my face, for we must pass  
 Beneath the huge, decapitated cross,  
 White on the wall, the T, and I cannot halt  
 The tread, the beat of it, it is my own heart,  
 The walls of my room rise, it is still night,  
 I have woken again before the word is spelt.

(CP 12 )<sup>168</sup>

The poem flits between an eerie anticipation of a Beckett-like apocalypse, and the recollection of World War I trench warfare. It is interesting to note that, at the age of 24, Larkin's subconscious is already envisaging a life slipping gradually and irrevocably towards death. Much like the critical culture discussed above, the poem seems acutely aware of its dependency upon the elapsing of time required to supply its own conclusion. Larkin's failure to

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<sup>168</sup> Original 1988 edition.

publish 'Träumerei' confirms this; it is both temporally and existentially incipient, and demands both the poet's accumulation of years to legitimise its status as a "mature" piece of writing, while requiring, too, at a symbolic level, definite answers to the unanswerable questions of the afterlife.

The poem concludes before the final whitewashed letter 'H' of 'death' takes its position, unequivocally and unnervingly transposing the existential conundrum onto the reader. In this sense, the poem is a type of logic puzzle: it requires the death of its narrator to reveal the placement of the final letter 'H'. However, death severs all communication with the lived world, implying that the answer – while potentially delivered in the existential realm of death – *cannot* be delivered to the existential realm of life. Consequently, the poem is a cunning reaffirmation of the intrinsic limitations of poetic symbol. Much like a Schrödingerian experiment, the narrator cannot exist in life and death at the same time, and the sheer insurmountability of this fact remains unimpeached, even by the most elaborately crafted symbolic conceit. The best Larkin can offer is the inference that the trench-like passage will continue to narrow with the 'H' heralding the death-moment.

It is perhaps the unexpected virtuosity of the poem's conceit that has led 'Träumerei', despite its lack of publication, to be the subject of sustained critical interest. Tijana Stojković questions whether death is an active or passive agent – whether it 'pushes and directs the crowd, or is just an "advertisement"' – and chooses to earmark 'Träumerei' as the first in a long line of Larkin poems which seek to vilify the role and function of advertisements in popular culture (180). Arnold, similarly, is also keen to flag

the poem as a developmental waypoint, claiming that it illustratively bookends Larkin's 'fear of death' – a period 'beginning with 'Träumerei' and ending with 'Aubade'. Both points, I think, are valid but largely overlook the deep singularity of the spatial and symbolic conceit. Stojković comes close with her observation of the 'symbolically rich "decapitated cross"', a key moment, and one in which Larkin discloses the glimmerings of a deep-seated anxiety centring around the repercussions of a Christian death, which would manifest itself variously in later collections (180).

The reference to the 'decapitated cross' betrays the quiet, quasi-Christian yearning for transcendence which seems to drive the poem towards its unrealisable conclusion. The cross is not sought by the trudging crowd; rather it is something which they 'must pass / Beneath'. It is 'White on the wall' and, like the poem itself, it is a truncated version of the very Christian icon it recalls. It is not the Latin crucifix, but is shaped like the letter 'T' and, as such, eschews the Christian liturgy for scientific precision of the Roman alphabet. The cross is, quite literally, described "to the letter" in a self-parodic attempt at undermining the orthodoxy of the Christian 'word' appearing on the wall. Consequently, the image, and iconography, of the redemptive Christ is amputated and, through such derision, is rendered as bleak and as godless as the enclosing 'concrete passage' in which the crowd are 'shut in / Like pigs'.

As with many moments in Larkin's early development, 'Träumerei' strikes the reader as an aborted style experiment. A moment of over-ambition, perhaps, in which the poet deliberately tested the parameters of

form. Crucially, however, Larkin acquires a key skill here: namely, the ability to use symbolism and time to hide death in plain sight of the reader; to conceal its presence within a moment of deliberate logical beguilement, and, most crucially, to achieve this by positioning death *within*, or *proximate to* a given space or logic experiment – in this instance, the walled passage. *High Windows* is equally preoccupied with encoding death into *topoi*; the *topoi* used, however, ascend from an ever-widening catalogue of everyday locations and institutions. Perhaps the most virtuoso enactment of this technique is demonstrated in the euphemistically entitled poem ‘The Building’. In many ways, ‘The Building’ is the “macro” iteration of Larkin’s technique of cossetting death in plain sight, in response to ‘Träumerei’s “micro” illustration of these concerns. In this sense, ‘The Building’ is a type of stylistic palinode – a poetic response to, and inversion of, a former poetic conceit. Less a focus on logical trickery, Larkin instead uses the visual conceit of a hospital building to *locate* his fears of death within each corridor, room and hallway, to advance an aspect of his own complicated, multifaceted fear of death. Much like ‘Träumerei’, ‘The Building’ presents a world of narrowing walls and humans shuttling haphazardly towards an unspoken oblivion. However, perhaps owing to his own illness (his first hospital visit – a foreboding false alarm – also falling within the compositional period<sup>169</sup>), Larkin realises that the evocation of thanatophobia need not

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<sup>169</sup> Burnett recalls Larkin writing to C. B. Cox, on 3 August 1972: “‘The Building’” was (as you might expect) “inspired” by a visit to the hospital here about a crick in the neck’. The bulk of compositional work on ‘The Building’ took place between 14.12.71 and 9.1.72. (*TCP* 458).

require the esoterically supernatural setting of 'Träumerei' in order to achieve its desired effect. On the contrary, experience has taught him that a hospital is an identikit of these very fears. A hospital, like the existential world of 'Träumerei' is a 'ground curiously neutral'; its confines and features are already reduced, sterile and blandified. Unlike 'Träumerei', however, the setting is immediately relatable and, in being so, is embroidered with aspects of banality that lend death a particular and unnerving sense of immediacy.

Nevertheless, I argue that Larkin never fully forgets the style experiment he undertook in 'Träumerei', since many of the investments and techniques played out therein seem to haunt 'The Building'. Particularly difficult for Larkin to eschew is the notion of the corridor space, and its function in compressing and 'channelling' individuals towards oblivion, along with his fondness for presenting the reader with a challenging thought experiment. Indeed, 'The Building' is so replete with labyrinthine corridors that Larkin's hospital resembles a world not too dissimilar to an Escherian nightmare in both the anxiety and futility of its enclosed, yet perpetually mobile, world. This Escherian influence, as we shall see, is not altogether oblique. During this time, Booth identifies in Larkin a sudden and marked interest in several other painters from the Low Countries, most notably Bruegel, Teniers and Bouver.<sup>170</sup> Curiously, however, I would suggest that

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<sup>170</sup> Understandably, Booth uses Larkin's interest in Flemish art during this period to talk about the self-evident Flemish references in 'The Card-Players' (the derided 'Jan van Hogspeuw' and 'Dirk Dogstoerd' being the lead personae in this poem). Larkin's interest in Flemish art is a new addition to scholarly conversations about Larkin, having not been covered in Motion's

there is another influence simultaneously at work in which Larkin potentially recalls many of the lexical techniques, metaphorical devices and tones more typical of 18<sup>th</sup> century place writing. The combination of both strategies yields a presentation of death that is uniquely impactful, both in its careful encodement of death-related anxieties into place but also in its awareness of, and interaction with, the largely Victorian idiom of Christianity upon which much of '60s and '70s Britain continued to depend. As such, there is a struggle of allegiances in 'The Building': the first is an emboldened, existential and truly visual depiction of place that has its roots in the 'Träumerei' thought experiment, and finds its contemporary touchstones in surrealist art. The second relates to a linguistic and stylistic appreciation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century country house poetic; recalled particularly through the way in which these poems carefully enumerate spatial *topoi*, while apostrophising to the reader with a heavy dependence on imperative verbs. I now propose we look closely at the 'The Building' to examine these features in action. The opening stanza is cited, in full, below:

Higher than the handsomest hotel  
 The lucent comb shows up for miles, but see,  
 All round it close-ribbed streets rise and fall  
 Like a great sigh out of the last century.  
 The porters are scruffy; what keep drawing up  
 At the entrance are not taxis; and in the hall

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*AWL*, nor by any other solo critical endeavour save J. Osborne's *Radical Larkin* (2016).

As well as creepers hangs a frightening smell.

(CP 136)

The stanza is heavily stocked with detail. The linguistic tone is lofty, and seems directly antithetical to the comparatively demotic opening of 'The Card Players' which precedes it in the collection, as well as 'Posterity' which follows. Carefully-wrought symbolic conceits pile up abundantly, demanding a heightened level of concentration from the reader. Despite this lexical richness, Larkin just manages to stave off a sense of verbosity by inserting, mid-way through the stanza, a refreshingly lucid, accessible Larkin-esque simile: 'Like a great sigh out of the last century'. The eye scans across this line easily, reorienting the reader (it being itself a type of 'sigh'), and affords a necessary break from the complicated wordplay and notional freight that precedes. Rather than seize the clarity of this mid-point in the stanza to introduce the poem's subject (the hospital), Larkin instead evokes it somewhat diffusely in the poem's opening line, choosing instead to gradually enumerate the hospital's defining features over the coming lines. The consonance in this opening line, 'higher than the handsomest hotel' provides a breathiness which slows the reading process down, while 'higher' and 'handsomest' confer an overwhelming sense of superlative, with the titular building seeming to 'exceed', in both size and grandeur, the buildings which surround it. Like the poem's euphemistic treatment of death in general, at no point is the word 'hospital' actually used; instead, the reader is effectively required to 'construct' the hospital themselves out of its constituent parts in

what becomes a kind of protracted objective correlative. Thus, by refusing to utter the dreaded word 'hospital' Larkin paradoxically makes his reader *more* aware of its forbidding presence – both physically and within the public's consciousness – than they would have been otherwise.

However, a closer examination of these lexical choices reveals, I would argue, the deepest and most singular side to the poem's surreptitious agenda: the syntax – and to a lesser degree the tone – of the poem are markedly old-fashioned. 'Lucent comb' is a compound epithet, and mimics the same adjectival doubling of Pope's 'carpet views' (meaning grasslands). By choosing to engage in such nominal obfuscation, Larkin gently primes his reader towards calibrating their reading approach to one that is not only acutely sensitive to the trickery of language, but also one that recalls, subconsciously, a bygone symbolic heritage. The moment one recognises the latter, the concordances that Larkin upholds to a Popean style become increasingly evident. In subsequent stanzas, Larkin's use of the directional imperative, 'but see', recalls Pope's similar imperative exhortation of the reader when 'guiding' them around Burlington's pleasure grounds ('See! sportive fate, to punish awkward pride, / Bids Bubo build, and sends him such a guide' [19-20]). Equally, while utilising the imperative voice, Larkin also mimics Pope's use of anaphora to re-deploy the same monosyllabic, emphatic appeal across several lines. Larkin states, 'For **see** how many floors it needs . . .', which is followed by '**See** the time' rhyming with '**see**, as they climb' (my emphasis; 24-28); while Pope states, '**Bid** harbours open . . . / **Bid** the temples, . . . / **Bid** the broad arch' (my emphasis; 197-199). Both

Pope and Larkin also appear keen to direct their reader's gaze up and down a vertical axis. Pope mitigates his reader's enthusiastic haste with 'But soft – by regular approach – not yet . . . And when up ten steep slopes you've dragg'd your thighs' (131) while Larkin, assuming the role of a pavement onlooker, guides his reader's eye-line up the side of the building with 'see . . . how tall / It's grown by now' (24-25).

