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"HERE" / "ELSEWHERE":

A THEME IN THE POEMS OF PHILIP LARKIN

A Thesis Submitted to the University of Wales

by

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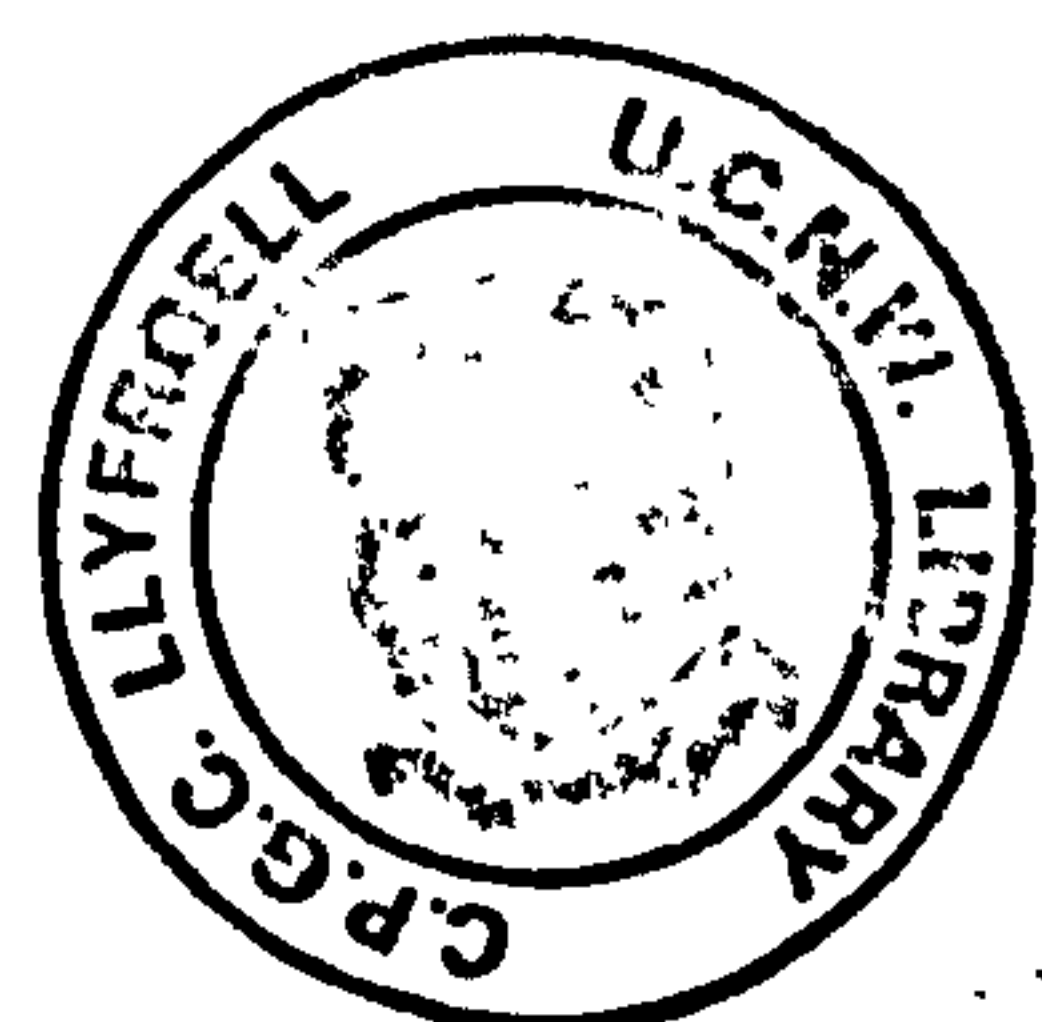
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ABSTRACT

The poems of Philip Larkin seem at first uniquely self-centred, concentrating emphatically on a picture of the character of the poet himself, to a point where the life and times of this character, objectively described and defined by his actions, seem to dominate the poems.

Yet despite the unusually high profile of the poet himself (or "himself"), Larkin's work is very far from self-centred. On the contrary, running through the poems is a pronounced inclination to look less to the self than to things other, less to the real than to the ideal, less to the near than to the remote: to look, in short, not "Here" but "Elsewhere."

The centrifugal structure in which thoughts of the self give way to thoughts of things other has two main expressions: the social and the transcendent. In looking away from the self to the lives of others--the social expression--the poet draws the kind of contrast which serves, very often, only to underline a sense of separation between the self and others.

There is similarly a gap at the heart of those poems--mainly later works--which compare real life with a notional ideal, or contrast presence with absence. The same centrifugal impulse is at work in these contrasts, though its expression might be called transcendent or metaphysical. The common ground is the comparison between self and not-self.

These contrasts are examined here from a variety of angles: Chapter One concentrates on a semantic approach, Chapter Two on a metaphorical, and Chapter Three on a linguistic analysis. The fourth chapter examines the role of the theme in Larkin's prose fiction, and the fifth applies the theme to the single subject of love.

The closing chapter then relates the conclusion reached in the poems--that the separation of "Here" from "Elsewhere" is unalterable, and indeed should be relished--to the tradition to which it belongs, which is the Romantic tradition.

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INTRODUCTION: PHILIP LARKIN'S "SEMANTIC GAP."

Literary analysis in the twentieth century--especially, perhaps, the analysis of poetry--has been most notable for its preoccupation with paradox, ambiguity and irony. Paradox, argues Cleanth Brooks,

is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry. It is the scientist whose truth requires a language purged of every trace of paradox; apparently the truth which the poet utters can only be approached in terms of paradox. [1]

Brooks's analysis is somewhat reticent: his argument suggests, if only by extension, that art will accomplish those tasks left undone by science, rather than setting its own agenda. There is nothing reticent, however, about William Empson's espousal of ambiguity as a poetic value: asking whether "all good poetry [is] supposed to be ambiguous," Empson answers in the most straightforward way: "I think that it is" [2] This view prefaces Empson's seminal analysis of the subject, Seven Types of Ambiguity--a volume which espouses the view, as Geoffrey Thurley comments, that

degree of complexity and / or ambiguity is practically equivalent to degree of excellence--

and regards the best poetry as a "compact of balancing and self-righting complexities." [3]

Thus, whereas such phenomena as propaganda and politics, advertising, the law and, indeed, science set out to convey a single message with a single meaning, the best poetry advances two or more meanings, which it succeeds in harmonizing. In I.A. Richards' analysis, it is this co-existence of positive and negative that distinguishes the best poetry from the rest. In his Principles of Literary Criticism, he draws a distinction between those kinds of poetry which leave out the opposite and discordant qualities of the experience and, on the other side, poetry in which the imagination includes them, resolving the apparent discords, and gaining a larger, more convincing unity--an "equilibrium," as Richards describes it, "of opposed impulses" in which the reader ceases "to be orientated in one definite direction" [4] And this "equilibrium" constitutes, he believes, a "ground-plan of the most valuable aesthetic responses"

F.W. Bateson's "Principle of the Semantic Gap" develops the consensus described above. Indeed, Bateson takes his terms direct from Richards: "However brilliant the details," he argues,

no poem can be considered a good one unless the basic social attitudes implied or expressed are genuinely 'opposite' or 'discordant.' [5]

The terms may be Richards', but the manner is bolder, less descriptive than prescriptive. Bateson draws a

straightforward equation between quality and discordance, then adds an "additional requirement":

that the two social attitudes be more or less equally matched. A poem in which the outcome is a foregone conclusion ... cannot engage the reader's interested cooperation. [6]

For these critics and the school of thought they founded, the position, then, is straightforward: the best poetry is ambiguous, and ambiguous poetry is the best. Or, as W.H. Auden puts it:

The Truth is one and incapable of self-contradiction;
All knowledge that conflicts with itself
is Poetic Fiction. [7]

It is to "knowledge that conflicts with itself" that the most influential literary criticism in this century has been drawn.

