



# Critical Assessment of Poetry of Philip Larkin

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**Abstract**— In the year 1922, Philip Larkin was born in Coventry, which is located in England. In addition to finishing with First Class Honors in English, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree from St. John's College, Oxford, where he also became friends with the author and poet Kingsley Amis. After completing his undergraduate degree, Larkin went on to pursue professional courses in order to become a librarian. He began his career in Shropshire and Leicester, continued it at Queen's College in Belfast, and ended it as the librarian at the University of Hull. He worked in libraries the whole of his life. Not only did Larkin produce volumes of poetry, but he also wrote and published two novels, *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947), as well as jazz music criticism, essays, and review articles. The latter were compiled into two books: *All What Jazz: A Record Diary 1961-1968* (1970; 1985) and *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982*. Both were published in 1970 and 1985 respectively (1984). Before his death in 1985, he was considered by many to be "England's other Poet Laureate." He was one of the most well-known poets to emerge from England in the decades after World War II. In point of fact, when the post of laureate became available in 1984, numerous poets and critics advocated for Larkin's election to the position; nevertheless, Larkin chose to stay out of the spotlight.

**Keywords**— *Philip Larkin, World War II, Shropshire and Leicester.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 OVERVIEW

Philip Arthur Larkin was born in Coventry, England, in 1922, and passed away in 1985. He was a prolific contemporary writer. It was his father, Sidney Larkin, who served in the role of treasurer for the Coventry city government. Despite the fact that Larkin was born into a wealthy and aristocratic family and had access to a wealth of opportunities and experiences throughout his formative years, he recalls his boyhood as "a forgotten monotony." He often used negative language due to his gloomy outlook on life. He says that his time spent at school was completely unremarkable. The culminating high school test that Larkin took was successful for him, and he received honours in the fields of history and English. He enrolled at Oxford University in 1940, and graduated with a graduate degree and a first-class standing from that institution in 1943. During the Second World War, he sought employment in the military but was finally successful in obtaining a position as a librarian at the public library in Wellington,

New Zealand. Finally, in 1954, he was given a job at the University of Hull in the same role, and he stayed in that position until the day he passed away. At the age of fifteen, he began his career as a writer. The majority of his poems have a gloomy tone that permeates the whole piece. He discusses the unfavourable parts of life, such as being alone, becoming ill, and eventually passing away. The predominant themes in his poems are feelings of despondency, loss, exhaustion, and disillusionment.

The major features of Larkin are his pessimistic temperament and his voice of defeat, yet we can't ignore the fact that he has a sense of humour. He begins his writing career as a writer, but ultimately, it is his poetry that brings him fame. After the publication of "North-Ship" in 1945, "The Less Deceived" in 1955, "The Whitsun Weddings" in 1965, and "High Windows" in 1975, he goes on to write three more books in quick succession (1974). He was presented with the Queen's Gold medal in 1965, and he also has honorary doctorates from a number of universities located in the United Kingdom. The position of Poet

Laureate was extended to him. Larkin valued seclusion and loathed travel. His poetry investigates contemporary perspectives on topics such as labour, pleasure, love, and death. In addition, the realities of post-war England are reflected in his collections of poetry. Both "Going" and "Wedding Wind" were poems that illustrated the harm that had been done to the old religious rites and rituals that were practised in Britain. The poem "At Grass" was meant to represent the decline of Britain's former splendour. Larkin's animal stories may be found in his poems "At Grass," "Wires," "Myxomatosis," and "Toads," among others. In his poem "Church Going," he emphasised the viewpoint that the faith and religion may go, but the spirit of the tradition would live on forever. Larkin believed in love and sex, but he didn't believe in marriage at all. The book "The Whitsun Weddings" demonstrated how the social and cultural milieu of England was changing at the time it was written. Both "Here, Mr. Bleaney" and "Dockery and Sons" were poems written by him that made it very evident that the motivating drive aspires for a life free from alienation. The poem "Here" went from night to day and from an industrial setting and busy roadways to open fields and pastures as it progressed.