The opening stanza of 'The Building' concludes with a rather virtuoso use of zeugma: yoking the nouns 'creepers' and 'frightening smell' around the single executorial verb 'hang'. The choice of the word 'creepers' is carefully considered, given its proximity to the maudlin adjective 'creepy'. Syntactically and tonally, death infuses the language, forcing nouns to part with their originally intended meaning. Yet, all the while, by refusing to utter the word 'death' the poem manages to maintain its grandiose commitment to euphemism. Notably, this particular deployment of zeugma – defined by Jacob Adler as 'incongruous' usage owing to the *discordant* manner in which the verb is shared across the two nouns<sup>171</sup> – is also recognisable in Pope's poetic style: the former's oft-quoted line from 'Rape of the Lock', 'Dost sometimes Counsel take—and sometimes Tea' is a typical example of incongruous zeugma; furthermore, it closely parallels Larkin's zeugma usage in 'The Building' not merely in its incongruent use of verb, but also in its appearance in the final line of the poem's opening stanza (8). The unnatural

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<sup>171</sup> Adler makes an important distinction between 'normal' zeugmatic usage, and this far more singular and *Popean* 'incongruous' zeugmatic usage. That Larkin employed the latter suggests his allegiance to 18<sup>th</sup> century writers, and Pope *in particular*, was not accidental.

undulation imbued in the ‘close-ribbed streets [that] **rise and fall**’ is another gesture to Pope, whose rippling landscape is hewn by the ‘genius of the place in all’ who ‘tells the waters or to **rise, or fall**’ (57-8). The emphasis on ‘rising’ and ‘falling’ overwrites Pope’s original association of the phrase with the *genius loci* and instead mimics the inhalation and exhalation of a hospital respirator. However, the ethos of the *genius loci* percolates through the phrase semantically with the suggestion that the streets *themselves* are ‘rising and falling’ in line with the ‘sigh[ing]’ breaths of the respirator.

As ‘The Building’ continues beyond its opening stanzas the clotted assortment of images starts to dispel. As a result, one feels that the poem’s style is beginning to slip free from its earlier Popean stranglehold. The resonances of an inherited 18<sup>th</sup> century style never fully dissolve; however, the anaphoric repetition of the word ‘see’ in the fourth stanza once again portrays the narrator as a patronised, diligent supervisor of the reader’s gaze. Booth, too, notices the ‘abrupt elevation of tone to a “poetic” register’ which continues to grip the verse as far in as lines 43-5. It is true that Larkin’s ‘O world, Your loves, your chances, are beyond the stretch / Of any hand from here!’ catches a ‘faint echo’ of Shelley’s ‘O world! O life! O time! / On whose last steps I climb’ (*TPP* 189). However, I am reluctant to agree with Booth that such moments of apostrophe constitute a refusal ‘to keep the building ordinary’. Indeed, the anachronism of the rhetoric is, I think, merely a vehicle for Larkin to present an environment that is almost *too* ‘ordinary’ for comfort; indeed, if anything, the sporadic elevation of language lends a momentary, and somewhat offbeat, sense of decorum to a location whose very existence

in the public consciousness is voiced with linguistic evasiveness and euphemism. Booth is broadly convincing, however, when comparing the poem's structural and lexical features to Gray's 'Elegy'. Both Larkin and Gray, states Booth, rely heavily on 'archaic Latinisms' to elevate the tone (190); however, the resulting auxesis of language is only achieved, I argue, on account of its careful juxtaposition with the symbolic inadequacy of offering hospital 'flowers'. The latter constitutes the thoughtless re-enactment of a specious ritual whose very emphasis on colour, life and beauty is undermined by the harsh, judicious-sounding language in 'contravenes' and 'propitiatory'. However, it is Booth's brief mention of the poem's 'faintly Dantesque vision' that I believe is most strikingly original (190). Significantly, as I shall demonstrate, Larkin's recollection of the wretched crowds of Dante's *Purgatorio* demarcates a change in the poem's stylistic commitment: away from one which is preoccupied with lexical and grammatical trickery, to one that emphasises, and meditates profoundly upon, the power of the *visual conceit* in creating meaning. Recalling the spatial features and logical conundrum of 'Träumerei', this part of the poem undergoes an important shift in stylistic commitment away from one whose tropic and linguistic derivations exist principally in pre-19<sup>th</sup> century place poetry (among other forms), to one that manifests itself *visually*, with a sharp focus on modern features of existential space-making in surrealist art.

Little scholarly work has been undertaken regarding Larkin's interest in art.<sup>172</sup> Aside from Booth's aforementioned critique of 'The Card-Players' with reference to the Dutch painters Teniers and Brouwer (an approach taken by M. W. Rowe three years earlier<sup>173</sup>) a study of Larkin's artistic inspiration (from either painting or drawing) is all but non-existent. Simon Petch comes close in his monograph *The Art of Philip Larkin* (1982), but his attempt is jeopardised by what Barbara Everett rightly determined to be a 'frankly aggressive' approach to the poems of *High Windows*, which coincides with Petch 'fall[ing] below the high level of intellectual efficiency maintained elsewhere in the book'.<sup>174</sup> The critical oversight is surprising, especially when one considers scholarship's relative receptiveness towards analysing Larkin through the lens of surrealism. Sam Perry lucidly attacks Larkin's work from a surrealist perspective in "'Only in Dreams": Philip Larkin and Surrealism' (2010) by offering the reader an essay that is as broad in scope as it is convincing and timely. Other critical observations of surrealism have been more piecemeal. Booth, for instance, observes the 'surreal personifications' in *High Windows* or the 'surreal image of sundials' in the poet's unpublished work (*TPP* 165, 108). More prescient, perhaps, is Stojković's cogent recognition of the 'highly suggestive and surreal' components to 'Träumerei' whose composition in 1946, as we have seen,

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<sup>172</sup> Larkin's quiet but pervasive interest in art is reflected in several letters to James Sutton which Brennan covers comprehensively in *The Philip Larkin I Knew*. Brennan states at one point that, 'Larkin had visited a major Van Gogh exhibition in London which made a deep impression on him.

<sup>173</sup> *Philip Larkin: Art and Self: Five Studies*

<sup>174</sup> Barbara Everett, 'Larkin and Us'.

hints at the desire for a geometric, spatial treatment of death that never fully disappears from Larkin's subconscious in the years leading up to 'The Building'. Both the determined efforts of Perry, and the relatively minor scattered references to the surreal found elsewhere, suggest a critical disinterest. Indeed, while Perry edges close to treating surrealism as a gateway to critiquing artwork, he stops short via the implication that the term stands for little more than a broad, interdisciplinary, modernist (and intellectual) concept. Its specificity is reduced, in fact, to the vague inchoate musings of early surrealist critics for whom surrealism meant "a state of soul" or mode of sensibility rather than merely an aesthetic practice' (102). Such despecification of terminology renders difficult any attempt to address actual allusions to surrealist art in Larkin's work: the very breadth of scope contained in any one contemporary glossing of the term 'surrealism' struggles to advance beyond the treatment of fine art alone. I argue that, despite Perry's long and engaging discourse on Larkin's surrealist debt, an awareness of 'Träumerei' while reading 'The Building' is most helpful in securing an access point to Larkin's treatment of surrealism and art. With Stojković's work in mind, I therefore wish to advance Booth's insight concerning Larkin's debt to the Flemish painters Teniers and Brouwer (*LAL* 360-2) to include Escher whose own brand of spatial surrealism has hitherto only been afforded a fleeting investigation by Larkin scholars.

The relationship between Escherian models of space and post-Euclidean architecture are well documented.<sup>175</sup> While Escher's use of hyperbolic geometries are well suited to the scholarly fields of mathematics, they also intersect with more philosophical notions pertaining to the depiction, and classification, of space. In Escher's famous lithograph *Relativity* (1953), faceless inhabitants move around an enclosed world, centring around three gravity wells. The image challenges its viewer principally through its ostensible dissolution of the laws governing perspective and logic: each gravity well depicts its own architecture and a set of individuals traversing it, in a manner that *appears* to make sense. The illogicality of Escher's image arrives with the problem of seeing all three gravity wells, with their constituent sets of perspective, and mathematical logicalities, *simultaneously*. Furthermore, in addition to this discordance, and often omitted along with prevailing mathematical or artistic critical readings of the lithograph, are the philosophical and existential obfuscations that arise from the lithograph's unique *mise-en-scène*. In the latter stanzas of 'The Building' Larkin, much like Escher, attempts in his own medium 'to create the appearance of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface' (Biderman & Devlin 7). Moreover, similar to 'The Building's coy avoidance of

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<sup>175</sup> Douglas Durham notes that 'Escher was the first artist to create patterns from the hyperbolic plane [and] used both the Poincaré disk model and the Poincaré half-plane model of hyperbolic geometry (1). Lundsgaard Hansen confirms this thought, stating that 'French mathematician Henri Poincaré . . . described a particularly well-known model of non-Euclidian geometry . . . used by the Dutch artist M. C. Escher in a series of pictures' (75). Eric W. Weisstein writes a particularly fascinating article, complete with illustrations, to show how Poincaré's 'hyperbolic tessellation [is] similar to M. C. Escher's *Circle Limit IV (Heaven and Hell)*.'

the word 'death' and its symbolic manifestation in the 'proprietary flowers', the hospital-universe mirrors that of Escher's *Relativity* through the inhabitants' stalwart commitment to *self-deception*. As Shai Biderman and William Devlin state in a reading of David Lynch's work, 'The characters within the narrative do not see any humour or irony in their beliefs or actions, just as the man walking up the stairs to nowhere in Escher's work (*Relativity*) doesn't realise his world is visually illogical' (7).<sup>176</sup> Therefore, one might argue that intellectual correspondence to Escher's work in 'The Building' is two-fold. The first relates to the artist's unorthodox drawing of space, that proliferates gravitational centres to create a false sense of enclosure or entrapment; the second pertains to the characters *within* this universe who remain ostensibly unaware of the symbolic and physical unreality of the world they inhabit. Such obliviousness is depicted through the characters' nonchalant progression up and down the stairs, but also in their blank orb-like faces that suggest an expungement of all character and feeling. By depicting multiple states of gravity, *Relativity* denies the viewer the certainty of "top" and "bottom", and with these – one could add – their spiritually symbolic counterparts in "heaven" and "hell" / "good" and "evil", etc. In turn, the occupants of the world are seemingly unaware of this new, unsettling

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<sup>176</sup> Ironically, while Booth's considerably more developed reading into Larkin's debt to fine art takes place in *LAL* (2014), a brief moment in *TPP* (2005) recalls a similar intersection of space, irony and surrealist art. Booth compares 'Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel' to 'an interior in a Magritte painting [where] the apparently banal and ordinary effervesces [are depicted] with portentous absurdist humour' (165). Booth quickly backs away, and ends on a safer literary comparison between Larkin and the "literary cubism" of writer Alain Robbe-Grillet.

worldview owing (apparently) to an enforced, or otherwise restricted, diminution of *character*.