Against this background, it is not surprising that critics have been much given to ask whether any "Semantic Gap" underwrites the poetry of Philip Larkin. What is more surprising is the lack of unanimity in their findings. When a critic like John Wain argues that Larkin "sees landscape and people unremittingly as they are," he suggests that truth has a single dimension which the poems faithfully ("unremittingly") record. [8] There is little room, it seems, for any ambiguity in such a plain-speaking poetic. Simon Petch takes a similar view when he argues that Larkin's clarity issues in "holding a mirror up to nature and saying plainly and unflinchingly what it reflects." [9]

Truth is singular, such analyses suggest, and Larkin's poems set out, "unremittingly" and "unflinchingly," to convey it.

Both Petch and Wain may be numbered among the poet's admirers--Larkin's apparently unflinching manner with the truth is evidently among his great virtues in their eyes. But the view that the poet takes a robust course with his own material does not invariably please those who hold it. Blake Morrison believes that "Larkin's poetry minimizes the interpretative process by including it within the text":

what is inferred by the reader is limited by what has already been inferred by the speaker The reader is 'helped' (he cannot be confused as to what the poem means), but he is also restricted (the only meaning he takes away from the poem is the one found for him by the speaker). [10]

It is fair to say that in Morrison's analysis, Larkin's poems are often underwritten by doubt, and rarely vindicate their own speakers. The poet, says Morrison, "rarely allows his speakers to present their case convincingly" [11] At the same time (as he says here) the poems do not always allow such doubts to be shared by their readers: the reader "cannot be confused." Christopher Miller offers a more pejorative analysis. In his view, Larkin's manner is

the sententious tone of one intervening in the chaotic discussions of his juniors to bring a little order, sense and observation into their lives. [12]

Such "order" and "sense" as the poet dispenses seem unlikely to indulge the ambiguity and irony valued by the literary consensus described above. Evidence of semantic gaps (to recall Bateson's phrase) seems unlikely, on this evidence,

to be widespread.

But not all Larkin's critics regard his poetry--for better or worse--as bent "unremittingly" (in Wain's phrase) on an "only meaning" (in Morrison's). Indeed, a good number are willing to testify that many of the poems--especially, perhaps, the later works--are monuments to obscurity rather than lucidity and diffuseness rather than plain-speaking. "While wanting to be just the reverse," says Clive James in a review of Larkin's final collection, High Windows, "Larkin can on occasion be a difficult poet" [13] Difficulty is not, perhaps, something one would normally associate with Larkin, but Barbara Everett, widening the argument, sees the alleged "obscurity" of the late poems as a return to an earlier manner, that of Larkin's first collection, The North Ship:

It is, in fact, the obscurities of High Windows--though they are also its lucidities--which throw light on an aspect of Larkin's verse that has surely always been there. [14]

Everett's analysis is a long way from Morrison's. But she takes the view that Larkin's purpose is not to interpret or re-organise experience (as Morrison argues), nor indeed to bring "order" to it (as Miller believes), but rather to embody it in all its variety and disorder. [15] One result of this is described by David Lodge:

Many of Larkin's most characteristic poems end with a kind of eclipse of meaning, speculation fading out in the face of the void. [16]

Thus, whereas Morrison addresses himself to "the only meaning" of the typical poem, Lodge, by contrast, comments on the characteristic "eclipse of meaning." It might seem that two quite different poets are under discussion: between the unremitting clarity observed by Wain to the difficulty discerned by James, there seems to be no clear connection.

Even so, neither the school of plain-speaking (so to say) nor the school of obscurity and difficulty sees in Larkin's work much evidence of irony and ambiguity of a kind expected by literary critics like Brooks. But many critics have drawn attention--explicitly or otherwise--to ambiguities in Larkin's poems. The tone of the poetry, says Alun Jones, is

a delicate and precise irony continually undercutting the composure of the poem, largely self-directed but also used as a defensive intelligence through which to define the ambiguity of his attitude. [17]

The idea that Larkin's attitudes are ambiguous might almost suggest that a third poet has arrived to join Larkin the plain-speaking and Larkin the obscure. It is nevertheless a view which many critics share. Neil Powell concedes that "Larkin is frequently accused of being negative," but he also observes that

the negatives almost invariably imply both the existence and the co-existence of a positive. [18]

The argument is developed by Terry Whalen. Describing Larkin as an "ironic realist," Whalen suggests that the poet's instinct for irony and scepticism is itself

underwritten by

an ambiguity which is dramatised in the moments of wonder which are central to the more romantic poems in his mature volumes. [19]

In short, the poet's irony co-exists with his capacity for wonder: it is itself an ambiguous arrangement, a precarious linking of opposites that answers to Bateson's "Principle of the Semantic Gap."

But in practice Whalen does more than merely affirm the poet's impulse for ambiguity here: as can be seen, he aims also to summarise something of the character of this impulse. Whalen argues that Larkin's true position may be discerned somewhere between a preoccupation with realism and scepticism on one side and, on the other, a propensity for "wonder." In relating Larkin's work to Classicism and Romanticism--and, in particular, to T.E. Hulme's analysis of these two traditions--Whalen argues that

Larkin's tendency is to record his moment of mystical flight and at the same time hold back from the 'swing along to the infinite nothing.' [20]

The suggestion here is that Larkin is a Classicist--but a reluctant one: that he is fundamentally a frustrated Romantic. For, as Hulme himself argues, the acceptance of limits lies at the heart of the Classical tradition. Thus, as Whalen says,

What we have [in Larkin's work] is ... the possibility of a creative-imaginative poetry of restraint, a poetry of passing wonder. [21]

That is, a poetry in which wonder locks horns with restraint, and in which the impulse for release does battle with the conviction that release is out of reach.

The terms of Whalen's analysis have a convincing ring. Larkin's poetry is certainly much possessed with ideas of "restraint" on one side and "wonder" on the other: a semantic gap, in short, between the real and the imagined. Much of the latter arises, as Whalen himself suggests, out of the poet's weakness for

gesturing toward an eternal land of the spirit. [22]

That is, the poems investigate the possibility of a kind of para-universe in which the merely physical aspect of life is replaced by some kind of spiritual existence, free and beyond dimensions. Yet as Whalen suggests, hopes of discovering such an existence are typically restrained by the poet's ultimate bias towards realism and scepticism.