## 1.2 PHILIP LARKIN

In the year 1922, Philip Larkin was born in Coventry, which is located in England. In addition to finishing with First Class Honors in English, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree from St. John's College, Oxford, where he also became friends with the author and poet Kingsley Amis. After completing his undergraduate degree, Larkin went on to pursue professional courses in order to become a librarian. He began his career in Shropshire and Leicester, continued it at Queen's College in Belfast, and ended it as the librarian at the University of Hull. He worked in libraries the whole of his life. Not only did Larkin produce volumes of poetry, but he also wrote and published two novels, *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947), as well as jazz music criticism, essays, and review articles. The latter were compiled into two books: *All What Jazz: A Record Diary 1961-1968* (1970; 1985) and *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982*. Both were published in 1970 and 1985 respectively (1984). Before his death in 1985, he was considered by many to be "England's other Poet Laureate." He was one of the most well-known poets to emerge from England in the decades after World War II. In point of fact, when the post of laureate became available in 1984, numerous poets and critics advocated for Larkin's election to the position; nevertheless, Larkin chose to stay out of the spotlight.

Larkin was able to earn praise despite the fact that he only produced a little body of work, which consisted of just over

one hundred pages of poetry distributed over four slim volumes and published at approximately ten year intervals. These collections, especially *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), and *High Windows* (1974), present "a poetry from which even people who distrust poetry, most people, can take comfort and delight," as stated by X.J. Kennedy in the *New Criterion*. Larkin employed the traditional tools of poetry—rhyme, stanza, and meter—to explore the frequently unsettling or terrifying experiences that are thrust upon common people in the modern age. As noted by Alan Brownjohn in *Philip Larkin, the poet produced without much ado* "the most technically brilliant and resonantly beautiful, profoundly disturbing yet appealing and approachable, body of verse of any English poet in the last twenty-five years." Larkin's work has been called "the most technically brilliant and resonantly beautiful".

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

**S., Savitha (2021)** The modernist poets wanted their work to be taken seriously by readers. They had the impression that the contemporary era was disjointed and that it included a variety of facets. If they were going to be given in the form of poetry, then the language of poetry needed to be able to convey a sense of fragmentation and multitudinousness. Therefore, they shattered and shattered the language. They made use of literal metaphors. In their poems, they aimed to capture the irrational quality of existence, which was their purpose. Because of this, they made their poems incomprehensible. Allusions to older works of literature and history were used in order to convey both a sense of continuity and a sense of break with the past. Their poetry was notoriously difficult to understand due to these traits. Yeats, Eliot, and Auden are examples of modernist poets who expected their readers, if they were serious about what they were reading, to put in the effort to figure out what they were trying to say.

**Mason, Emma (2021)** This editorial serves as an introduction to the special issue that is based on the proceedings of the symposium entitled "Peter Larkin: Poetry, Phenomenology, and Ecology," which was held on April 26, 2017, at the University of Warwick. In addition to that, it contains the first and most up-to-date list of all of Larkin's published and unpublished poetry as well as his prose compositions.

**Ubeid, Ahmed (2020)** It is the opinion of a great number of academics and researchers that the poetry of Philip Larkin is interesting to the reader since it can be readily comprehended and is extremely accessible to the general population. As a reader, I find myself really struck by the subject problems that Larkin explores, particularly the idea

of time. The portrayal of life as a series of happenings and experiences that unfold over the course of time has been Larkin's primary goal throughout his writing career. Larkin (1922-1985) is a poet who is known for his insistence on focusing his primary concern toward the average man. This demonstrates his distinct difference from the interests of other poets, such as T.S. Eliot's obscurity, W.H. Auden's socialist ideology, Dylan Thomas' romantic surrealism, etc. This research throws insight on Larkin's perspective on time, particularly with regard to time's unending progression and unbeatable capabilities. It will make an effort to concentrate on the straightforward imagery that Larkin employs by using language that is highly introspective and straightforward. In order to offer this research, reader response theory of criticism has been used. The reader's familiarity with and experience with the literary work provide the foundation for the hypothesis. It places the responsibility for determining the meaning and interpretation of any text with the reader. Without a reader who can debate, question, and ultimately value what the author has written, the book has no meaning.

**Malkawi, Suhaib (2020)** This article provides a cognitive and stylistic study of Philip Larkin's poem "Talking in Bed," focusing on the language functions that assist the reader in the process of creating meaning from what they have read. In the poem, the protagonist has an epiphany about the truth in the last moments of a prolonged contemplation. This epiphany sheds light on the reason why he is lying in bed next to his spouse, utterly unable to voice a single word. In the end, it appears to him that telling the truth is absolutely necessary for healthy human interactions. This article reflects an attempt at textually interpreting the poem in a complete manner. It draws on tidbits of information from a variety of disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and literature, in an effort to provide a full interpretation of Larkin's poem. The purpose of this is to provide further evidence of the speaker's realisation, which is that the expression of truth is an essential component in a healthy relationship, and to provide an understanding of the stylistic technique that Larkin uses the most, which is the linguistic deviation that he typically employs by the end of his poems. Both of these goals are intertwined. I contend that the author of this poem intentionally left the ending of the poem open to interpretation in order to make an intellectual effort at empathetically conveying to the reader the sensation of meaninglessness that the persona experiences throughout the poem.