The fourth and fifth stanzas of the poem arguably display these notions most vividly. In them, Larkin opens by depicting the hospital as the arena of religio-punitive correction – an effect Booth evidently endorses in his comparison of hospital rooms to ‘oubliettes’ in a dungeon prison (*TPP* 165). This notion, however, is quickly and radically overwritten by a new imagining of the building as a containment centre – a concentration camp-like flow of people to an unknowable death – with its ever-moving populous, each going about important, though crucially *unknowable* business. Parallel to this, the opening suggestion of purgatorial evaluation dissolves with the subtle recollection of the Catholic confessional box, giving way to a strictly *irreligious* null-space, whose rooms seem to spread out infinitely into oblivion. During the course of this shift, the geometric drawing of the hospital alters as well, with our observation of the hospital’s rooms being directed (by a persistently imperative narrator) along the ‘x’ and ‘z’ axis of ‘left, right, forward and back’, rather than the ‘y’ axis of ‘up and down’, together with its implied ontological correlatives of heaven and hell:

The end of choice, the last of hope; and all

Here to confess that something has gone wrong.

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; see, as they climb

To their appointed levels, how their eyes  
Go to each other, guessing; on the way  
Someone's wheeled past, in washed-to-rags ward clothes:  
They see him, too. 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; and who knows  
Which he will see, and when? 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. Then, past the gate,  
Traffic; a locked church; short terraced streets  
Where kids chalk games, and girls with hair-dos fetch  
  
Their separates from the cleaners.

(CP 136-7)

On one level, Larkin's hospital scene is vivid, accessible and unpretentious in its choice of language and image. Here is a working hospital, like many others on a particular day in 1970s England. It is replete with emblems that communicate the frustrations of a perpetually underfunded National Health Service: the 'washed-to-rags ward clothes' are pathetic and colourless; the 'Red brick [and] lagged pipes' are indicative of a woefully outdated Victorian sensibility and architecture. Both of these things remain curiously unresponsive to the 'money [that] goes / In trying to correct it.' On top of this, a side of the human condition is presented that is quintessentially "English" in character; in that, the scene flickers with introversion and pent-up anxiety: 'eyes / Go to each other, guessing', an observation that is accompanied by a forbidding sense of Catholic correctitude ('It must be an error of a serious sort'); both moments suggest a reversion *en masse* to the common English values and stock responses occasioned in a time of crisis. Self-containment and self-doubt pervade to such an extent that one naturally finds cause to question whether Larkin covertly projects his own anxieties into the crowd so as to assuage the inevitable alienation that stems from a harrowing *personal* experience. Either way, Larkin's depiction of a community, paradoxically united in its bewilderment and unspoken suffering, is noteworthy. While not strictly uncommon for Larkin, it is a departure from his usual route to relatability through the unmistakably solipsistic experience of the poet-narrator. The crowd's experience is nothing if not communal, and relatability seems to emerge from an egalitarian exemplification of the "collective", rather than from a single individual's experience. Space, too, seems to be encoded

with a democratic sense of orderliness: people ‘climb / To their *appointed* levels’ (emphasis mine), while the anaphora of ‘room’ in the line ‘rooms, and rooms past those, / And more rooms yet’ sharply institutionalises the word ‘room’ evoking endless, nondescript prison cells, together with the tacit suggestion of stacking or stockpiling. Indeed, this sense of stockpiling has queasy undertones, as Booth wryly notes, remarking that ‘a coffin is, by tradition, the narrowest of rooms’ (152). Invariably, one questions whether the far off rooms – the ‘hardest to return from’ – are the morgues. Spatially, Larkin forces the rooms to adopt an unrealistic, purely emotive sense of linearity in their arrangement, their individual statuses defined as a distance away from the implied ‘nucleus’ of the hospital. Death can happen anywhere, can result from any condition, and on any ward, and yet the Chinese Box style ‘telescoping’ of rooms, each getting further away and ostensibly “closer” to the finality of death, is almost a spatial iteration of the teleological fallacy. Geometry, here, engages purely for aesthetic affect.<sup>177</sup>

Throughout the poem, the democratising treatment of the hospital’s spatial construction, its tone and erasure of individuality, suggests the presence of an all-seeing power. Simultaneously, in seeking this power, the reader emerges somewhat at a loss; a conclusion seemingly upheld by Larkin himself for whom – perhaps deliberately – the question is treated with

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<sup>177</sup> Larkin was akin to recognizing art that had an eye for aesthetic vision which deliberately obfuscated structural or spatial logic. In an excited letter to Sutton, Larkin noted that: ‘Certain [aspects] of the landscapes, *View of Arles* for instance, seemed to tremble with packed life: the structure of them seemed entirely organized by the intensity of his vision rather than any mental plan.’ (24.ii.48).

evasion and ambivalence. While the extract opens with a gesture towards the idiom of Christian redemption (the inpatients 'are all / Here to *confess* that something has gone wrong'), the omnipotent presence under which the inpatients suffer quickly becomes recast as someone, or something, that is far less benign (22; emphasis mine). The omnipotence of this power emerges halfway through the fifth stanza, through the pronoun 'they'. This pronoun's use, together with its arrival among the already Orwellian undertones and repetition, replaces the image of a merciful Christian God with that of a malevolent policing which is collective, constantly watching and judging. Additionally, it recalls the equally faceless 'they' spoken by the narrator of 'Träumerei' who trudges down an ever-narrowing channel, presumably overseen by some unknown, malevolent power. As in 'Träumerei', the subjects to which 'they' refers are never explicitly rendered: instead, the syntactical distance between 'they' and the former mention of waiting room visitors is left sufficiently wide so as to mire the characterisation of 'they' with a degree of ominousness and doubt. This ominousness is compounded by the pronoun's appearance within the two shortest (and possibly eeriest) sentences in the poem: 'They see him, too. They're quiet' (32). Both sentences appear in the centre-most line of the centre-most stanza in the poem. Aside from constituting a technical mastery of tone and symmetry, this dead-centre positioning of these short sentences serves to hold off the reader's inevitable existential contemplation until such time as they have become deeply imprisoned by the building themselves. Once reached, the uneasiness that permeates the fifth stanza – with its stricken

populous, 'held in common', and ever-watched in a never-ending stack of rooms – gently recalls the wretched inmates and punitive tactics of Foucault's panopticon. Such a reference chimes oddly with Larkin's established political allegiances, both in real life and in his art. Rather than wage a sharp indictment against the commune-like structure of this hospital and its organisation of inpatients and outpatients, Larkin instead implies a quiet vindication of the set-up by manipulating it in way that enables him to blazon his message about the human condition at large. Paradoxically, the proletariat-like inhabitants become the mouthpiece of Larkin's own edict; one that, while not necessarily espousing left-wing ideology, is happy to exploit its structures and forms for poetic ends. As such, they represent Larkin's own 'struggle to transcend / The thought of dying'; the intellectual equivalent of the very 'propitiatory flowers' with which he chooses to close the poem.

It is at this point that one begins to recognise the parallels between Larkin's use of space, politicisation and geometry and those of Escher in an image such as *Relativity*. Indeed, the comparison offers currency when addressing the two works along political but, more crucially, along spatial and philosophical lines also. Not unlike the hospital's population who reach, along with the narrator, an epistemological impasse when attempting to confront death, *Relativity*, similar to *Träumerei*, constitutes a thwarted attempt to transcend. Parallel with the unknowability of the very buildings they inhabit, so the characters of both 'buildings' are forced to exist within a notional (and logical) cyclicity. In craving ontological elucidation in their interminable quest 'upstairs', *Relativity*'s faceless inhabitants are tormented by the

pernicious configuration of *space itself*. As in *Träumerei*, space becomes both the ostensible access route to enlightenment, and the very means by which such enlightenment can never be attained. Similarly, in 'The Building' an attempt to understand the predicament of death through linear-thinking, or transcendence, is invariably doomed. This very 'struggle to transcend / The thought of dying' is encoded into space as well. Corresponding with Escher's building, the rooms of the hospital appear to go on infinitely, are drawn with a telescopic sense of diminishment, and are as impersonal as the patients seen to move between them. However, to track the spatial coordinates of these philo-spatial "leads" in both buildings is futile, and prompts the seeking mind to fold back to its starting point having achieved little more than renewed frustration. Similar irregularities of logical continuance portray themselves at the level of narrative understanding too: in the same way the everlasting stairs of *Relativity* pose a logical conundrum for the eye, so does Larkin's enumeration of objects which the narrator attempts to direct the reader's 'gaze' towards, all in the same moment. In stanza four alone, the imperative narrator asks us to 'see' three separate things, in three different locations, *simultaneously*: 'see how many floors it needs' / 'See the time' / 'see, as they climb / To their appointed levels. . .' The latter two examples are housed within the same sentence to entrench, yet further, a sense of simultaneity. Beyond the perimeters of Escher's building, the observer can see two sets of couples outside: one pair seemingly hand in hand, the other pair dining *alfresco*. This is in juxtaposition to the individuals housed within the interior purgatory who do not appear to intercommunicate, and who are

denied the physical and spiritual freedoms of sexual companionship. Equally, beyond Larkin's hospital, characters exist predominantly in groups ('kids', 'girls with hair-dos'). Each individual group, as described through Larkin's emphatic caesura, is 'free', and engages in seemingly frivolous or recreational activities compared to their compeers inside, who remain stuck in a logic-defying cyclicity of both space and ontology; while the 'locked church' outside sharply underscores the redundancy of religion in this exterior setting of carefreeness.

In the final stanza, couched among a continuation of descriptive freight, one can discern an admission from Larkin, whose own complex paradigm of space, art and logic, reaches its own breaking point. Contentment, the narrator implies, is a mixture of 'conceits / And self-protecting ignorance . . . collapsing only when / Called to these corridors'. The choice of language in the verb 'collapse' is significant: it neatly connotes the disintegration of buildings, as well as ideas. Ultimately, Larkin's concluding message in 'The Building' seems to parallel Escher's in *Relativity*: namely, one must *choose* one system of understanding, and remain with it. Any attempt to direct multiple schemas of understanding to problems of ontology will invariably leave the viewer more bereft of meaning and certainty than when they started. Yet, equally, such problems of ontology will powerfully exhort one's intellect to engage multifariously and lastingly upon any given issue – an invocation which should be resisted. However, this simulacral, semi-conceived grasp on existence disintegrates when 'called to [the] corridors' of 'The Building'. In spite of oneself, the individual becomes

an unrestrainable questioner of existential matters and, in doing so, attempts to reconcile competing and irresolvable notions.

‘Träumerei’ and ‘The Building’ undoubtedly respond to each other. In them we see a complicated nexus of ideas drawn from separate literary periods. In both poems, rather than attempt to iterate his own uncertainties relating to death Larkin employs a surreal set of spaces and structures to do the speaking for him: replete with their own attendant symbolisms of politics, ontology and geometric illogicality. While a cunning idea, ‘The Building’ is far from clean-cut in its stylistic allegiances. On the contrary, it is imbued with the residue of earlier styles and aesthetics – specifically pre-20<sup>th</sup> century symbolic sympathies – as well as a more contemporary informant in Escher. Above all, however, it arises from a lifelong preoccupation with the *final moments* of death; it is a desperate attempt to locate and describe the moment of passing over. In this, it is aware of its own notional futility and appeals to space to articulate these frustrations.