On the face of it, this analysis seems unobjectionable. Indeed, one might well go further than Whalen, and observe that there exists a small number of poems in the canon--"The Whitsun Weddings" is one such, "Here" a second--in which the poet's "wonder" is so strong as to balance his characteristic bias towards "restraint," so that the poem does indeed seem almost to "swing along" (in Hulme's phrase) "to the infinite nothing." There is little evidence of scepticism at the conclusion of such poems. But still, they are firmly in the minority. It is a good deal more characteristic to find wonder reined in and restrained by

the poet's scepticism, as Whalen argues.

Whalen's discussion of this tension between wonder and restraint, however, is briefly and somewhat vaguely concluded. He refers to the "possibility" of a certain kind of poetry, but he omits to explain how far the possibility is acted on and taken up by the poems themselves. Moreover, when he speaks of "gesturing toward" a spiritual otherworld, he does not quite conceal his own doubts how far such lands are available to the poet--and if they are, how determined the poet may be to reach them.

This impression of uncertainty on the critic's part is reinforced by the first example he presents as evidence of Larkin's spiritual "gesturing," which is "Church Going." However else it is read, "Church Going" cannot be regarded as a poem of "wonder." On the contrary, it belongs with that group of poems written before the publication of The Less Deceived (1955) in which wonder is specifically suppressed. The poet sees the church as a straightforwardly secular and temporal institution, a social phenomenon whose function was once to hold together

what since is found
Only in separation--marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these [CP, 98]

The poet visits the church--evidently a place of "wonder"--mainly in order to broadcast the inaccessibility of things mysterious, and to reclaim the "special shell" of the church for this world--not some other. This "isn't a religious poem," says Larkin. [23] And it is difficult to disagree

with him.

In the context of the poet's dilemma between wonder and restraint, then, "Church Going" is an exception. After all, even in so conducive an atmosphere as the "special shell" of the church, the poem still refuses to sanction thoughts of otherworlds, and concentrates instead on this. Any idea of "wonder" is subject, then, to the most emphatic "restraint." Between these two poles, it is a mightily unequal struggle, and one in which the poet's empirical convictions triumph comprehensively.

Whalen's second example of the semantic gap between the physical and the spiritual is more informative, however, because this example, "High Windows," helps to clarify the first of the questions raised above: how far an "eternal land of the spirit" is available. The core theme of "High Windows" is that hopes of attaining "paradise" and the spiritual otherworld--whether through love or faith in God--are simply misplaced and doomed to failure. This view is summarised in the closing verse. In presenting a vignette of release there, the poet also advances a metaphor for our worldly separation from things otherworldly--a metaphor, that is, for the inaccessibility of the land of the spirit:

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
The sun-comprehending glass,
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless. [CP, 165]

The world "beyond" the glass has a dizzying appeal, but the glass underlines the conviction addressed throughout "High Windows" that in this world, human kind remains remote and

isolated from worlds spiritual, dimension-free and infinite.

The poet's refusal to give "wonder" a hearing in "Church Going," combined with the conviction expressed in "High Windows" that things spiritual are out of reach, may suggest that any battles fought out in these poems between wonder and restraint will prove unequal at best. This suggestion, however, is inaccurate. There are poems in the canon in which something close to eternity and infinity is almost reached, in which the limits of existence (in Hulme's terms) are very nearly outwitted and outflanked. "Here," as was mentioned, is a case of this:

And past the poppies bluish neutral distance
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach
Of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:
Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach. [CP, 136]

As in "High Windows," the vision of freedom and eternity is a vision of "unfenced existence." And again, this vision belongs "beyond" the limit of the real and tangible, the worldly. Yet in "Here" the poet comes close to transcending such obstacles as divide the self from release, and in doing so almost reaches a place that is "out of reach." This poem is mentioned here as a parenthesis, evidence that Larkin's "gesturing toward an eternal land of the spirit" is at times more than mere gesturing.

"Church Going" was written in 1954, "Here" in 1961, and "High Windows" in 1967. Taken together, the three poems suggest that though a consistent preoccupation of Larkin's poetry is the dilemma between the empirical and the

spiritual, nevertheless the poet's treatment of this dilemma is anything but consistent. As it happens, these three poems accurately represent the three chief stages of Larkin's preoccupation with this theme. In the relatively early works, composed before the publication of The Less Deceived, the poet seems determined to avoid any reference to things eternal, spiritual, infinite or free of dimensions. "Church Going" is a case in point. In Larkin's "middle period," however, which ends with the publication of The Whitsun Weddings in 1964, the spiritual often closes in on the material and physical, or (as happens in "Here") the worldly often leads the poet close to the otherworldly. In the later poems, as "High Windows" may suggest, things spiritual are as prominent as things temporal, but the two dimensions occupy different worlds, and are clearly separated from one another.

Whalen's analysis, then, though brief and somewhat impressionistic, conveys a great deal of truth. Moreover, his examples, though ostensibly miscast in the roles he assigns them, do play pivotal roles in the question he raises. But "High Windows" is representative of rather more than the single dilemma between the worldly and the otherworldly. In the first place, it offers a vital clue--whose applicability throughout the poems is general--as to the character of Larkin's otherworld. The glass described in the closing verse does more than merely separate the poet from release. It also defines him and his territory, the territory of the physical self. In the process the poem

suggests that among the beauties of that otherworld "beyond" the glass is the poet's own absence from it.

This analysis is confirmed by an assessment of the poem made by the poet himself:

One longs for infinity and absence, the beauty of somewhere you're not. It ["High Windows"] shows humanity as a series of oppressions, and one wants to be somewhere where there's neither oppressed nor oppressor, just freedom. [24]

The equation of "freedom" with "absence" and of "beauty" with "somewhere you're not" demonstrates the delicacy of the equilibrium, the poise of the arrest, at the end of "Here." In the closing lines of that poem, the poet is both present and absent as he inhabits an atmosphere apparently reachable yet "out of reach." The contrast with "High Windows" is clear: by the late poems, the obstacles which separate the self from freedom are very prominent; moreover, a large measure of that freedom is, indeed, freedom from the self.

Larkin's own assessment of "High Windows," however, is notable in another sense. The semantic gap between imprisonment and freedom is a contrast between here (the poet's territory) and "somewhere": or, as the poem itself says, "nowhere." That is to say, the poet conveys this contrast between "restraint" and "wonder" (or between the self and freedom, or between presence and absence, or between this side of the glass and the world "beyond") as a topographical contrast. Rather than casts of mind, then, or conditions of existence, these are places. They are separated from one another by the pane of glass to which the

last verse draws attention. The world "beyond" the glass is the goal: the poet's sense of being incarcerated in himself is matched only by his hunger for the place that excludes him.