### III. PHILIP LARKIN'S CONCEPT OF TIME AS PROJECTED IN HIS POETRY

Philip Larkin is often considered to be the most significant poet of the contemporary age. This is due to the fact that the ludicrous sensitivity of the post-war era is most clearly reflected in his body of work. Larkin is a poet who does not delight more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; rather, he rejoices less than other men than he does in the spirit of life that is in him. English poetry has never been more consistently ignored as it is with Larkin. He came just in time to mix in with the disaffected young of the Second World War, which was a fortunate circumstance. His contemporaries were looking for love among the ruins, as depicted in "An Arundel Tomb," and he found nothing to romanticise about the past, as shown in "I remember." He found no religion in churches, as shown in "Church-Going." He found no love among men, as shown in "Faith-Healing." He found nothing to romanticise about the past. The themes of self-deprecation, sexual defeat, and decay are prevalent throughout Larkin's work. He is the antithesis of romanticism and hyperbole. He is very honest, and this integrity shines through in a way that is quite lovely in his poems. When he writes, he uses a vocabulary that is not only clear and easy to remember, but that is also powerful and natural. The breadth of Larkin's writing is quite restricted, and it is often characterised by a disgust that is passively resigned toward current reality. His is the poem of an outsider who is at once perplexed, half-pitying, and half-despising the second and third-rated standards in all that he witnessed in the world around him. Everywhere he looked, he found nothing but self-deception and compromise. It is both about himself and about life in general that he writes in "Dockery and Son" that the first stage of existence is "boredom." The fact that Larkin makes the sterile world bearable and demonstrates that it is possible to face it with elegance and tenderness is what makes him so endearing to others. Larkin is straightforward and passive, in contrast to some of his contemporaries such as Donald Barthelme, Robert Lowell, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter. He does not exhibit hysteria, pretensions in mockery, dramatic grandness, fierce sardonicism, or keen honesty. Because he is aware of their ineffectiveness, he does not attempt to take on the Goliath of the Void by hurling stones of fancy, technological brilliance, or angry jokes. And what he offers is not a "world beyond," but rather a "life right here" that is devoid of libido, passion, and the evident transvaluation of creative potential. The depiction of life as it really is given with integrity by him.

### IV. THE MAKING OF THE POET

According to Seymour Smith F., who works for An English Library, "no current literature in the world surpasses English poetry and poetic theatre, and maybe none equals

it." As a result of the fact that Anthony Thwaite and Roger Day have referred to Larkin as "a top-selling and well appreciated poet," it is not difficult to see why he is regarded as one of the best living poets now composing their work in the English language. In the crowded field of contemporary poets, such as John Betjeman, Seamus Heaney, Douglas Dun, Tony Connor, Elizabeth Jennings, Norman Nicholson, Ted Hughes, and Sylvia Plath, Larkin stands out as a prominent figure. Although Larkin is current in terms of the subject matter he writes about, he is traditional in terms of the manner he writes in; he is sometimes thought of as one of the Movement poets, although he disputes this; he is the most pessimistic of all modern poets. In this chapter, I made it my goal to depict Larkin in such a way that the reader would not need any previous knowledge or further guidance to traverse the poet's numerous sides and complexities.

About the life of poet and librarian Philip Larkin, there is not a great deal that can be said. Even though he did not get married, he seldom travelled outside of the United Kingdom, he did not give any public readings of his work, and he was quite nervous whenever he had to talk in front of a group of people. In a letter, he expressed his current perspective on himself, writing, "I now consider myself as a freak and a failure, and my entire life as a farce." To the best of my knowledge, the majority of individuals have employment that serve to insulate them from the harsh realities of their personal life. A pessimistic wit would claim that autumn and winter are superior than summer and spring since "they aren't designed to be joyful, is it?" [5]. When questioned about his character as a grumpy hermit, he ruefully admitted that it was just as much of a fake as appearing in public, but it was a great deal more comfortable. Even so, he counted among his friends a sizable number of people, the majority of whom praised him for his thoughtfulness, kindness, and sometimes humour. The fact that this dismal, self-deprecating attitude belongs to one of the greatest English poets of all time contributes to our interest with it.