## 6

**Staring Death in the Eye: Deictics, Spacing and Growing Old in *High Windows*****Requiem**

Under the wide and starry sky,  
Dig the grave and let me lie.  
Glad did I live and gladly die,  
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you 'grave for me:  
*Here he lies where he longed to be;*  
*Home is the sailor, home from sea,*  
*And the hunter home from the hill.*

(Stevenson 319)

The inspirational debt Larkin owed to the above elegy – from whose second stanza he pilfered the phrase 'This be the verse' to entitle his own, famed poem – is paradoxically both mystifying and brazenly self-evident. On the one hand, the poem is about death. A favourite topic for the gloomy poet, and one which famously impelled Eagleton to anathematise him as 'a death-

obsessed, emotionally-retarded misanthropist' (Eagleton qtd. in O'Driscoll 66). On the other hand, the poem is a conversation: the first quatrain ostensibly presenting a set of instructions to the second. The imperative command to 'Dig the grave' along with the statement 'And I laid me down with a will' has the ring of a bequeathal request; a communicative moment from beyond the grave that would seem to defy Wittgenstein's assertion that 'Death is . . . a "nonverbal" reality' (qtd. in *PLP* 44). The second quatrain assumes the voice of a will executor, with the phrase 'This be the verse' acting as a kind of deictic gesture towards the piece of reported speech that follows. The stanza break between the two quatrains, thus, might be read as the unbridgeable moment of death itself – 'the anaesthetic from which none come round' (*CP* 190). One can imagine Larkin become captivated by the poem. Everything from the occluded death-wish of its narrator, to the echoes of Yeats in both quatrains,<sup>178</sup> to the wryly comic solecism 'grave for me' would seem to chime with Larkin's own style and poetic sensibilities. Moreover, one can imagine the poet happily ruminating over the temporal and narrative illogicality of the piece; or, at the very least, its capacity to mimic his own paradoxical attempt to 'forget for a time about dying *per se* [by] focus[ing] instead on creating the act'; to, quite literally, write the fear away (qtd. in Booth 222<sup>179</sup>). After all, the poem offers a description of an indescribable event: the instruction by, and response to, a deceased

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<sup>178</sup> Requiem's parallels Yeats's 'The Fisherman' in its wistful remembrance of, and appeal to, a seafaring individual long since passed whose internment takes place on a windswept, hilly landscape.

<sup>179</sup> Cited in Booth's *New Larkins for Old: Critical Essays*.

individual prior to their interment. It imitates, as István Rácz asserts about Larkin in general, an ‘oxymoronic fusion of the possibility of speaking about death and the impossibility of speaking within death’ (*PLP* 44). Stevenson’s elegy, however, takes one final, bold step by framing the interlocution as a conversation *between* life and death. The poem’s cadence echoes that of Larkin’s early poem ‘The North Ship’ whose refrain ‘Over the sea, the lifting sea’ repeats five times with only minor modifications. This, in turn, closely mimics the metre, rhythm and tone of Stevenson’s ‘Under the wide and starry sea’.<sup>180</sup> A similar concordance with *The North Ship* might be discerned through the poem’s simultaneous preoccupation with both the cosmic features of the ‘starry sky’, alongside more earthy concepts, such as grave-digging, interment and the channelling of genealogy through soil. All these elements could well serve to explain why Larkin might be attracted to the poem, and impelled to use it as a stylistic departure point.

But in another sense, Larkin’s appeal to the elegy is deeply cryptic. Why Stevenson? And why a piece that so dramatically recalls the Yeatsian mode of incantation and mythopoeia that the poet was so desperately trying to distance himself from during the 1960s? Even if we put the matter of poetic investment aside for a minute, why purloin a line from a maudlin quatrain to entitle a poem that is, in its repeated use of expletives and

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<sup>180</sup> ‘The North Ship’ is also, in itself, an extended metaphor for death, according to Kadhim Jawad Kadhim. In it, Larkin recalls the ‘legend of three ships, one of which never returns to shore’. Each ship represents ‘everyman’s journey to the land of death’ (137), while, conversely, the poet appeals to ‘the sea and ships as metaphors of life’ (136).

aphorisms, one of Larkin's most lively, boisterous and facetious? One answer might well relate to the phrase's dogged, imperative tone. Indeed, when reading the poems of *High Windows* in sequence, the title 'This Be The Verse' is arresting, and somewhat disarms the reader with its powerful sense of didactic intransigence. As such, the poem arrives *in medias res* with an oblique, impulsive tone. The poem's deployment of an expletive in the very first line, combined with the disarming simplicity of its AB/AB rhyme scheme and apparent prioritisation of aphorism over image, sets it apart from many of the other poems in the collection. Another possibility might be far broader, and arrive in the form of Larkin's own admission to Betjeman in 1964, that 'Everything I write, I think, has the consciousness of approaching death in the background' (*TPP* 172). If Larkin's claim is to be believed, then the veiled presence of Stevenson behind 'This Be The Verse' is truly among one of the most artful moments of intertextual concealment in the Larkin canon. True to his word, almost to the letter, Larkin hides 'death in the background', in plain sight of the reader – a concealment which, as I discussed in chapter five, is arguably reflected throughout much of *High Windows* at large. With its presence encapsulated deep within the fabric of the poem's context, this message of death is too discrete to encumber the poem's lively tone. And yet, albeit with a slight impishness, the poet's own stylistic edict is vindicated – its very title was lifted from a poem about entombment. A third possibility might include parts of both the above scenarios and argue that, in the disguised appeal to Stevenson, Larkin applies this mode of Chinese Box-style conceptual sequestration in order to demonstrate how we ourselves

often attempt to hide behind certain concepts for reasons of self-preservation. As such, the poem with its odd arrival in the collection and its oblique title, may well constitute a mimetic attempt by Larkin to query how one *looks at* death. The poem, thus, is an intricate system of euphemism and circumlocution, which holds death at a distance while surreptitiously orienting its central message around the very subject it has so carefully concealed.

Lingering on this scenario for a moment, it is interesting to note that *High Windows* at large enacted, in many ways, a similar attempt at thematic concealment. As I discussed in chapter five, one does not have to look far to realise that criticism struggled to recognise, categorise and explain the nature and treatment of the collection's presentation of death. Thus, with the critical distance afforded to us, one notices that, in addition to his conspicuous proclivity towards death as a poetic subject, Larkin was not unfamiliar with the process of *containing* or *concealing* death within poems. Describing death, as Garrett Stewart suggests is, in many ways, the ultimate challenge for form: being an event we can neither conceive nor visualise, the poet must compensate for death's imponderable nullity by evoking it with the fullest gamut of formal, stylistic or conceptual mechanisms; mechanisms which, at the very same moment, threaten to sclerotise in the face of the sheer unimaginableness of the event they are recruited to describe. Just as 'death often invites and defies imagination at once', so place, too, as a constituent of both form and the imagination, must grapple with having its stylistic properties both demanded and rejected at the same moment

(Stewart 3). Larkin was deeply aware of this issue, and commented how his own 'mind blanks at the glare' of death in 'Aubade'.

In this chapter, we will address 'The Old Fools', 'Sympathy in White Major' and 'Aubade', and attempt to explore the ways in which Larkin overcomes such stylistic problems when he is himself staring death in the eye. The answers, naturally, will be various, though nevertheless can be grouped around a handful of key notions. Firstly, in responding to the logical difficulties involved in using place to evoke death, Larkin frequently appeals to its complimentary antonym: time. Often using it as a unit by which space can be measured. Unable to employ time in the manner common to his earlier poems, where 'time is usually transformed into space; the central metonymy for [which] is the train journey', the concept of time instead becomes an indirect means of drawing *space* (*PLP* 120). Space, therefore, becomes better described as *spacing* – a measure of distance across time – which itself becomes synonymous with the drawing of certain locations and settings. Alongside this, one discerns a rise in deictic language, as the narrator attempts to draw the reader's eye into the "mapping out" of an object in conceptual space – a process which often bears resemblance to mathematical triangulation. Opposite to (and often concurrent with) the technique of composing space through time and distance, Larkin becomes equally interested in the symbolic opportunities arising from unspecific geographical features and locations, such as bedrooms, old people's homes and mountains. Finally, the abstraction of many of these *topoi* is vivified with a marked interest in light and lighting which, in turn, is symbolically

communicative of Larkin's own struggles with the earlier, religious inclinations displayed in his poem 'Compline' – a poem that was never published during the poet's lifetime. As such, 'Aubade', I shall argue, is a palinode – a poem which vehemently retracts the religious sympathies of 'Compline', overlaying these with a staunch atheism. Through the motif of light, however, one notices that 'Aubade' retains the residue of the poet's earlier flirtation with religious belief and, in particular, the principles of Pascal's Wager. In conclusion, we shall observe that, while place serves some function in evoking death, its tendency to buckle when compelled to communicate death's mysteries *itself* becomes a form of aesthetic communication for Larkin. The resulting transmutation of place into the neighbouring concepts of space, distancing, light, and geometry delivers a certain symbolic value in their own right; value which – when seen in relation to Larkin's palinode – offers the added bonus of revealing the poet's own, surprisingly complicated and conflicted, religious affiliations.

'The Old Fools' is one of Larkin's most uncomfortable and visceral poems. In it, the narrator vilifies unflinchingly the behavioural traits and appearance of the elderly. While recoiling at the descriptions of such personae, the reader is made powerfully aware of the callous, denunciative nature of the narrator's attack on the old, which strikes as deeply cruel yet regrettably truthful. Chatterjee is correct to assert that the poem immediately distances itself from the 'abstractions or generalisations' of death typical of Larkin's earlier work; indeed, Larkin presents 'death with a disturbing intensity and urgent directness' (274). However, as early as its incendiary

opening sentence, the poem rapidly develops its argument as one which is as acutely interested with attitudinal approaches towards death as it is with honest, unsanitised depictions of death in general. Such an opening line smacks as a deliberate, polemic manoeuvre – a desire, perhaps, to antagonise and ensnare fringe readerships swept up in the poet's recent rise to fame, who remain both unaccustomed to Larkin's indignant attitudes towards political correctness, and therefore susceptible to his wry proselytisation. The rhetorical opening sentence gives way to a second, whose expletive-heavy language forces the narrator's insistent stance, somewhat redemptively, into the realm of irony:

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?

(CP 131)

Despite the mildly redemptive application of irony delivered through the 'pissing yourself' line, Larkin's *modus operandi* for this manoeuvre does not appear to centre on protecting the narrator's moral integrity. Instead, the irony itself becomes a platform upon which the narrator further unleashes an acerbity of his tone which threatens to undermine (initially, at least) the likeability of Larkin-the-man. And yet this irony is disturbing on another level, too: why, one might ask, is the narrator indignantly questioning the thought

process of individuals whose cognitive reasoning is self-evidently impaired? While one answer to this question may well point to gratuitous or ghoulish intent on the part of the narrator (which, admittedly, would not seem out of place for Larkin), there is another more ingenious scenario: namely, that by adopting the cantankerous tone of illogical questioning, Larkin himself is casting himself as a titular 'Old Fool'. If Larkin is indeed drawing some of the fools' amnesic traits into his own narrator, one might argue further that the rhyming and phonetic sound of these opening lines supplements such a commitment. The opening five words are monosyllabic which supplies a staccato-like quality to the first line. Simultaneously, iambic stress is placed at regular intervals ('**What** do they **think** has **happened** . . .'), until the line-end phrase 'old fools', which is a spondee. The spondee supplies a deliberate moment of pace abatement in amongst the regular metre and sharp word sounds, thereby forcing attention to linger around the titular phrase 'old fools' itself, before resuming the monosyllabic urgency in the successive line 'to make them like this?' This sense of stretch and compression continues throughout the opening stanza, with another notable instance of syllabic elongation falling around the line 'thin, continuous dreaming', whose long vowel sounds are evocative of the same state of vacant, absent-minded day-dreaming that they describe. At this point, the absurdity of the narrator's questioning reaches its zenith, with his fetishised mesmerisation with the unsightly character traits of the elderly giving way to an incredulity upheld towards their inability to shift time.