The poet's doubts about whether to describe this place as "nowhere" (as he does in the poem) or "somewhere" (as he does in prose) are a measure of his many doubts about the condition being described: whether it exists in any meaningful sense; how to reach it if it does; and whether reaching it is desirable, given the sacrifice this entails, the loss of the place here. Yet his fascination with the place he calls "somewhere" does indeed remain a permanent feature of the poems. In "The Whitsun Weddings" the point of epiphany is again "somewhere": fulfilment is an "arrow-shower"

Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain. [CP, 116]

Similarly in "Sad Steps," the world of adolescence and love

Can't come again,
But is for others undiminished somewhere. [CP, 169]

In "Sad Steps," such a world is symbolised for the poet by the moon, from which, as in "High Windows," he is separated by a pane of glass. In the early poem "Wires," the same idea is conveyed in a slightly different way: freedom, says the poet, exists

Not here but anywhere. [CP, 42]

Such a place, whatever it contains, is "Beyond the wires."

In "The Importance of Elsewhere," of course, the ideal otherworld is "Elsewhere." And, as "Wires" makes plain, the most prominent absentee from the various worlds beyond the wires, or glass, is the poet himself.

At the heart of Larkin's semantic gap, then, is the dilemma of presence and absence: a real dilemma for a poet uniquely given, as Larkin is, to make the personal and intimate the currency of his work. The dilemma is presented as a choice between two places. Indeed, to adopt the terms of the poems themselves, the poet's dilemma is between "Here" and "Elsewhere." "Here" constitutes the poet's own way of life, his cast of mind, his assumptions and expectations, his poetic personality. To these the poems draw continual attention, for the poet's profile in the poems is unusually--perhaps uniquely--high. "Elsewhere," by contrast, is the poet's own absence, the prospect of freedom, the thought of things other than the self. In "Church Going" there is no sense of an "Elsewhere," and this poem (to recall Hulme's picture of all Classical poetry) is entirely "mixed up with earth." [25] "High Windows," by contrast, is a reminder that the comparison between two kinds of world is a mainstay of the poems in general. Indeed, there are times when these two worlds dove-tail with one another, so that the spiritual otherworld comes within reach. "Here" is an example of this.

This contrast between worlds has been presented hitherto almost on a metaphysical level. The poet's hunger for the beauty of somewhere he isn't is a hunger for a

transcendent dimension to experience. Yet as "Church Going" suggests, Larkin's eyes are no strangers to ground level. That is to say, just as the poet looks away from himself and peers up into the sky in poems like "High Windows" and "Here" in his search for transcendence, so very often he looks away from himself not upwards, but outwards: to other people, and the way they lead their lives.

Here, too, "High Windows" is representative:

When I see a couple of kids
And guess [CP, 165]

The poet watches others and hazards guesses in an attempt to cross a second kind of semantic gap--between himself and others--which is secular rather than spiritual, but which obeys the same principle as that which underwrites the closing verse of "High Windows": the attempt to bridge the gap that separates self from not-self. Moreover, in doing so, he watches himself as he watches others and draws attention to the act of looking:

Struck, I leant
More promptly out next time, more curiously,
And saw it all again

as he recalls in "The Whitsun Weddings" [CP, 115]. Or, in "Mr Bleaney":

But if he stood and watched [CP, 102]

The poet himself surely does so. "I Remember, I Remember" is a case in point:

I leant far out, and squinnied for a sign
That this was still the town
 that had been 'mine' [CP, 81]

The emphasis is less on looking, in many of these poems,
than on looking out--

 looking out to see the moon thinned
To an air-sharpened blade [CP, 181]

--as if not even the sight of places other than the poet's own environment can relieve his sense of being imprisoned in the self. So once again, in the process of looking, he casts his eyes from presence to absence, from self to other, and from "Here" to "Elsewhere." When critics like Wain and Petch draw attention to the poet's hard gaze, they do so partly because the poet so often draws attention to this himself.

The poet's examination of other people together with his impulse for drawing comparisons between himself and those he sees constitutes, perhaps, an aspect of his loneliness, his separation from others. His own environment, which this thesis will describe as "Here," is on the whole an isolated place. Comparisons with others establish some kind of vicarious community, a brief closing of the gap between "Here" on one side and, on the other, that aspect of "Elsewhere" which, because it consists of other people, this thesis will describe as "social": the social "Elsewhere." As a very general rule, of which "Church Going" is an example, Larkin's "social" interests dominate his earlier poems, whereas his "transcendent" or

spiritual compulsions dominate the later works. There is a gradual raising of the poet's eyes, then, over the course of his career, from ground level to the sky. Of this trend over the poems as a whole, "High Windows," which enacts just this movement, drifting from the "couple of kids" to the "sun-comprehending glass," is again representative.

The poet's own territory, by contrast with these two types of "Elsewhere," the social type and the transcendent, is simpler to define. It is lonely, as, indeed, "Church Going" and "High Windows" suggest, an isolated existence. Yet it is also structured, dependable and familiar--with all the advantages and disadvantages this suggests. Above all, perhaps, it is safe. There is nothing "unfenced" about this existence, as there is about "Elsewhere." The appeal of an unfenced existence (or, indeed, non-existence) is obvious enough in such circumstances. But so too is the danger.

At all events, because "Elsewhere" constitutes a release from the self and the self's territory, and because (more generally) these two worlds are antithetical to one another and mutually exclusive, "Here" must be forfeited if "Elsewhere" is to come within reach. This thesis will ask whether the gap between "Here" and "Elsewhere" closes, so as to bring "Elsewhere" within reach. It will ask whether, ultimately, the poet desires to close the gap, and to reach "Elsewhere," if this means abandoning "Here." And it will ask where the solution to the dilemma leaves Larkin in relation to a tradition in poetry--the Romantic tradition--in which limits are conventionally rejected, or outwitted.

It is most sensible, however, to begin with an analysis of the poet himself, the life, assumptions and values ascribed to him in the poems, and the terms on which these are presented: in short, an analysis of "Here."

CHAPTER ONE: THE SELF AND THE OTHER IN LARKIN'S POEMS.

i. The prominence of the self: a theoretical analysis.

"Our major device of order," argues Jonathan Culler in his analysis of the reader's approach to a given poem,

is, of course, the notion of the person or speaking subject, and the process of reading is especially troubled when we cannot construct a subject who would serve as source of the poetic utterance. [1]

The "process of reading"--by this analysis--has never been more troubled than in this century. The reader who seeks to picture the source of much twentieth-century poetic utterance will often have to be content, not with a single "speaking subject," but with a wide variety of them:

Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.
Tereu

Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon [2]

Poetry of this kind, which appeals to models of "impersonality," defies the reader's attempts to construct a consistent source for the utterance as a whole. The Waste Land is spoken not by one voice but by many, and in being

so, frustrates the reader's attempts to construct a single speaking subject or poetic persona. It is the "poetic persona," Culler argues, that "fulfils the unifying role" in a given poem,

and even poems which make it difficult to construct a poetic persona rely for their effects on the fact that the reader will try to construct an enunciative posture. [3]

But here again the reader of The Waste Land is likely to be frustrated, because there is no more a single enunciative posture in the poem than there is a single speaking subject. Yet Eliot was apparently alive to the reader's need for a unifying speaker, persona or posture: "Tiresias," he explains in his note on line 218 of the poem,

although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. [4]

The unity Tiresias confers is conceptual and abstract: it is certainly not his voice that speaks throughout the poem. In adding this note, Eliot seems to honour the reader's need, in approaching a poem, for a unifying element of some kind.

