

What connections
have you found
between the ways in
which larkin and abse
write a...

[Life](#), [Death](#)



Both Larkin and Abse write about death in a way which suggests to the reader that it's an overriding concern in their life. Although this is more explicitly expressed through Larkin's poems, the fact it is a dominant theme in Abse's 'Welsh Retrospective' is evidence in itself that such fear existed in his mind. Both poets go on to explore the effect of death draining life of its worth. Larkin seems to relate to death more universally, as perhaps the only common feature he shared with the people around him. Through the collection, Larkin suggests that life offers nothing to us, other than death. The narrative of the poem 'Mr Bleaney' is of the persona replacing Mr Bleaney's existence by moving into his old room: " I lie/ Where Mr Bleaney lay". This gives the reader a sense of one person moving out leading to replacement and being forgotten; this perhaps is parallel to the idea of death. The language in " Mr Bleaney" conveys death for both Mr Bleaney and the voice of the poem, as the speaker related himself to the former tenant. " One hired box" connotes coffins and death but is actually a description of the small room; this is similar to " They moved him" which suggests the transportation of a dead body, but in fact refers to a change in jobs. It's important that Larkin set this morbid tone to suggest that death is always in the background of the persona's mind and to accentuate the realisation which the persona faces after moving into Mr Bleaney's old room. He " stood and watched the frigid wind" like he supposes Mr Bleaney once did and wondered if he " warranted no better." Despite reading as if the persona is pondering over Mr Bleaney's life, as a reader it seems more plausible that the voice of the poem is actually viewing his life through the former tenants.

He is able to relate to him through death and worthless existence, as it's a shared feature of humanity. He's questioning whether he- like Mr Bleaney- truly deserves a tiny " box" room with unfulfilling and incomplete features such as frayed curtains which " Fall to within five inches of the sill". This in an image of incompleteness, and is a metaphor for the unsatisfactory life of Mr Bleaney and the present resident. The poem ends with the understanding that " I don't know" and if we relate this with the background hints of death it seems the persona- and Larkin- don't know if they deserve more than they see around them. Why? The poem may be suggesting that with death being a constant possibility, ever present in one's mind, how can we know what we deserve in life if to live is to die? This is a morbid outlook, but it seems nothing really holds much worth- including yourself- if we merely just die and thus after death our former life is purposeless; die like Mr Bleaney's presence. Dannie Abse reflects Larkin's outlook through the perspective of his dead cousin in " My Cousin, the Soldier". Returning as ghost, the persona becomes aware of his invisibility, perhaps symbolic of having been forgotten; erased from people's minds. This is visually illustrated as " a stranger stepped in front of him" and could not physically see him. Furthermore, the word " stranger" informs the reader that his old life is non-existent, also shown through the disappearance of an " energetic Dalmatian". It also links with " My Bleaney" as presumably another family have moved into his former house; replaced the previous lives. The three stanzas in the voice of the cousin end on the word " changed" and we're left with the implication that his entire life has moved on and the depressing thought that his life was

worthless, if after death he was merely forgotten and his existence vanished. Mr Bleaney was simply erased from his satisfactory life and what happened to Abse's cousin seems much the same. Although Larkin initially attempts to focus on the past through "Dockery and Son" by visiting his old university, he's both physically and mentally "Locked." out of this endeavour and, not surprisingly, begins to take focus on the future, inevitable passing of time and "how much had gone of life". The words "Locked." and "ignored." are a potent reminder of the inaccessibility of the past and, I suppose, leave the persona nothing else to look to other than the future. Instead of feeling nostalgic, he becomes aware of the emptiness of his present and potential life after learning about Dockery's son; his life-"no son, no wife,/No house or land"- in contrast to Dockery who "must have taken stock/Of what he wanted". The voice cannot seem to reach a decision as to whose life is more fulfilling, deciding that children meant "dilution" and implying he is in the higher position. He explores the notion that our lives are purposeless due to our desires warping "tight-shut, like doors.". If our aspirations become closed off, then surely our lives become empty and without worth. He closes the poem with "Life is first boredom, then fear." which could be interpreted as the transition from not having a path to follow in life, to being anxious as to never achieve it. Both states seem rather unfulfilling, yet what Larkin shows he is ultimately certain about is the inevitability of death. "And age, and the only the end of age" tells the reader than whatever happens in life, to be frank, we get old and we die. We can see him visually taking a different path to other's as the track is "joining and parting", but he reaches an

understanding that this is irrelevant; it's still a journey with an end. Our life may have already seemed worthless but of that he couldn't be sure.

However, Larking makes it clear throughout this poem and many others that he believes death is inevitable and the one thing which seemed to make him ever-aware of life being a purposeless existence. Abse's cousin "Closed it." and Larkin sees the doors "warp tight-shut". Shutting is our past, our life's purpose and our desires. They shut because both poets understand that to live is to die, therefore our life is worthless even before it's over; even before we've moved on. We cannot escape death; Larkin and Abse were especially conscious of this, hence why it's an overriding theme in both poet's work.