With the narrative persona established, Larkin further confounds his reader by injecting an ambivalence into questions of time and place. This is accompanied by a reversal in the nature of the narrator's interrogative regimen: from one that seems to perpetually question *self-evident* content in the first stanza, to one which, paradoxically, seems unjustifiably certain of deeply *baffling* content in the second stanza. Heraldng this change, stanza two opens with a disarmingly conclusive statement on the spatial nature of the afterlife. It is a statement whose very unlikelihood is matched, in inverse correlation, by the bumptious assuredness of the narrator conveying it:

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,  
 And was all the time merging with a unique endeavour  
 To bring to bloom the million-petalled flower  
 Of being here. Next time you can't pretend  
 There'll be anything else.

That both Larkin-the-man, and his narrator, cannot know the experiences of the afterlife is obvious. Consequently, the left-field portrayal of fission-like atomic fragmentation quietly indicates a rather flight of fancy-style agenda on the part of the narrator. Significantly, the parameters of place are encoded both visually, but also grammatically. On the one hand, death is an astronomical process; its appearance, in the macrocosm, resembles that of a supernova. Larkin's example here is uncharacteristically abstruse and

awkward; it appears to be as much an evocation of death as it does a mimetic attempt to express the very *difficulties* of evoking death symbolically or stylistically. Its very presentation seems desperate, even forced, with the narrator's imperative, professorial voice striking a suspiciously quack-like tone given the barrage of rhetorical questions that have immediately preceded in the first stanza. However, as our trust, confidence and fondness for the narrator continues to dwindle, our comprehension of the cosmic metaphor that he is mobilising gradually strengthens. On one level, at least, the image of a supernovae is effective: it conveys both the incomprehensibility and magnitude of death as an event while, at the same time, rooting itself cautiously on the conceptual plane of inchoate visualisation. A supernova, like a distant planet or an unvisited corner of the globe, exists in our mind as an amalgamation of NASA photographs, stories, literature and plain imaginative fabrication. Given this, it possesses an intrinsic resistance to empirical verification and debunking, cannot be easily destabilised, and thus offers a reasonably steady, unassailable platform upon which to imagine death. Ironically, it is – in this sense at least – similar to the Yeatsian 'myth-kitty' which Larkin had come to abhor (*RW* 115): the image of the supernova is, after all, partly plucked out of the reader's own pre-existing image repository – a repository whose images have accrued as a result of the reader's own personal cultural, social or artistic conditioning.

Importantly, this phenomenological rendering of death as "atomic fragmentation" delivers an extra horror. Death is a *process* – a progression from low to high entropy – whose status is effectively ascertained by

observing the change in *spacing* between particles. In this sense, the laws of physics are an exact equivalent to Larkin's credo on death *and* life: like the universe, both are infinitely less likely to exist in a state of order than they are disorder. Thus, in this sense at least, death for Larkin is much like life itself: not a single event, but an ongoing process of increasing separation and loneliness, bereft of any sense of *real* closure. Simon Petch reads Larkin's portrayal of fragmentation as the symbolic touchstone to the poem's underlying theme: namely the fragmentation of thoughts, or memories, in the elderly. Petch argues that 'The Old Fools' 'leaves us with the impression of the self as a series of spots of time that get harder to integrate as life develops' (95). Thus, as time progresses, much like the atomising star, the distance between the measurable entities (or memories) stretches out. One becomes the titular "old fool" when one no longer has cognisance of that quiet force *that holds memories together* – an attraction tantamount to atomic gravity. The space between them is no longer measurable, and so the very concept of "distance" – a measurable space between two points – collapses. It is replaced with something that is exclusively *unmeasurable* – a void. And while forgetfulness in the elderly is not characterised by a complete void, the voiding procedure is well underway: the 'lighted rooms / Inside your head, and people in them, acting' are, fundamentally, not coherently linked together over time, forcing life into a mere 'plethora of moments' (Rácz 120). Consequently, these 'lighted rooms' cannot exist as the settings for any "real" actions, but are simply stages for actors. Like an existential play where the generation of lucid meaning is hindered, either partly or wholly, by the

“disconnect” with past and future,<sup>181</sup> the thoughts of the elderly present as small, scenic absurdities. The antithesis to this scenario, according to Larkin, is the ‘million-petalled flower / Of being here’ – an explosion of the courtly, literary motif – and an almost self-aware manifestation of impossible, transient perfection. Petals radiate from a centre point, or nucleus, and their beauty arises – at least in part – from this careful governing spatial order. Furthermore, the flower’s metaphoric tie with the phrase ‘Of being here’ is a complicated one: like the flower, the concept of ‘being here’ might initially seem irresponsible to dialectical investments with the past and future. However, just as each petal on the million-petalled flower is on a continual growth trajectory away from a nucleus, so the present, too, can never be truly disassociated from the past and future; it merely gives the *impression* that it is, and rather like death, it is underpinned by an invisible set of distances drawn across time and space.

The juncture of stanzas three and four sees a shift in Larkin’s means of portraying distancing and spacing. Rather than evoking distance through physical and cosmic processes, Larkin instead takes a bold, disarming approach by appealing to the intrinsic directional “spacing” that is yielded through grammatical deixis. Obscuring or omitting the spatial and temporal deixis of a pronoun, or stripping it of its deictic centre entirely, is an established ploy of Larkin’s: one need only look at the titles of poems such as

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<sup>181</sup> Responding to Husserl’s edict for temporal awareness, Dreyfus & Wrathall eds. pithily encapsulate this notion in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, stating that, ‘The now is not sealed up within itself: it is a dynamic relation to the past and to what is to come’ (128).

'Here', 'Now', 'Coming' and 'Going' to see that the poet uses deictic words to coax the reader in the direction of the poem, by promising the continuance of the journey *within* the poem. The word 'going', for instance, owing to its deictic status, demands additional information – either temporal, spatial, or grammatical – in order to make full semantic sense.<sup>182</sup> Consequently, the word 'going' in isolation only delivers an inchoate idea of movement, invariably piquing intrigue and prompting questions such as 'from where? / to where? / by what means?'; information which, Larkin ensures, is cunningly withheld. As such, the word 'going' intrinsically gestures to a sense of distance by way of the gap that opens between its assumed *origo*, and its inevitable destination. The technique is a subtle one: much like the aforementioned evocation of distance in the cosmos, or the radiating configuration of petals on a flower, such distances are not described outright, but are *alluded to* by way of the grammatical vacuum that Larkin creates, whose affect is to "pull" the reader's attention in a certain direction. Between stanzas three and four, Larkin evokes this "gestural" evocation of space, or "movement by negation", through a heavy reliance on deictic pronouns.

However, unlike the poem 'Going', he does not deny denotational meaning by robbing pronouns of context in time or space. Instead, the closely followed combination of deictic pronouns 'here', 'now', 'there' 'here'

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<sup>182</sup> Albeit a study focussing on the work of a poet not herein discussed, Paul Kenneth Naylor cogently explores the function of the deictic pronouns in the poetry of George Oppen. Oppen's focus upon the intrinsic logical value of a preposition in creating meaning is, thusly, very similar to Larkin's. Like Larkin, 'Oppen emphasises prepositions and prepositional phrases to such a great extent that they *ultimately become demonstrations in themselves of many of the central concerns in his poetry*' (101; my emphasis).

gives the impression of a welter of movement – a desperate attempt, perhaps, by the forgetful individual to fix a time or a place to a memory to give it coherence:

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.

This is why they give

An air of baffled absence, trying to be **there**  
 Yet being **here**. For rooms grow **farther**, leaving  
 Incompetent cold, the constant wear and tear  
 Of taken breath, and them crouching **below**  
 Extinction's alp, the old fools, never perceiving  
 How near it is. This must be what keeps them quiet:  
 The peak that stays in view wherever we go  
 For them is rising ground. Can they never tell

What is dragging them back, and how it will end? Not at night?  
 Not when the strangers come? Never throughout  
 The whole hideous inverted childhood? Well,  
 We shall find out.

(CP 131-2; emphasis mine)

Despite the suggestion that the elderly live ‘where all happened once’, it is once again the “here and now” that seems to receive the brunt of Larkin’s questioning. The ‘doors and rooms, and rooms past those’ of ‘The Building’, is an eerie counterpart to the ‘lighted rooms’ mentioned above; and, while the former evokes the labyrinthine entrapment inflicted by hospitals, the ‘lighted rooms’ represent a similar entrapment, but of the mind and intellect. The phrase ‘known doors turning’ has the ring of solecism, since its grammatical subject ‘People you know’ is sequestered into a separate sense unit by the semicolon after ‘can’t quite name’. If deliberate, the effect on the reader is crafty, prompting them to perform a double-take over the line in an attempt to “match up” subject and object. As with the proliferation of deictic pronouns, by frustrating certain grammatical norms, Larkin forces the reader, paradoxically, to consider the grammatical “space and time” through which these processes exert influence. Much like memory, whose very existence, the poem asserts, is contingent upon a dialectical relationship with one’s present self in order to constitute meaning, such grammatical trickery serves to destabilise, and so expose, the *equivalent* dialectical functions that operate within grammar. As a result, when reading such lines, the reader is

forced to suffer their own bout of 'amnesia'. They become forgetful, double-checking aspects of agreement and meaning, and are left frustrated at their own failings. However, it is space itself which remains the last refuge of the forgetful elderly, when all human interaction is purged. The 'fire burning' or 'blown bush at the window' – much like a fragmented deixis, or the object stripped of its subject – become mere fragments of meaning. They are inchoate, at once goading the mind and then thwarting it by refusing to attach with the image a feasible context in time and space. Without this ancillary information, the image becomes indistinguishable from the 'here and now'.

As stanza four gets underway, Larkin shifts the presentation of space away from grammar, back to the physical realm of planetary orientations and perspectives. Distancing is alluded to, though not through the conceptual space of grammar, nor through the magnificent expanses and trajectories of the cosmos; instead 'the old fools' have their location described as an orientation bearing away from the metonymic 'Extinction's alp'. The technique infers a type of geographical triangulation: the 'alp' featuring as an immovable 'fix' on the horizon, with all current states of age discernible from one's proximity, and angle, according to it. Indeed, for the reader, presumably not yet encumbered by the inevitable deterioration of old age, 'the peak . . . stays in view wherever we go'. It is formidable, yet far off, and its place in our field of vision is suitably eclipsed by the foreground pell-mell of day-to-day living. Like a geostationary satellite, we rely fully upon its location in space being *fixed* in order that we can measure distances accurately to and from it. For the elderly, however, this point can no longer

maintain its fixed position in space: it becomes 'rising ground', with its icy, uninhabitable summit moving in to engulf everything else. The very point that must remain stable in order to establish one's spatial location, *itself*, starts moving. The cowering elderly end up 'crouching below' this formidable object whose inanimate yet ever undoubtedly malevolent status borders on an instance of malevolent prosopopoeia.<sup>183</sup> Consequently, Maria Grau's assertion that 'the third stanza [is] based on "still points", [and the] free of the flow of time, [while] the closing stanza is built on distance and perspective', is only half true: while the third stanza is indeed heavily stocked with "memory vistas" that appear fixed in time, intrinsically, such features are far from fixed (56). The careful phrasing of 'blown bush' and 'setting down a lamp' confirms that these memory-visions are motion-based and filmic, rather than still and photographic as their content comprises of fluid, ever-replaying moments from the perceived past. Similarly the narrator states that, for most of us, 'Extinction's alp' is static; its role in building perspective only collapses during the final throws of senility. Consequently, Larkin's scrutiny of the principles of stasis and movement in the elderly, only achieves its subtle complexity on account of each mode's constant, self-aware relationship with its binary opposite.