But whereas a poem like The Waste Land frustrates the reader's appetite for a single speaking subject, Larkin's poetry might be said to over-indulge it. His typical practice has little in common with ideas of "impersonality." Indeed, the connection suggested by Everett between Larkin and Eliot is a negative one, a reversal:

the whole address of Larkin's poems to the reader, is

that of a vivid and actual being who is the reverse of the 'Invisible Poet' (Kenner's phrase for Eliot) invented by Modernism's quest for Impersonality. [5]

Thus whereas in general--as Culler argues--it is the reader who constructs the "speaking subject" if (s)he is able to do so, in Larkin's work, by contrast, the poet (or "the poet") is principally the creation of the poem and its author. Moreover, this "vivid and actual" speaking subject was created by its author, Everett argues, as a kind of rejoinder to the idea of impersonality: it required, she speculates,

the presence of a doctrinal impersonality to encourage the poet to 'go and do unlikewise' [6]

It is chiefly on the linked questions of the "speaking subject" and the "unifying role" that the issue lies. In The Waste Land the unifying role is fulfilled by a figure who, in the poet's view, is not a "'character'" in the poem, although his voice, of course, is heard. In Larkin's most characteristic poems, however, the poet ("the poet") plays precisely the role of the central character, and his experiences frequently unify the poem. Patrick Swinden draws attention to

the presence of the poet, Larkin, as a character in his own poem, and not such a different character, we feel, to what we judge to be the real character of the poet [7]

This, as Swinden points out, can only be a judgement. But as this chapter will show, it is not only that this "character" appears in the given poem, but also that

frequently he is the only character to do so. In short, it is often less a question of his "presence" than of his prominence, indeed dominance. At the same time, the suspicion inevitably arises that the "character" and the author of the poem are not quite the same man.

Swinden's remarks refer specifically to a single poem, "Dockery and Son." There, the actions of the "character" of the poet are detailed with striking but characteristic detachment. The poet muses here on the rapid and often unproductive passing of time, a theme for which his actions serve as a metaphor:

Well, it just shows
How much ... How little ... Yawning, I suppose
I fell asleep, waking at the fumes
And furnace-glares of Sheffield, where I changed,
And ate an awful pie [CP, 152]

The prominence of the poet in this poem and the dramatization of his reflections through the medium of his actions make the reader's attempts to construct some kind of speaking subject straightforward. It is a job, in fact, that the author of the poem undertakes on the reader's behalf. The reader is introduced not only to the poet's insights and reflections, but also to his actions (or in this case, inaction) and even to his appearance. The result is that the reader not only "hears" the poet: (s)he "sees" him too.

This graphic technique, by which the author of a particular poem seems to be made directly available to the reader, distinguishes a poem like "Dockery and Son" (in

which the poet's actions are described in the most detached spirit) from one like "To the Sea." In this poem the reader is not "shown" the poet. (S)he merely "hears" him in the conventional way:

If the worst
Of flawless weather is our falling short,
It may be that through habit these do best,
Coming to water clumsily undressed
Yearly; teaching their children by a sort
Of clowning; helping the old, too,
as they ought. [CP, 173 - 4]

"I think one has to dramatize oneself a little," Larkin remarks in an interview with Ian Hamilton. [8] In "Dockery and Son," the poet's reflections and actions are dramatized. In "To the Sea," by contrast, Larkin's approach is more conventional. Yet Swinden argues that

we feel the presence of this middle-aged, slightly dirty-minded, self-critical and luckless character very strongly and most of the time, even when he does not actually make an appearance in the poems. [9]

In short, even in the closing lines of a poem like "To the Sea," from which the poet as a character is absent, and in which his own life and experiences seem largely peripheral, his "presence" still strikes the reader "strongly."

It is the reader's relationship to this character, rather than any search for him, that the prominence in the poems of the character of the poet makes possible. At the same time, so emphatic is his presence that at times such ideas as may have occasioned the poem often seem less than central to the finished product. In his analysis of "To the

Sea," for example, John Bayley argues that

what matters is our relation with the poet, not his comments on decent seaside pieties. [10]

The prominence of the poet in the poems is seen by Bayley not only as an element in their appeal, but also, indeed, as their justification (so to say), their raison d'etre: or, at any rate, the reader's relationship with the poet is "what matters." The poet's view of the world and his reflections on the human condition are significant, in Bayley's view, primarily insofar as they contribute to the reader's picture of a personality, a "self." At the heart of the poem is the character of the poet himself. Bayley comments that poets of this kind, whose chief significance is less philosophical or technically innovatory than plain personal,

talk about the outer world, but their poetic centre is the shape of their own lives. [11]

To extend Bayley's analysis, a great deal of Larkin's significance as a poet lies in his "personal" relationship to the reader, one founded largely on the mundane and daily nature of his subject matter. Poems like "Church Going" and "Mr Bleaney," then, derive their significance less from such philosophical ideas as they advance--and less from any technical innovations they may pioneer--than from the glimpses they give of a life being lived.

Bayley argues that the originality of such writers--his discussion involves Robert Lowell and John Berryman as well as Larkin--lies in the way they

have taken the modern subject, the self, and ... formalized it The formalization of the Self is an important aspect of what Pound called 'making it new' in poetry [12]

To speak of "formalization" is to suggest a conscious, deliberate process. Certainly there are doubts about how accurate a picture of the author of the poems is presented here. The question arises because the author and "the poet" are separate and distinct entities: the author has created a character, and it is the life of this character--not that of the author--that the poems describe. The mundane, in short, rather than the strictly intimate or personal, is Larkin's subject. For this reason there is a good number of poems on such subjects as waking up in the middle of the night, or receiving an invitation to a party, but apparently only one on, for example, the death of Larkin's father. [13]

The purpose of this introduction, however, is not to speculate on the sincerity of the poet's "character" as it appears in the poems, but to observe the prominence with which it does so against a literary background in which "impersonality" has made such intrusions radical and "new." But Bayley's description of "the Self" as "the modern subject" suggests that the personal (or "personal") may displace the impersonal as a value in art, and his comments on the "decent seaside pieties" of "To the Sea" suggest that the personal may suffice--even (as in the closing lines of this poem) when the author universalizes, and speaks for the many rather than the self. The medium, then, will no longer provide such message as there is: the message, in short,

will be the messenger himself.

ii. The character of the self: a semantic appraisal.

Given the centrality of the poet himself and his life in these poems, it might be expected that a purposeful and rewarding existence is being celebrated here. Such is the poet's concentration on his own life and times that these must prove (one might expect) a joy to record. Alternatively one might imagine, because the poet's prominence is almost heroic, that the poems will bear witness to the life of a man well equipped to meet the demands of a complicated and often frustrating culture, the better for their readers to make sense of their own lives. Given its prominence, the life of the poet must either be a pleasure to himself or a model for others.