#### 4.1 THE NORTH SHIP

Philip Larkin's first collection of poetry, titled "The North Ship," was published in 1945. It included poems that the author had written between 1943 and 1944. The majority of the poems in this collection are considered to be derivative works, which is consistent with the common perception that the poems included in this book are only appropriate for juvenilia. In 1966, Faber & Faber Limited undertook the task of reprinting the collection.

Both W.B. Yeats and Vernon Watkins may be observed to have had an impact on the writing of 'North Ship,' which displays Yeats' style, attitude, and poetic qualities as well as Watkins' transcendentalism. In 1943, Vernon Watkins gave

a presentation to the Oxford English Club. Larkin was present, and the event left an everlasting mark on him as a result of his participation. Although he did not like Watkins' poetry, he had a great deal of respect for the poet and shared his enthusiasm for the works of Dylan Thomas and, above all, W.B. Yeats. The majority of *The North Ship* sounds and feels like a parody of Yeats, and it has little to offer other than music that is patently derivative. It is possible to trace the influence of Auden in poems such as "Conscript." Larkin mostly absorbed associational tactics from Dylan Thomas, despite the fact that this had a little effect.

The poems included in 'The North Ship' are obviously Yeatsian in terms of the themes, perspectives, and styles that they explore. The themes of morality, love (or rather, lovelessness), sex, and art appear throughout Larkin's later poems, where they are treated with more maturity than in his earlier works. Larkin's Yeats, on the other hand, is the early Yeats and not the Yeats of "The harsher, last poems," as the author notes in the prologue to the book. The general tone of the book, as well as the importance of the poem "The North Ship," which serves as the collection's title. The 'North Ship' journeys north, crossing a perilous and frigid sea under the direction of 'a fire-spilling star,' and ultimately arrives at 80 degrees north, where the 'drunken boatswain' sings, 'A woman has 10 claws.' This tale, which is recounted in a sequence of five poems, depicts the sexual dilemma that Larkin was having. "The poem's dreamlike picture of faraway coldness blending with sexual anxiety reveals how Larkin employed Yeatsian paradigm to externalise and mythologize his own psyche," contends Andrew Swarbrick in his analysis of the poem. "The poem's dreamlike picture of faraway coldness blending with sexual anxiety"

#### 4.2 THE LESS DECEIVED

"The Less Deceived" is comprised of 29 poems that have been arranged "with care" to mirror Larkin's own preference of order for the poetry found in his volumes. *XX Poems*, a privately produced collection that was released in 1951, marked the beginning of the mature Larkin's emergence, and *The Less Deceived* established without a reasonable doubt that he had arrived (which featured more than half of the *XX Poems*). The majority of Larkin readers agree that this is the author's most accomplished work.

Larkin changed one of the poems to 'Deceptions,' and he pushed the volume's original title. When George Hartley accepted the book for publishing, he protested about the feebleness of the title, so Larkin renamed one of the poems to 'Deceptions,' and he pushed the original title. To begin, we can take a look at that poem, which is distinctive among Larkin's other works in that it recounts the story of another person. Specifically, the poem starts with a historical occurrence that Larkin has been reading about in Henry

Mayhew's seminal work of interview journalism, *London Labour and the London Poor*, which was first published in 1851. This event serves as the poem's inciting incident. Mayhew's account of the young woman who was drugged and discovered the next morning that she had been 'ruined,' and 'cried like a child to be killed or sent back to my aunt,' is deeply moving, and almost any modern reader will sympathise with the victim: the first stanza of the poem, which is about her suffering and begins "Even so distant, I can taste the grief, / Bitter and sharp with stalks, he made you," is deeply moving and almost What more can be said save the fact that although the measurements provided by the pain are accurate, they will become incorrect if desire is in charge? You wouldn't mind if you were less deceived than he was as he was stumbling up the frantic stairs and out on that bed, would you? to force one's way into the empty attic that is satisfaction.

#### 4.3 MAIDEN NAME

After you were married, you stopped using your maiden name altogether.