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<sup>183</sup> Interestingly, J. Hillis Miller argues that prosopopoeia in poetry, and specifically the prosopopoeia of mountains, invariably assumes as its departure point the intrinsic metaphoric qualities that are embedded in lexical phrases. Quoting Wallace Stevens, Miller argues that, "without evasion by a single metaphor," he cannot avoid those personifications that are woven into the integral fabric of our language, like "face of a mountain" (245). Therefore, despite the shift in approach between stanzas three and four, one might argue that Larkin never fully relinquishes his handle on the metaphorical faculties of language to allude to space and place.

It is understandable that critics should preoccupy themselves with Larkin's closing statement of 'The Old Fools' to determine whether the narrator manages to effectively dispel, or undo, any of the indignation he directed towards the elderly in the poem's opening stanzas. Critics such as Chatterjee, Worsfold and Stojković place the entire burden of moral appeasement on the pronoun 'we' in the final send-off 'We shall find out' (274, 11, 153). Stojković and Chatterjee, at least, appear convinced that Larkin's attempt to include himself in their descent into senility dilutes his earlier disparagement, whereas Rącz focuses intently upon the 'gap between the question and the answer' to discern whether this conceptual lacuna is, in fact, another tacit evocation of the same forgetfulness (43). However, while Rącz's argument is perhaps the most convincing (the others' preoccupation upon one redemptive pronoun 'we' seems a little forced), I argue that the point of Larkin's ambiguous signoff is to conceal a moment of quiet, professional self-eulogy. Indeed, the final lines of 'The Old Fools' – their interest in conflating forgetfulness with coldness, barren landscapes, and a loss of self-awareness – recalls Larkin's philosophical position when writing *Winter* as discussed in chapter four; a novel which itself was Larkin's attempt to "forget", in part, the clamour of the Second World War. Much like 'The Winter Palace' – itself a response to certain stylistic decisions at play throughout *Winter* – the final stanza of 'The Old Fools' is a kind of thematic coda; a reference back to earlier works, and Larkin's attempt to re-establish death as his greatest fear. In keeping with these earlier meditations, Larkin's stance towards death in 'The Old Fools' is as paradoxical as it is baffling. By

reimagining the dramatic turn in 'The Winter Palace', Larkin's sign-off to 'The Old Fools' expresses a craving not for *less* forgetfulness, but for *more* forgetfulness; enough forgetfulness, that is, to forget what one was "forgetting" in the first instance. The narrator wants to 'manage / To blank out whatever it is that is doing the damage', in order to not succumb to the peculiar, semi-amnesic state of 'the old fools' whose thoughts are a looping, immutable set of images. Subtle references to the weather and coldness underpin this side-reference to 'The Winter Palace' on a stylistic level, too: 'Incompetent cold' recalls 'The Winter Palace's 'cold shoulder', while the snow-capped 'Extinction's alp' shares its cadences with the 'mind fold[ing] into itself like fields, like snow', as well as Katherine Lind – the titular "Girl In Winter" herself.

This premature attempt at self-eulogy is not unusual during the *High Windows* period. As early as 1967, six years before the composition of 'The Old Fools', Larkin had cast himself in his own mock-funeral in 'Sympathy in White Major'. In many ways, 'Sympathy in White Major' marks the beginning of Larkin's preoccupation with staring death in the face. Its peculiar attempt to aggrandise and recalibrate the narrator's character as altruistic and selfless is, of course, both paradoxical and euphemistic: on one level, by doggedly staring *back* at his own life, the narrator blissfully refuses to stare *forward* into death itself, leaving the reader alone to question the poem's eulogistic context. Similar to the gestural effects of grammatical deixis, the narrator's attempt to eulogise his own life effectively forces life's antonym – death – to loom especially large in the contextual vacuum that emerges.

Furthermore, the sudden recasting of the Larkinian persona as selfless and caring tacitly points to a kind of panic at the prospect of impending religious judgement. The narrator seems aware of Pascal's Wager through his sudden desire to recast his life as virtuous in the face of the inevitable acceptance into either Heaven or Hell at the point of death. The endorsement of Pascal's Wager seems surprising for a Larkin narrator; a fact that is reflected in the second stanza's quiet awareness of the absurdity of his own re-characterisation as benevolent. Such self-parody is demonstrated through the extended image of clothes as vessels for concealment and disguise:

While other people wore like clothes  
 The human beings in their days  
 I set myself to bring to those  
 Who thought I could the lost displays:  
 It didn't work for them or me,  
 But all concerned were nearer thus  
 (Or so we thought) to all the fuss  
 Than if we'd missed it separately.

(*CP* 123)

In much the same way as the narrator solemnly anticipates his own slide into dementia at the end of 'The Old Fools', in the above stanza, Larkin is "wearing" the more altruistic equivalent of himself in a superficial display of posturing behaviour in common with the very category of people that he is lambasting. The narrator continues to ennoble himself by stating that he

brought about the 'lost displays'. These displays may translate as fashions and, in turn, appear to pose as an ambiguous metonymy for art. Despite having the best intentions, however, Larkin's alter ego fails in his selfless attempt to enrich the lives of others through poetry: his capacity to produce and disseminate art to a loyal group of disciples only has the effect of bringing everyone 'nearer . . . [to] all the fuss', or, indeed, to the possible "meaning" of life. Despite this failure, the forestalled attempt to attain poetic "kinship" is a success since it achieves its ultimate aim – the veneration of the narrator. The narrator's view of themselves as a martyr to the poetic sacrifice swells to a self-congratulatory closing stanza, replete with the reported speech, typography and lexicon of a eulogy:

*A decent chap, a real good sort,  
 Straight as a die, one of the best,  
 A brick, a trump, a proper sport,  
 Head and shoulders above the rest;  
 How many lives would have been duller  
 Had he not been here below?  
 Here's to the whitest man I know –  
 Though white is not my favourite colour.*

Once again, the prospect of space is generated through a mixture of subtle negation, religiosity and deictic grammar. Otherwise bereft of any clear visualisation of space or place, the narrator divulges an ambiguous location through the phrase 'here below'. That the narrator is speaking from 'here below' encourages the reader to question whether the voice is issuing from

hell prompting, in turn, a meditation upon death.<sup>184</sup> If Larkin is gesturing towards hell as the *locus* of the narrating voice, he is doing so in the most efficient way possible: by purging all conventional indicators of place and space, the reader is left only with the deictic adverb ‘below’ and its y-axis connotations of ‘above-below’ or ‘up-down’. Thus, the reader’s visualisation of heaven and hell at this point is inevitable, owing largely to the sparsity of any other spatially-descriptive, or spatially-indicative language.

The narrator’s lacklustre endorsement of religion is a foil to the delicious opening sensuality of a slowly poured gin and tonic, itself a virtuosic emblem of secular living, and one which is decidedly more “Larkin-esque”. And yet the poem’s failure to denounce religion, along with the narrator’s shifty, urgent quest to improve their image in the eyes of an undisclosed “other” points to a narrator who is nervous about, or at very least receptive towards, the notion of religious judgement. The poem’s move from a Baudelairian revelry in the sin of drink to a meagre attempt at Christian repentance, not only suggests a flirtation with Pascal’s Wager but finishes the work of an earlier poem ‘Compline’ which investigates the benefits of believing in God more directly.<sup>185</sup> However, if ‘Sympathy in White Major’ is a

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<sup>184</sup> The preoccupation with death or hell conveyed through the phrase ‘here below’, along with the corporeal undertones in the phrasal choice ‘Head and shoulders above the rest’, tacitly recalls Eliot’s ‘I. The burial of the dead’ in *The Waste Land*. Like Larkin’s narrator, Stetson’s corpse in Eliot’s fourth stanza continues to ‘sprout’ with life despite existing – both literally and metaphorically – “underground”. While Stetson is denied a voice, Larkin appears to be toying with the same Eliotian style of using macabre reanimation as a means of evoking hell from beyond the grave.

<sup>185</sup> Reflecting on the anguish of a lost loved one, the narrator of ‘Compline’ (1950s) states, ‘For this I would have quenched the prayer’. The assertion reflects the very Pascalian notion of finite losses in life (time spent in prayer),

final, pathetic attempt by Larkin to absolve himself in the eyes of God, such an effort would appear to be dramatically jettisoned in 'Aubade'. By addressing 'Compline' followed by 'Aubade', we shall see that 'Aubade' is actually a palinode: it deliberately reworks and rejects the burgeoning religious sympathies outlined first in 'Compline' and then later in 'Sympathy in White Major'. As Larkin's most powerful meditation on the prospect of extinction, 'Aubade' depicts a courageous faceoff with death in diametric opposition to 'Sympathy in White Major's flinching, spooked evasiveness. However, as we go on to address 'Aubade' starting with its poetic and contextual informants, I argue that a tiny sliver of Larkin's receptiveness to the Christian afterlife lives on throughout 'Aubade', despite its vehement surface-level rejection of religious transcendence. Such moments of receptiveness can be decoded, I argue, through Larkin's marked interest in the motivic status of light, or, more specifically, light's status as a metonymy for Christian transcendence.

Written over the course of three years between 1974 and '77, 'Aubade' was an ongoing challenge for Larkin, and did not reach completion until 'his mother's death on 17 Nov. 1977 at the age of 91' (*TCP* 494-5). It has come – whether rightly or wrongly – to emblematised Larkin's views on death as a whole, and has prompted many of his readers, upon its publication, 'to bombard Larkin with an array of personalised, often ruthlessly eccentric, accounts of what they felt [about death]' (Bradford *FBTF* 214).

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leading to infinite benefits in death (entrance to Heaven), and is reiterated tersely in the poem's closing stanza: 'Better that endless rites beseech / As many nights, as many dawns, / If finally God grants one wish'.

Such a large and audacious venting of personal neuroses, directed exclusively at Larkin in whose trust such letter writers, knowingly, placed their fears, demonstrates the level to which Larkin's own existential rubric chimed with certain members of the British public. The affection was personal, and continued up to his own death whereupon Charles Monteith noted that, 'the house of Faber had never received so many letters from 'ordinary people' on the death of one of their authors' (qtd. in Chatterjee 314; emphasis Chatterjee's).

While most critics have read 'Aubade' as a poem that interprets death as complete extinction,<sup>186</sup> some critics more recently have undertaken a renewed reading of the poem which focuses heavily on a subtle countercurrent of symbolism that undergirds the poem, and whose effect appears to destabilise or even negate the poem's received dictum of "death-as-extinction". The title itself 'Aubade' has been central among recent critical discussions hoping to unveil a covert agenda in the piece: although addressed as early as 1989 by Dale Salwak,<sup>187</sup> critics Bennett, Royle and Rácz have been among those 21<sup>st</sup> century Larkin scholars engaged in an ongoing attempt to probe the noun's etymological derivations and, by consequence, efforts to review Larkin's otherwise highly adamant, and unassailable credo on death. As Bennett and Royle state, an 'aubade' is a

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<sup>186</sup> Chatterjee writes that, for Larkin, 'Aubade' is a 'horrifying reminder of the inexorability of his own physical extinction' (298); while Rossen affirms that 'Aubade' proves that nothing can defeat or mitigate the horror and permanence of death' (141).