It need hardly be said that such expectations would be disappointed. Though the poet's life and character are writ large across the poems, this existence is neither rewarding nor exemplary. Moreover, though the poet's profile is high, his status is low. If "the self" is indeed "the modern subject," then the treatment of this subject in this instance is less than positive. The author describes this existence, then, not to celebrate himself ("himself"), nor to offer an example to his readers: rather than pleasure there is often frustration, and rather than success there is often failure. Indeed, some general sense of failure is among the most prominent characteristics of the character of

the poet and his life.

The character's failings may be deep-seated or incidental, the result of bad judgement or bad luck. But failure is a way of life with which he has become familiar: "You have been here some time," he says in the early piece "To Failure"--and this seems to be accepted [CP, 28]. By contrast, the kind of failure to which he confesses in "Dockery and Son" is of a far less serious kind: "I try the door of where I used to live: / Locked" [CP, 152]. The incident is quite unimportant in itself. Yet it still seems typical of the many incidental frustrations which dog the poet's life.

"The Whitsun Weddings" opens with a series of similarly unimportant oversights: "That Saturday," the poet recalls, "I was late getting away," and though this matters little, it adds to the impression of a man for whom the minutiae of everyday life are fraught and demanding. Larkin is rarely reticent in drawing attention to such failings:

At first, I didn't notice what a noise
The weddings made ...
And down the long cool platforms whoops and skirls
I took for porters [CP, 114]

Failures of this kind do not themselves matter. They are quickly corrected, or quickly forgotten. But they prepare the reader for more deep-seated shortcomings. The "unsatisfactory" nature of the poet's life is mentioned in "Reference Back," and its unlucky character in "Annus Mirabilis": "Sexual intercourse began / In nineteen sixty-three / (Which was rather late for me) ..." [CP, 106, 167].

This seems typical.

The sense of having missed out on life's compensations is more often general than particular. But the poet's failure to enjoy the sexual revolution that took place in his own "prime" (the word is from "Reference Back") is an occasion for self-criticism. In "Money" it is the poet's savings that seem to reproach him: "'I am all you never had of goods and sex. / You could get them still by writing a few cheques,'" his accumulating riches seem to tell him [CP, 198]. The failure to take advantage of such opportunities, however, seems inevitable.

One aspect of this failure is the poet's unprepossessing appearance and manner. Comments on his physical shortcomings are widespread and habitual. The reader is shown (it seems) his "swivel eye" in "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album," and his "inch-thick specs" in "A Study of Reading Habits" [CP, 71, 131]. In "Send No Money," the poet's face is summarised as "The bestial visor" [CP, 146]. It is at this face, perhaps, that the pretty girl in "Wild Oats" tries "not to laugh" [CP, 143], and it is his appearance in general at his lover's table in "The Dance" that causes her companions to "Sag into silence" [CP, 155]. For all his self-consciousness, then, the poet seems quite unimpressed by himself. The general impression left on the reader, however, is that the poet's physical shortcomings, though comprehensive, are indeed merely an aspect of a wider failure.

This roll-call of shortcomings, deep-seated or

incidental, is an introduction to the poet's dissatisfaction with his character and his life. So though the reader is expected to look at the poet (one cannot avoid doing so), (s)he is not expected to look up to him. On the contrary, for all his prominence, the poet is presented not heroically but ironically. Northrop Frye argues that a character "belongs to the ironic mode" when (s)he is

inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have a sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration or absurdity [14]

In looking at the character Larkin presents as himself in these poems, the reader does often have this sense of "looking down."

The poet's inability to take control of events and shape them to his will--in short, his familiarity with his own "bondage," his deep-seated sense of being trapped--is a second property of the hero's non-heroic status. The character of the poet is timid, indecisive, self-critical, and incapable of taking things on trust, as if a gap existed between himself and the outside world, which it was impossible to bridge. His doubts may be personal, or else rooted in the external world. In a number of poems, then, it is himself he doubts, and indeed, there are poems (one thinks of "Reasons for Attendance" and "Self's the Man") in which what the poet doubts is his own doubts, as he probes and questions his suspicions of phenomena like sex and marriage [CP, 80, 117].

This seems typical, and it seems equally characteristic

that when the poet questions himself about his own questioning, it is certainties rather than doubts that seem alien. In "Dockery and Son," he might have asked where doubts originate--he is their familiar, after all--but he asks instead where certainty comes from. "Assumptions," he suggests, are merely "a style / Our lives bring with them: habit for a while, / Suddenly they harden into all we've got ..." [CP, 153]. In short, man is the tool of his own outlook, governed by it rather than governing through it. The result is that human beings are no more free when possessed by certainties than when racked by doubts.

So the poet is swung this way and that by circumstances over which he exercises no control. An incident in "The Dance" is a good example of this. The poet, alone in the Gents, is spurred to leave for home by nothing more persuasive than "Chuckles from the drains" [CP, 157]. It is not the best motive for leaving, but at first he seems determined enough: "Ring for a car right now," he resolves. But the decisive mood does not last because making a phone-call

Needs pennies, and in making for the bar
For change I see your lot are waving, till
I have to cross and smile and stay [CP, 157]

The decision to leave, lightly taken in the first place, is now equally lightly reversed because (here as elsewhere) no single course of action seems demonstrably better than another. Though the poet dominates the poems, he rarely dominates the situations in which they place him. This is

because, as "Ignorance" argues, human beings "spend all our life on imprecisions" [CP, 107]. So all positive and decisive action is relegated to the status (as it seems) of little more than wishful thinking.

If these characteristics suggest that the poet's face does not fit in the world described (often in painstaking detail) in the poems, then this conclusion is reinforced by that feature of his character that is the most pronounced of all, which is his isolation. "All solitude is selfish," the poet tells himself in "Vers de Societe," and besides, "Virtue is social": but these are not rules by which the poet himself abides [CP, 181]. So once again, any idea of an exemplary existence has to be abandoned.

Often his isolation is desired. In "Church Going," for example, he enters the church only when he is certain that he will be alone: "Once I am sure there's nothing going on / I step inside ..." [CP, 97]. Similarly, in "Mr Bleaney" he aims to isolate himself from others--in particular from his landlady and the radio Bleaney "egged her on to buy"--by "Stuffing my ears with cotton-wool ..." [CP, 102]. The radio disturbs his isolation, of course, but it may also remind him of the friendly relations that once existed between landlady and tenant--relations of a kind he does not mean to recreate. This is his typical way, despite the landlady's companionable overtures.

In "The Whitsun Weddings" his isolation is similarly deliberate, his attention being directed resolutely elsewhere:

At first, I didn't notice what a noise
The weddings made ...
And went on reading [CP, 114]

Even when, later, the poet puts down his book and begins to take an interest in the events of the afternoon, he remains isolated, conspicuously single, it seems, an island in a sea of couples. In "Autobiography at an Air-Station," his isolation is so pre-determined as to be almost distasteful [CP, 78]. Speculating on his aeroplane's delayed take-off and the long wait that may be in store for him, he wonders, "Ought we to smile, / Perhaps make friends?" It seems an odd question, and it is oddly expressed ("Ought we ... ?"). But the answer the poet gives is still odder: "No: in the race for seats / You're best alone. Friendship is not worth while." It is the most emphatic renunciation of companionship he gives, but it does underline his isolation in these poems.

