

Philip larkin's images

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



Stanza forms and images in Philip Larkin The various fields of art, just as all ways of life, in the twentieth century were deeply impacted by the horrifying experiences of the two world wars and especially the second one. English poetry was not an exception either. " Among the poets of this time there is often a sense of tiredness, of things being worn out, and of helplessness in the face of world events which they had no power to change or influence, so that the strongest poems are often those which describe personal experiences rather than world events." (Thornley & Roberts 191-192) Poets who share the same social and political events may share a relatively similar outlook on them. They may share the same experiences, yet they always see things filtered through their individual lenses dealing with themes such as love, religion, birth, life and death. Philip Larkin is one of the best-known figures developing this poetical attitude towards the events of the past century. He was an outstanding poet in the " tradition of quietness", and represents a form of poetry in which " there is a sense that reality is dull and unattractive but that living through a dream is equally impossible. Real happiness seems only to have happened in the past..." (Thornley & Roberts 195) The main aim of this essay is to explore how two of Larkin's dominant images, (passing) time and religion are deployed in his poems to express the complexity of his sensing the modern world and how the stanza forms serve this intention. Philip Larkin's poems usually start from a chance of observation, a conversation or a concrete experience. These events serve as an origin for the poet to form a general, universal statement. " At Grass" is an example of the expression of Larkin's deeply-rooted pessimism depicting the images of passing time and loneliness in old age. Also, according to

Blake Morrison, the poem is "more than an emotion about racehorses in old age". He claims this is "one of the most popular post-war poems...by allowing the horses to symbolise loss of power. Larkin manages to tap nostalgia for a past glory that was England." (Reagan) The poem contrasts the state of race-horses and his attitude towards them by depicting two periods - the memorable and glorious past and the dark, gloomy present. You can be young, strong and celebrated but one day you will surely decline and, as he believes, memories will vanish just like flies from the ears of the horses with a mere shaking of the head. You will be neglected and lonely. This is Larkin's philosophy conveyed in the text. The poem consists of five stanzas containing six lines each. The stanzas follow a fixed rhyme scheme having the first three lines rhyme with the last three lines (i. e. abc abc, def def etc.). The only exception is the third (or middle) stanza in which the rhyme pattern is ggh ggh. This stanza is followed by a rhetorical question: "Do memories plague their ears like flies?" To me, it seems to be a rather sudden shift from the impressive descriptive voice into the rhetorical style. As if Larkin is to throw the readers out from the position of a passive listener and enforce them to respond on his meditation. The pairs of alliterative words (e. g. shade and shelter, fable and faint) further improve the musical quality of the lines. In human life, passing time always assumes death whether we realize it or not. Nonetheless, "Larkin never uses death as a lever to urge people to improve their lives. It is simply always there, a 'fact of life' to be taken into account, casting its shadow over everything." (Without Metaphysics) Once however, death is considered, it seems unavoidable to face a number of questions. What is beyond death? What is the role of

religious faith in our life? And anyway, must faith necessarily involve religious formality? Religion and Christian faith are central issues for many of Larkin's poems. " Church Going" discusses the diminishing role of Christian formality in our modern life while " The Explosion" provides a meditative exploration of his own religious faith. In " Church Going", the poet is " unable to believe in the transforming power of traditional Christian faith, yet affirms the sacramental power churches hold on human imagination. ...Thus, Church Going is one of Larkin's poems where the visionary moment is most nearly realized and least tempered by scepticism."(King) The main theme of the poem is the role and importance of traditional, formal religion in our " modern" life. As is so typical of Larkin, a seemingly objective description of the place introduces the poem. The description of the church is full of carefully chosen details which somewhat underlies the speaker's (the poet's) attitude towards the changing role of religion. The language of the poem at the beginning has no complex structures, the speaker simply lists the objects in a rather informal style. Larkin doubts whether religion and religious faith has the same importance in our modern world as it had in those days when the church was erected. Still, as the speaker gradually shifts into a more meditative and visionary tone we can feel the mysterious atmosphere of the place which has for centuries made those who enter the church long for some more " serious" experience. Even the language of the closing stanza is highly elevated and dignified as to signal the conclusion of the poet. Larkin's " The Explosion" is not a less impressive example of how a mortal man battles his doubts about the idea of life and death, religion and faith. To me, this is the poem in which Larkin gives us solid proof of faith and his religious

beliefs. Throughout the poem, Larkin himself does not release his own doubts whether there is or there is not eternal life after death. There is only one thing which is sure: life goes on, no matter what happens. And we, on Earth can merely hope for resurrection. This hope of the poet's is embodied in the symbol of the unbroken eggs. " Technically, there is much to admire in " The Explosion" ...the deft secularization of Dante's terza rima, partly effected by refusing end-rhyme; the quietly confident handling of trochaic meter...". (Smith) Sources 1. Thornley, G. C. and Roberts, Gwyneth. An Outline of ENGLISH LITERATURE. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001 2. Reagan, Stephen. Philip Larkin's England. [2006. 05. 10] <http://www.britishcouncil.org/graphics/morbsnph.htm> 3. Without Metaphysics: The poetry of Philip Larkin. [2006. 05. 12] <http://www.sogang.ac.kr/~anthony/Larkin.htm> 4. King, Don W. Sacramentalism in the poetry of Philip Larkin. [2006. 05. 12] <http://www.montreat.edu> 5. Smith, Ron. Larkin's Eggs. [2006. 05. 20] http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v5n1/nonfiction/smith_r/guitar_2.htm