<sup>187</sup> *In Philip Larkin: The Man and His Work*, Salwak states simply that 'An Aubade was an ancient dawn-song of love' (138)

poem about two lovers parting . . . a poem set in the morning, at day-break' (86). Therefore, far from imbuing death with the intransigence of an atheistic extinction, the titular atmosphere that pervades 'Aubade' is more likely to be one of melancholic joy; the lovers, while parting, are to meet again. Rácz develops this attempt at critical reappraisal by offering up a second etymological reading: citing the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, he relays that 'there is a theory that the *aubade* grew out of the night watchman's announcement from his tower of the passing of night and the renewal of day' (171; emphasis Rácz's).

The readings of Rácz, Royle and Bennett cast a degree of doubt upon the more received readings of the poem's title, extending by critics such as Nicholas Marsh, as being purely 'ironic' and in line, perhaps, with the more brazen attempts at titular irony delivered through poems such as 'Homage to Government' (25). Significantly, both readings evoke an outpouring of light, or an expungement of dark. If we are to pursue this reading, then the very decision to entitle the poem 'Aubade' forces an optimistic sense of diurnal rebirth to cling to the poem; a symbolic counterpoise that is antithetical to the credo of death-as-extinction so forcibly advanced within the poem's *prima facie*. That Larkin ostensibly entertains a quiet moment of spiritual optimism in his despairing discourse on death is not altogether surprising when one considers the manner in which the poet's own atheistic adamancy began to soften in the weeks leading up to 'Aubade's publication. Richard Bradford notes that shortly after his mother's death (the event precipitating 'Aubade's eventual completion), 'Larkin, a lifelong atheist, asked [Anthony] Thwaite a

low-church Anglican, if he would come with him to the [All Souls', Oxford] college chapel' for morning prayers (qtd. in *The Importance of Elsewhere* 241).<sup>188</sup> Set against 'Aubade's inexorable belief in an atheistic death, Larkin would no doubt view this momentary receptiveness towards spiritual comforts provided by religion as a sort of doxastic false alarm. However, looking back across the poet's *oeuvre*, further even than 'Sympathy in White Major's coded religious sympathies, one can see that symbolic or mimetic endorsements of Christian transcendence, specifically through the rubric of Pascal's Wager, are not altogether uncommon.

Written in 1950, the previously-mentioned poem 'Compline' is a short meditation upon religion, the possibility of prayer-power to summon supernatural intervention, and the gains that one would receive, if such powers could be credibly summoned. It is cited, in full, below:

### **Compline**

Behind the radio's altarlight

The hurried talk to God goes on:

*Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done,*

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<sup>188</sup> Maeve Brennan confirms this event took place. She cites *Selected Letters* at length and describes Larkin's almost rapturous affirmation of faith (on a bike ride, he recalls, seemingly without irony, that 'Everything seemed filled with the "Glory of God"' (SL 71). Although Brennan is clearly aware of Larkin's tendency towards histrionics on the matter of religion (he 'resorts to the language of religion, if not the substance'), she nevertheless acknowledges the persistent religious ambivalence that permeated many of Larkin's beliefs ('he is at a loss to explain the mysterious force which suffuses him . . . [which] were outside his control [and] which defied explanation' (71-72).

*Produce our lives beyond this night,*

*Open your eyes again to the sun.*

Unhindered in the dingy wards

Lives flicker out, one here, one there,

To send some weeping down the stair

With love unused, in unsaid words:

For this I would have quenched the prayer,

But for the thought that nature spawns

A million eggs to make one fish.

Better that endless rites beseech

As many nights, as many dawns,

If finally God grants one wish.

(TCP 270)

Had 'Compline' been published during Larkin's lifetime, its antithetical approach to the religious atheism of 'Aubade' would no doubt have quickly caused a stir. However, given its collection in Thwaite's *Collected Poems* in 1988, the juxta-position between its endorsement of prayer, versus 'Aubade's outright castigation of religion, is a discontinuity that has only become truly visible in the last three decades. Much like 'Aubade', 'Compline's existence as a straightforward or unambiguous poem is rendered questionable, in the first instance, by its perplexing, ill-fitting and notionally discordant choice of

title. A 'compline' is an evening prayer, and is etymologically deconstructed at some length by Burnett in *The Complete Poems*. As well as being 'the last service of the day' in the Catholic ritual, it also recalls Thomas Browne's *Religion Medici* to 'produce a mans [*sic*] life unto threescore', while more directly recalling the epigrammatic biblical line 'a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun' (qtd. in *TCP* 595). Thus, the word is a confluence of etymological genealogy, relating to the holy trinity (the 'threescore'), Catholic liturgy, and the image of 'light' or the sun.

In many ways, 'Compline' would seem a more fitting title for 'Aubade' and vice versa: the former evokes the end of the day – a melancholic closure and the moment of one's bodily surrender to God for deliverance into the afterlife. Conversely, 'Aubade' evokes birth, hope, trysting lovers and bodily surrender in the act of sexual communion. 'Compline's line '[T]hat nature spawns / A million eggs to make one fish' is an almost parabolic analogy for Pascal's Wager. It is the religious equivalent of 'The Old Fools' 'million-petalled flower / Of being here' – an emblem of a one-in-a-million chance reaching fruition and, in turn, an espousal of the practice of prayer given the very small possibility that it might actually prove effective.<sup>189</sup> For the narrator, the chance of deliverance into heaven is slim, but not altogether absent, and the nature of this chance is delivered through a series of symbolic and tonal codifications heralded by the 'radio's altarlight' which becomes a metonymy

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<sup>189</sup> Critics, such as Rowe, have also read the 'million-petalled flower' as a direct attempt to link an individual's 'hereness with the consciousness of flowers' (*Art and Self* 9), though many others, like Bowen and myself, have read it as a metaphor for 'the "miracle" of each individual birth' (81).

for a modern reappraisal of religion.<sup>190</sup> One feels that the narrator's usual rigidity of mind has become malleable, albeit temporarily, leading to an uncharacteristic meditation upon the nature of human transcendence.

Against the 'altarlight', the 'sun' appears during a reworking of the Lord's Prayer. The moment is expressed through the use of confabulation, which rather than educe the typical Larkin derision seems to suggest a personal and respectful reinterpretation of the Christian liturgy. During this instance of confabulation the narrator turns to a free, indirect style during a moment of italicised direct speech in which his recital of the Lord's Prayer segues into the collective voice of the worshipers. All the while, however, the confabulation of Lord's Prayer betrays Larkin's own trademark lexical style, implying that the narrator, with some degree of conceit, is attempting to muscle in and adulterate the very expression of the worshippers that he is *himself* attempting to ventriloquise. Life continuing '*beyond this night*' is contingent upon one's appeal to the 'sun'; a canny slip back again to Larkin's own voice, whose undertones of secular spiritualism ("the *sun*' versus "son of God") are closer aligned to the poet's true atheistic leanings, while meantime developing the motif of light. This motivic development continues through to the second stanza in which the 'flicker[ing] out' of parishioners' lives, 'one here, one there', conjures the image of a candle reaching the end of its wick

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<sup>190</sup> Presenting an Epicurean death as underpinned with the motivic significance of light is not altogether new. Regan touches upon this in his chapter on Larkin's *In the Grip of Light* (NLFO 121-129) in which he cites a poem formerly collected in Thwaite's 1988 edition of *Collected Poems* which includes the lines: 'And famous lips interrogated God / Concerning franchise in eternity' (128). Here, the religious agency is reversed with the parishioners seemingly interviewing God about the nature of everlasting life.

on a bedside table. Each newly spent candle plunges another of the 'dingy wards' into darkness ('dingy wards' itself reflecting a moment of lexical trickery through its play on the word "ward" as either hospital wards, or civic wards). The stanza swells into an articulation of the poem's axiomatic line: 'For this I would have quenched the prayer'. As in the preceding stanza, the line is introduced by a colon purportedly marking it as an instance of direct speech. However, rather than italicise the line in common with the radio's garbled broadcast, Larkin claims the desire for quenched prayer is 'unsaid', thus forcing it to exist in the amorphous realm of the narrator's own consciousness. The poem's final image is a sort of coda to the theme of light, and gravitates around the penultimate rhyme of 'spawns' and 'dawns', reiterating once again the narrator's entertainment of the notion of everlasting life.

Geographically, the place of 'Compline' is unfixed and indeterminate. The poetic lens seems itself to 'flicker' between the various countryside wards, moving our gaze along the various parishes by night. However, such freedom of perspective across the landscape is juxta-posed with the image of the drawing-room radio, itself recruited as a metonym for the church, delivering its own type of ecclesiastical 'light' through the yellow glow of its backlight. Indeed this image of the garbling living room wireless is the poem's symbolic anchor point: all the images and philosophical deductions that arise thereafter stem directly from this same radio, with its 'altarlight' standing as a beacon of divine, doctrinal communication looming over the poem. Once again, through largely tacit and indirect means, Larkin encourages us to

consider the *space* across which this religious mantra exerts its influence.

The ubiquitous presence of a radio, in the corner of every household living room across Britain in 1950, forces us to consider whether the power of religious influence may well prevail despite its recent detachment from the traditional stomping grounds of church and chapel. The motivic common denominator, however, is the light itself which, by the poem's final epiphanic line, becomes synonymous with the hope for everlasting life.

Although the hope of religious transcendence is well and truly absent in 'Aubade', the poem's preoccupation with death along with its marked interest in the tracing of light suggests it may uphold a concordance with earlier poems, such as 'Compline', that overlap thematically. In many ways, this contradicts the received interpretations of 'Aubade' which often make much of the poem's uniqueness and isolation within the Larkin *oeuvre* (published three years after the poet's final collection, it is often dubbed a kind of 'swansong' [Logan 38]). Heaney spearheaded such denunciations of 'Aubade' by drawing attention to its 'arrested vision' as a failing which 'simply isolates 'Aubade' from the rest of [Larkin's] work' (Cavanagh 186). For other critics, like Jack Bedell, 'Aubade' is an 'island of loneliness and isolation' in the truest sense of the phrase: detached both in terms of the dogged, spiritual isolation of its persona, as well as a dearth of content that might easily relate it to the *oeuvre* (47). Other critics take a more forgiving view, claiming that the long gap between 'Aubade' and *High Windows* 'ignores the possibility that a poem like *Aubade* [sic] takes three years to write, even for a genius' (James 113-4). I argue that 'Aubade' did resonate with former works;

a belief that is supported, in no small way, by Richard Palmer's recent assertion in 2008 that 'Maeve Brennan revealed that Larkin used her as a sounding-board for 'Aubade' . . . looking to pit his agnosticism against her Roman Catholicism' (110). Brennan's comparison of 'Aubade' to *The Dream of Gerontius* endowed it, according to Palmer, with 'a properly spiritual dimension'; something which Palmer believes entitles 'Aubade' to a 'revisionist reading' on account of a clearly covert 'measured philosophical statement' (111). Palmer's find is interesting: not only does it suggest 'Aubade' was, despite the aesthetics of a *prima facie* reading, a somehow *spiritual* poem, but also that the poem posits an 'alternative', thus suggesting that it actively supplies a *different* belief system to one formerly espoused. Given this, one quickly recognises the potential scope for reading 'Aubade' as a palinode: a deliberate revision (and rescindment) of 'Compline's optimistic treatise on an Epicurean death. Rather than the radio's 'altarlight' disseminating the hope of Christian rebirth across the countryside, in 'Aubade' death *itself* becomes light:

In time the curtain-edges will grow light.  
 Till then I see what's really always there:  
 Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,  
 Making all thought impossible but how  
 And where and when I shall myself die.  
 Arid interrogation: yet the dread  
 Of dying, and being dead,  
 Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.