You are unable to be semantically equivalent to that youthful beauty because the five light sounds it makes no longer represent your face, voice, and all of your variations of elegance. It is impossible for you to be linguistically equivalent to that youthful beauty because you were gratefully mistaken by law with someone else. These kind remarks were said to her with respect and appreciation. It is now a term that does not apply to anybody, even if it may be found among old lists, old programmes, a few school prizes, and bundles of letters wrapped in tartan ribbon.

Is it consequently void of smell, devoid of substance, lacking in power, and wholly dishonest? If you want to be less obvious, you could try whispering it instead.

Actually, it is talking about you. Or, it may imply what we think of you now, despite the fact that you are no longer with us: how gorgeous you were, how near you were, how young you were, and how vivid you were, and how you must still be there among those first few days, unmarked again. Your time-honored name serves as a shield for our commitment, which means that the shape and meaning of your bags will not be diminished.

This is a poem that has stood the test of time and is also quite original. There are a thousand poems written on how youthful beauty may fade with time, but there are very few poetry written about how women often change their names after getting married. Let's begin with the word "semantically," which serves as both the most important and the least important word in the poem. Let's look at how it works. the least important since, being the sole non-poetic touch in the poem, it functions as a footnote or parenthesis and is barely considered to be a part of the poetry itself;

rather, it is only a notification of the kind of remark that is being made. And it is the most crucial since it enlightens us to the fact that the meaning of the poem has already been expressed via words. According to postmodern poetic theory, the primary focus of poetry should be on language in and of itself, namely the unreliability of language. The traditional and language-loving poetry that Larkin writes is a rejection of this concept; nonetheless, this poem indicates that Larkin's poems are, in some weird way, a confirmation of this thought. Even though it is a sentimental poetry, it is also a cold and analytical exploration of the meaning of meaning. It is precise in its logic as it describes how words signify the past that no longer exists to our present consciousness.

#### 4.4 THE WHITSUN WEDDINGS

On February 28, 1964, Faber & Faber published a collection of 32 poems titled *The Whitsun Weddings* under their imprint. 'To produce a fluctuation of mood,' Larkin organised the 32 poems that are included in the book in such a fashion that if a person does not enjoy one poem, 'at least the next one will be different,' as the poems reflect a wide range of interest in a variety of topics. Andrew Motion analyses the major elements of the varied aspects possessed by *The Whitsun Weddings*, including the following: "The Whitsun Weddings is a more homogenous work than *The Less Deceived*, in which parts of Larkin's Yeatsian and symbolist ancestry rub against a simpler approach." — "The Whitsun Weddings is a more homogenous work than *The Less Deceived*."

Since Philip Larkin never got married and didn't have a house of his own until he was far over the age of 50, he spent the most of his adult life as a tenant in rented accommodation. This began in Wellington, where his first lodgings were claustrophobic, draughty, and lacking in privacy; as he became more prosperous, his lodgings naturally became more spacious, culminating in the comfortable flat in Pearson Park where he lived for eighteen years; however, he never lost the feeling of rootlessness, and one of his darkest and most potent poems, 'MrBleaney,' emerged from it: 'This was MrBleaney's room.' He didn't leave the Bodies the whole time he was there; in fact, they had to move him before he left. Curtains with flowers, thin and torn, fall to within five inches of the window sill of the room whose window reveals a length of tussocky, littered building area.

## V. CONCLUSION

After moving to Hull, Larkin began writing "The Northship" and "XX Poems (1951)," both of which were published in pamphlet form. In this collection, W. H. Auden and W. B. Yeats's profound impact is readily apparent;

nonetheless, as the book progresses, the author's voice develops into a more fully formed one. In the following piece of writing, the poet discusses the urge he has had throughout his life to dispel erroneous beliefs and illusions. His subsequent work is going to be titled "The Whitsun Weddings." The expression of post-war Britain may be seen in abundance across this collection of works. The book "The Whitsun Weddings" provides proof that the culture has evolved. The subsequent book, titled "The High Windows," demonstrates a more profound understanding of and direct concern with modern economic, political, and socio-cultural issue. The sexual revolution was given a significant amount of attention in the poems included in this anthology. After this collection, the poet does not create any more poetry of this kind, with the exception of the well-known piece "Aubade." Larkin is considered to be the most revered and renowned poet of all time. As a poet, he was given a number of accolades for his work. His well-known collections of prose writing are titled "A Girl in Winter" (1947), "Jill" (1964), "Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982" (1984), and "All What Jazz: A Record Dial 1961-1968." (1970).

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