But this solitude, though it is normally pronounced, is not always deliberate: in "Dockery and Son," for example, his confession to having been "ignored" as he leaves Oxford seems rueful [CP, 152]. Similarly, in "Broadcast," his isolation from his lover is much regretted, cut off as he is from her, and "desperate" to make some kind of contact, no matter how imaginary [CP, 140]. But isolation is emphatically his fate in life. Moreover, because this solitude is experienced in public places, where people normally come together--in churches and colleges, on trains, at airports, at dances and dinners, in guest-houses and,

hotels--it seems more graphic still.

A second kind of isolation afflicts the poet: an isolation from commitments. His separation from his own past is the theme of "Coming"--in which he describes his childhood as a "forgotten boredom"--and of "I Remember, I Remember," in which he is unable to recognise his home town: and when his "friend" suggests that he may "wish the place in hell," the suggestion is not denied [CP, 33, 81-2]. Not until Larkin wrote "To the Sea," late in 1969 when he was nearly fifty, did he look back at his childhood without renouncing it [CP, 173]. It is a nice irony that having shut himself off from the past so emphatically in poems like "I Remember, I Remember," the poet's return journey to Oxford in "Dockery and Son" should result in the opposite effect: now the door of his old room is locked, and--having shut out the past for years--the poet discovers that the past shuts him out in turn [CP, 152]. Either way, however, it is typical that between the poet and his past, some kind of chasm yawns.

This isolation from his own past is linked to a separation from his own family, which is described in "Reference Back." The poem is addressed to the poet's mother:

That was a pretty one, I heard you call
From the unsatisfactory hall
To the unsatisfactory room where I
Played record after record, idly,
Wasting my time at home, that you
Looked so much forward to. [CP, 106]

The poet's isolation from the family into which he was born is not effaced by the creation of a family of his own: on the contrary, in poems as diverse as "Self's the Man" [CP, 117] and "This Be The Verse" [CP, 180], he denounces any idea of fathering a family, and in "Dockery and Son," he describes it as "quite natural" to "have no son, no wife, / No house or land ..." [CP, 152].

Furthermore, the poet has few commitments of an intellectual kind: his distance from Christianity is clear from "Church Going," his doubts about England are the theme of "Going, Going" [CP, 189], and throughout the poems as a whole, there is no consistent political commitment either. The general impression the poet leaves is of a man cut off by word and deed from other people both individually and collectively.

Particular attention might be drawn to other traits in the poet's character, but the general purpose of this second section has been to observe that the poet's prominence does not guarantee that the poems will present him in a favourable light. On the contrary, the author's willingness to expose the failings of his character is pronounced. So deep-seated, one imagines, must be his feelings of dissatisfaction, even distaste, with this character that one can well understand the appeal to the poet of "infinity and absence," the attraction of "somewhere you're not," the beauty of an "Elsewhere" that excludes himself. The purpose of the third section is to answer the question of whether the poet's instincts, expressed in the poems of his

relatively early maturity, lead him to believe that hopes of such an escape can in practice be satisfied.

iii. The inescapability of the self: the young poet's view.

In a number of poems written in Larkin's early maturity, the poet's longing for absence is expressed in an explicit "desire of oblivion." "Wants" is a case of this:

Despite the artful tensions of the calendar,
The life insurance, the tabled fertility rites,
The costly aversion of the eyes from death--
Beneath it all, desire of oblivion runs. [CP, 42]

"Dry-Point" is the corollary of this desire, the other side of the coin. Here it is desire itself that the poet resents. Indeed, if desire is an unalterable ingredient of human existence, as he suspects, then non-existence might be preferable. The libido is addressed:

And how remote that bare and sunscrubbed room,
Intensely far, that padlocked cube of light
We neither define nor prove,
Where you, we dream, obtain no right of entry. [CP, 37]

The question "Dry-Point" addresses is how far the human individual is trapped in his life, and by what means he may make his escape. Desire itself, though it might seem at first to aid the "struggle to get out," is only ultimately the prelude to an incarceration still more pronounced. Trapped in a life, and surrounded by escape-routes which serve only to return the individual to his prison, the poet paints a picture of the human individual in this poem as "padlocked" into a life from which, though there may be many

escape-routes, there is ultimately no escape.

"Dry-Point" is only one among a large number of early poems--"Wires" is another such, "Next, Please" a third--to argue against desire in general, and, in particular, the desire to escape from the life one lives. That present reality is frustrating and disappointing is not open to question in these relatively early poems: this is taken for granted. Indeed, the last section indicated how frustrating the life described in these poems often seems. But the chief concern of many of the relatively early works is, rather, the human propensity to be deceived by hopes of lightening the burden of living the life one is given. The reluctance of "Church Going" even to consider the possibility of a life other than this is a case in point. To desire to lead a different life is futile, the poems say, but it is more than this: it is to increase the burden of present reality with the kind of desolation and despair described in "Dry-Point."

"Success Story" takes the question a stage further. Here, too, the poet is concerned with the struggle to overcome the desire to escape: that is, the struggle to make peace with the real, however disappointing [CP, 88]. The theme of the poem, then, is the tension between desire and acceptance. Desire, Christian faith, ambition and hope are futile, the poem counsels, because such emotions bear no fruit. This is familiar territory. But "Success Story" presents an analysis of the roots of desire and the motives of those who succumb to it:

To be ambitious is to fall in love
With a particular life you haven't got
And (since love picks your opposite) won't achieve.

The lure of desire is the promise it extends to abet the escape from one life into another: it seems to offer the chance to lead a "life you haven't got." Any hopes of such a life are over-inflated, however, a plain illusion--or so the poet believes. Poems like "Success Story" suggest that a single life cannot be reformed any more than it can be escaped. Release is something one "won't achieve." Acceptance is all.

The title of "Continuing to Live" suggests that the poet's battle with his "desire of oblivion" has been won. But his mood is little more optimistic: indeed, the prosaic title anticipates a poem in which the poet's appetite for life (rather than death) is lacklustre at best. Life is a matter of "nearly always losing or going without," the poem suggests, but it has to go on--and no hopes of change or betterment may be entertained:

once you have walked the length of your mind, what
You command is clear as a lading-list.
Anything else must not, for you, be thought
To exist. [CP, 94]

The four poems discussed here represent a selection of relatively early works, composed before the publication of The Less Deceived, in which present reality is seen as hostile and hard to bear, but also inescapable, a kind of prison. In particular, this reality consists of a single

"life" (as "Success Story" says), or a single "mind" ("Continuing to Live"). It might be said that character is not only fate, but also prison. The "beauty of somewhere you're not" seems very distant indeed, and, conversely, no doubt very appealing.

Any kind of life outside the prison of the self, then, "must not" (as "Continuing to Live" explains) "be thought / To exist": lives other than the life lived are out of bounds--or, as the seminal poem "Wires" would argue, they are "Beyond the wires." Moreover, attempts to reach them are punished by the "muscle-shredding violence" of disillusion when the attempt fails [CP, 48]. In "Wires" the limits to hope the individual must observe are symbolised by the wires of the title. But in a poem composed a year before "Wires," Larkin uses for the first time the metaphor for this sense of incarceration in the self to which, in his mature works, he returns time and again.