The mind blanks at the glare.

(CP 190)

At first, light is depicted as the opposite to death. Seeing ‘what’s really always there’ will eventually give way to ‘the curtain-edges’ becoming light, and the hope of a new day, free from the frightful shadows of maudlin, night-time contemplation. However, the caesura following ‘Arid interrogation:’, seems not only to stall the poem’s flow, but also demarcates a switch in the role of light. Now light is ‘the dread / Of dying’ and ‘Flashes’. The implication is not of an illuminating, spiritual or metonymic light as in ‘Compline’, but of a strobe light – a camera flash – that disarms and stuns, giving rise to flash blindness and flickering effigies on the retina for a few seconds afterwards. Scientifically, the ‘inch-thick spec[...].’ wearing narrator appears to be a sufferer of Charles Bonnet Syndrome,<sup>191</sup> the condition in which either blindness or constant darkness causes an individual’s brain to generate its own distorted, hallucinatory images in the absence of any images perceived through the eyes (CP 102). Thus the narrator’s mind is, in effect, generating its own “light” due to the lack of any empirical data to the contrary, and the

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<sup>191</sup> The *Neuro-ophthalmology Review Manual* (Kline, Bajandas, eds.) defines Charles Bonnet Syndrome as: a. ‘hallucinations that frequently occur in patients who lose vision in both eyes regardless of the location of causative lesion or lesions.’; and, b. ‘May be simple (flashes of light, shapes) or complex (people, objects).’

stupefying brightness of this “faux” light locks or ‘hold[s]’ him in time and space.

Although the narrator is stationed in the clear, recognisable space of a bedroom, as stanza two gets underway, the drawing of space is diversified away from the contemplative bedroom setting with the assistance of a deictic adverb. The ‘sure extinction’ of death, much as in ‘The Old Fools’, for instance ‘Extinction’s alp’, is a destination to which ‘we travel’; however unlike the latter, the destination of death does not cede an image of the outer cosmos, but is neither ‘here’ nor ‘anywhere’, forcing a new hopelessness upon the prospect of a spiritual (and spatial) transcendence. ‘Here’ and ‘anywhere’ are the only deictic adverbs in the poem; nevertheless, their influence is powerfully felt at this point. As Cees Koster affirms, ‘in “Aubade” we have seen that even if very few deictic elements occur, they still may be decisive in the interpretation’ (171). Interestingly, Koster loosens the tight focus away from an exclusive analysis of the poem’s deictic adverbs like ‘here’ and ‘anywhere’, to include ‘the deictic use of the article in the definite’. For Koster, ‘Aubade’s opening deliberately leaves the reader to question whether the narrator is describing a habitual, recurring event, or a *specific* one-off event.<sup>192</sup> It is not until the definite article of ‘the curtain-edges’ that

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<sup>192</sup> The argument that ‘Aubade’s opening lines portray a universal or symbolic occasion rather than *specific* one is compounded by several critics’ focus on the opening line as a borrowed blues lyric. As well as documented conversations between Larkin and Conquest on the poem’s blues debt (see Osborne 215), the most assiduous critical work on ‘Aubade’s blues debt comes from B. J. Leggett, affirming that ‘Working and drinking are the common properties of the blues’. Leggett selects Lonnie Johnson’s opening line as a possible informant: (‘I work all day for you, until the sun goes down’). If nothing else, ‘Aubade’ reflects the blues’ tendency to obfuscate,

one deduces that the latter scenario is correct: this is *one* dawn in the narrator's life, with *one* specific set of emotions, illuminations and observations. In terms of the wielding of space in the poem, the affect is particularly arresting: by suddenly deploying the definite article, the prospect of an '*instantaneous* reading draws the reader closer to the situation: it is as if the situation is being described on the spot, in one's presence' (Koster 64; my emphasis). Unlike 'The Old Fools' where the past and future are constantly in flux in an ongoing comment upon the *loss* of the present, in 'Aubade', through use of the single definite pronoun to gesture to a relatable object, the reader is in a "present moment" with the narrator. They are, in effect, drawn "into the room" with him, and so become inescapably exposed to the full horrors of his morbid treatise on death.

While an efficient, subtle use of deictic adverbs and pronouns may well confer an overwhelming sense of "presentness" to the poem, the effect is partially lifted in the final stanza whereupon Larkin reintroduces the theme of light as the narrative lens raises skyward to consider the 'uncaring / Intricate rented world'. Looking around the room, the narrator comments how 'Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape'. Rather than offering the 'glare' of a godless death, light now expunges the adumbrations of an over-active mind that is fixated on death-images in the absence of any real-life stimuli. Thus, a division is effectively made between "artificial", human-induced sources of light, such as the strobing 'glare' of death and the

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and move between, a lyric that describes a specific occasion, a quotidian routine, or a set of occasions conflated into one (Leggett 47).

'furnace-fear' glow of the crematorium oven, and "natural" light from the sun.<sup>193</sup> While the former conjures a world of shape/less fear, the latter, quite literally generates the opposite by allowing the room to 'take [...] shape' (my emphasis). At this point, one realises that 'Aubade's palinodic commitment to staunchly rescinding the religious susceptibilities of 'Compline' is also reflected on a symbolic level too: while the radio's 'altarlight' – itself a conflation of an electrical light and a metonymy for religion – is a source of comfort, in 'Aubade' any human or non-natural light instils abject fear in the narrator. Indeed, the final attestation of the narrator's abiding fear of death makes use of this very dichotomy of natural and unnatural light. As the outside brightens, the narrator asserts that 'The sky is white as clay, with no sun' – a bleak reminder of the poem's commitment to obliterating all hope, through both logical reasoning *and* careful control of symbol, space and motif.

It is difficult to tell what was on Larkin's mind when penning 'Compline' in 1950. Its apparent endorsement of an Epicurean death seems to go beyond Cavanagh's simple assertion that Larkin merely 'had the capacity to appreciate religion' (207). Indeed, the final stanza of 'Compline' transcends mere appreciation, and outwardly advocates a theistic life based on the Pascalian treatise of deistic probability. During the poet's lifetime, one can see why critics might oversee such a subtle slip in Larkin's prevailing (and

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<sup>193</sup> The macabre image of crematoria could well have its origin in Larkin's unshakable interest in the imagery of the World Wars. Alternatively, aware of his impending death, Larkin could well be responding to a surge in popularity for cremation in the UK following 1963 when the Pope Paul VI 'lifted the ban on Roman Catholics seeking cremation' (*BBC News*, 25 Mar. 2009).

now hugely famous) negative view of death and the afterlife: 'Compline', after all, only attained collected publication three years after Larkin's death in Thwaite's 1988 *Collected Poems*. Viewed against 'Aubade', the type of Christian belief espoused by 'Compline' not only makes for a far more spiritually conflicted and receptive Larkin, but further suggests that 'Aubade' may well have acted as a palinodic response to 'Compline' in its problematisation, and possible retraction, of the latter's religious proclivities and philosophies.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have looked at Philip Larkin's evocation of place and space through a set of often rather disparate lenses. In so doing, I have attempted to show that the stylistic and symbolic debts Larkin accrued over the course of his *oeuvre* are perhaps drawn from a more daring, erratic and interdisciplinary set of derivations than previously thought. Equally, I hope to have demonstrated that the literary periods and epochs from which Larkin harvested these modes and techniques span a greater literary timeline than many Larkin scholars have previously acknowledged. Within this maelstrom of competing forces, I have argued that the theme of Englishness (understood broadly as that version which emerged from 'The English Line') acts as a taxonomic common denominator into which many of these versions of place experimentation can happily reside. Sidling alongside this lifelong preoccupation with Englishness (though not quite sharing the same ubiquity across the *oeuvre* as a whole) is the trope of the *genius loci* whose unstable definition in 20<sup>th</sup> century vernacular offered Larkin a unique opportunity to seize and profit from the full gamut of attendant notions and philosophies which had coalesced around the term throughout the centuries.

In chapter one, after a bout of inspiration following a Slade lecture, we see Larkin unpick the juncture between the *genius loci* and adjacent Wordsworthian place notions in *Jill*, as he draws into his novel aspects of the Ruskinian pathetic fallacy as well as the classical concept of the *locus amoenus*. In chapter three, the spirit of place is expressed through the

wandering gaze and scopophilic fantasy of the Baudelairian *flâneur*, whose love of phantasmagoria and travel – in addition to piquing auto-erotic tendencies – reveal a paradoxical side to Larkin’s character that is surprisingly receptive to the notion of communal and societal engagement. Chapter four, on the other hand, revisits the *genius loci* in one of its earliest guises – that of the pernicious in-dwelling spirit of the landscape, as popularised by Pope – whose capacity for ciphering emotional expression through fixities of landscape provides Katherine Lind with a degree of emotional reciprocity in an alien, inhospitable country.

Through our exploration of the above, I also hope to have shown an array of associated allegiances, attitudinal positions and themes which help offer texture and depth to Larkin’s poetic of Englishness and *genius loci*. Among the more surprising of these are the themes of weather, Foucauldian imprisonment, and the capacity of deixis to draw the reader’s mind along contours of “invisible” spaces. All of which have received relatively scant attention by Larkin scholarship. In several instances, such as in the elaborate descriptions and existential meditations of *High Windows*, I suggest that Larkin’s ability to express the more complex, “unknowable” themes of death and the afterlife actually *evolved* from a series of style experiments that originated many years prior; experiments which, in their eventual virtuoso realisation in poems such as ‘Aubade’ or ‘The Old Fools’, gently call upon a modernist interpretation of time, before reconfiguring this theme in order to create an altogether new rubric by which to measure conceptual *space*. Indeed, throughout the thesis, I have attempted to show that Larkin’s

appreciation of space is just as elaborate (if not more so) as is his appreciation of place.

Through his evocation of space, Larkin is able – in a vivid sense this applies to his later work, but nevertheless discernible in imaginings inspired by the earlier ‘Dream Diaries’ – to call upon a set of informants that anticipate, or are coterminous with, the phenomenological place-making techniques of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In chapter two, for instance, engaging such informants yields, in a poem such as ‘V Conscript’, a poetic register, tone and sense of incantation that anticipates Hill’s paradoxically “modern” rethinking of ancient history and legend. Alongside these features, and visible particularly in his imagining of a life *beyond* death, one notices that Larkin’s concept of space diversifies to include, and riff upon, both *mathematical* and *cosmic* aspects of space absorbing, in doing so, the adjacent theories of Euclidian tessellation and quantum mechanics, respectively. As with any thesis, I have not engaged in an exhaustive attempt to quantify the types of techniques described herein; rather, I have attempted to show that Larkin’s *oeuvre* – despite the large volume of critical ink that has been spilt in its honour – still possesses a depth, plurality and conceptual receptiveness that enables the 21<sup>st</sup> century scholar to isolate, and explore, expressions of place and space that appear altogether new, unique and exciting.



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