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The Old Fools is primarily concerned with Larkin's fear of ageing and dying, a fear that pervades through the poems of High Windows. Using a slightly mocking tone, he attempts to understand the thoughts and feelings of the aged on the subject, but instead finds even more questions, and the inevitable realisation that " We will find out. " Death is a frequently occurring subject in High Windows: in The Building, Dublinesque, Vers de Societe and The Explosin he explores the inevitability of death and it's consequences on his state of mind. Often, the idea of a lack of consolation from organised religion is present within these poems.

Larkin, as an atheist, found little comfort in the idea of an afterlife, believing instead that " oblivion" was the eventual outcome for humankind: "... for unless its powers / Outbuild cathedrals, nothing contravenes / The coming dark... " Oblivion, as a general fate, is not all that appealing, yet Larkin manages to lift the spirit of The Old Fools with subtle touches of humour. The cynicism and sarcasm that he often uses in the collection do not detract from the more serious overtones of the poems, but they do 'lighten the mood', coupled with a use of more uplifting imagery that hints at non-Christian religion.

"... all the time merging with a unique endeavour / To bring to bloom the million petalled flower / Of being here... " The flower in this image is reminiscent of a Buddhist lotus flower, perhaps suggesting that although a Christian heaven cannot offer a solution, the Buddhist theory of reincarnation and natural regeneration could be more appropriate. It also ties closely to the imagery used in Solar, the " petalled head of flames" that stands as an

alternative idol to the traditional deity that Larkin refers to in *The Explosion* -

" The dead go on before us, they are sitting in God's house in comfort...

" Several other poems use 'nature' as a symbol of hope, and of 'life after death', most notably *The Trees*: " Their yearly trick of looking new Is written down in rings of grain. " This optimistic view does not seem to fit in with Larkin's fears about dying, but in actual fact the two sit well together throughout the collection, making the juxtaposition of the two ideas in *The Old Fools* fairly typical. The imagery of 'light', divided into natural and man-made categories, appears often in *High Windows*. Instances of both occur in *The Old Fools*, to different effects.

Artificial light, here provided by the " lamp" in the " lighted rooms inside [their] head[s]" suggests loneliness, as Larkin felt that the increase in 'modern' technology would isolate humans, playing out his deep fear of dying alone. The same image is used in *Vers de Societe*, where Larkin suffers a dilemma: attend a dinner party, and listen to " the drivel of some bitch / Who's read nothing but *Which...* " or to stay at home, sit under his lamp and contemplate his age. He chooses to attend the party, simply because " sitting by a lamp more often brings / Not peace, but other things...

" Sunlight, in *High Windows*, usually symbolizes serenity and tranquillity. In the third stanza of *The Old Fools*, it illuminates the 'rooms' inside the heads of the aged, making the image seem less miserable: "... the sun's / Faint friendliness on the wall some lonely / Midsummer evening... " Similarly to the eponymous *High Windows*, with their " sun-comprehending glass", this

image is uplifting and calm, but also carries with it the connotations of the poems' links to ageing and dying that are, apparently, inescapable.

The regular rhyme in *The Old Fools* is almost a trademark for Larkin - his carefully worked-out rhyme schemes are found throughout *High Windows*, and yet there are exceptions. *The Explosion*, for instance, has no rhyme scheme whatsoever, perhaps indicating Larkin's inability to believe in the God that offers the community their comfort. *Solar* also lacks a rhyme scheme, although it seems that in this case it is the presence of a comforting 'being' (the Sun) that elicits idolatry sufficient to bypass a rhyme scheme.

However, these two poems are in a minority, and regular, if at times subtle, rhyme schemes as in *The old Fools* are the norm for Larkin in *High Windows*. *The Old Fools*, however, does differ from the expectations of a 'typical' *High Windows* poem in some ways. The use of questions such as " Why aren't they screaming? " in the first stanza is not a technique Larkin favours, although it does occur in other poems. They have the function of conveying Larkin's uncertainty, and of making the reader question their own views on the subject, to re-evaluate their thoughts about death. By including the reader in the final line - " We shall find out.

" Larkin makes it impossible to ignore the fate waiting for all of us, at some point. On the whole, I feel that the slightly deviant factors of the poem are not outweighed by the typical features style and content, however, as a matter of principle I would like to state that I think calling any poem 'typical' is unfair. Each poem has its own subtle contours that define it as a single piece, and to generalise between poems, even from the same anthology, is

to overlook their worth as individual moments, captured and articulated by the poet. As Larkin himself wrote: " I believe that every poem should be its own sole freshly created universe. "