The theme of "Neurotics," established in the second line of the poem, is "misery," together with the corollary of this condition, which is, of course, the urge to escape, to look outside oneself or "Beyond the wires." In the opening stanza of the poem, the poet refutes any such hopes:

The mind, it's said, is free,
But not your minds. [CP, 22]

Rather, the neurotic mind is "rusted stiff," the poem argues, incapable of flexibility or change. This sense of being trapped in the self is a familiar position. The real interest in this poem, however, is the equation, late in the

poem, of this kind of mind with

locked rooms where a hired darkness ends
Your long defence against the non-existent.

In "Dry-Point" the poet speaks of "walls," in "Wires" he speaks of fences, and, indeed, in "No Road," he speaks of "gates." "Neurotics," though--which in other respects is much the least significant poem of the four--introduces the room as a metaphor for the individual trapped in a life and character from which there is no escape: a metaphor of which Larkin's mature work makes the most extended use.

These poems indicate the extent and variety of the poet's conviction, expressed throughout the relatively early poems, that the human individual is imprisoned in the life and mind fate deals him. And it may be worth observing, by way of a parenthesis, that there is a similar atmosphere of incarceration when--again, in the relatively early poems--Larkin speaks, not of the individual's mind, but of his appearance. In "Ignorance," for example, the poet's discourse on the "strange" ease with which human beings adapt to change is interrupted to examine the question from the purely physical angle:

Yes, it is strange,

Even to wear such knowledge--for our flesh
Surrounds us with its own decisions--
And yet [we] spend all our life

on imprecisions [CP, 107]

The human being is trapped, then, not only in a life and mind from which there is no escape, but also in a body over

which he has no control, one which makes "its own decisions." The same metaphor is advanced in "Skin." Here the poet seems so divorced from his own body, yet also so trapped in it, that he must ask:

pardon me, that I
Could find, when you were new,
No brash festivity
To wear you at [CP, 92]

Just as the mind may be compared to a room in "Neurotics," so, in "Ignorance," the flesh suggests a suit of armour and in "Skin" a suit of clothes. What does not alter, however, is the sense of being incarcerated, "restrained" (in Whalen's terms) and shut away inside a character and appearance over which there is no control, and from which, moreover, there is no escape. The human individual is marooned (these poems say) in a kind of prison. Moreover, in practice the mind is both prisoner and prison, taunting itself with promises of freedom from its own limits whilst recognising that freedom cannot be gained, and acknowledging that to dream of freedom is simply to court frustration.

The closing lines of "Mr Bleaney" offer a final illustration of the poet's conviction that the human being is trapped in a character beyond reformation. Here the poet speculates on the relationship of the room to Bleaney and, by implication, to himself:

How we live measures our own nature,
And at his age having no more to show
Than one hired box should make him pretty sure
He warranted no better [CP, 103]

Two separate arguments are advanced here. One is that whatever a man acquires in life is a measure of what he deserves. So human merit may be measured in wealth. Bleaney acquired "one hired box," so that is all he "warranted."

But in the context of this chapter, the second argument is more striking: the real significance of the equation between a man's character and the way he lives may be found in the room itself. This spartan place, with its single window and inhuman interior, is highly reminiscent of a prison cell. How the speaker lives is a measure of his nature in a way that is by now familiar, because the room's inflexibility and rigidity recall the way of the human character described in such other early poems as "Neurotics," "Success Story" and "Continuing to Live." The room, in short is a metaphor for a mind, a personality. Moreover this impression of a prison, which is subtle but very strong, is reinforced by the speaker's habit of "Stuffing my ears with cotton-wool" to the point where he becomes a prisoner not only in his own room but also in his own body, much as a man (in Larkin's view) is a prisoner in his own mind and his own life.

iv. The self and the other in the dramatic monologues.

Given the poet's conviction expressed in these relatively early poems that a single life and mind are cages from which it is impossible to escape (and, as it happens,

an act of folly to dream of doing so), it may be no surprise that the poems focus so attentively on their own author. It looks as though they, too, are trapped in the prison of the self. So in general it seems as if--semantically or formally--dreams of escape from the self to the "beauty of somewhere you're not" will be frustrated. In this, then, as in much else, it seems that the poet will be unsuccessful.

The poems which seem at first to underline this conclusion most forcibly might be described as Larkin's "dramatic monologues." These are the poems in which the poet ("the poet") is presented to the reader in so detached a spirit as to be almost visible:

I try the door of where I used to live:

Locked. The lawn spreads dazzlingly wide.
A known bell chimes.

I catch my train, ignored. [CP, 152]

There are around a dozen such poems in the canon, which, because they include such works as "Mr Bleaney," "Church Going," "The Whitsun Weddings" and "High Windows," seem to be among Larkin's most characteristic and recognisable works.

In many of these dramatic monologues, as the first section of this chapter observed, the poet's actions are described in the present tense. For this reason, the poems seem dramatic rather than anecdotal. These activities tend to dominate the opening stanzas of the dramatic monologues. Then activities give way to reflections on the themes raised. "Mr Bleaney" is an example of this structure. The

opening five stanzas describe the poet's actions as he settles into his new room. The description is given in the present tense:

'I'll take it.' So it happens that I lie
Where Mr Bleaney lay, and stub my fags
On the same saucer-souvenir, and try

Stuffing my ears with cotton-wool, to drown
The jabbering set he egged her on to buy. [CP, 102]

Once the poet's actions have been described, the dramatic monologues turn to reflection. In "Mr Bleaney," the final two stanzas generalise the issues, and question whether the room is a "home." This method (actions followed by reflections) is empirical, because conclusions seem to be drawn from real evidence and events.

Larkin himself seems to have these poems in mind when he speaks generally of his own practice as a poet:

I tend to lead the reader in by the hand very gently, saying that this is the initial experience ..., and now you see that it makes me think of this, that and the other, and work up to a big finish--I mean, that's the sort of pattern. [15]

So the "initial experience" (revisiting Oxford, taking a room, wandering around a church) is the first thing to be described, and this is followed by the "big finish." By this phrase Larkin means those reflective conclusions to poems like "Mr Bleaney," "Church Going" and "Dockery and Son," in which ideas and generalizations, rather than specific events, are what the poetry describes.

The link, or hinge, between "the initial experience" and "the big finish" is often easy to identify. Generally

the poet uses a conjunction like "but" or "yet" to establish that action is ready to give way to reflection. In "Mr Bleaney," for example, the link is "But":

But if he stood

This link introduces the generalisations with which the poem finishes. Typically these conjunctions are negatives, however: in "Church Going," for example, the link is "Yet": "Yet stop I did ..." [CP, 97]. Similarly, in "Sad Steps," the link is "No" at the end of the twelfth line, before reflections begin to dominate the closing six of the poem's eighteen lines [CP, 169]. So although the superficial impression to be drawn from the structure of the poems is that they are empirical, because action is followed by reflection, a closer analysis of the dramatic monologues suggests that the poet will not necessarily draw his conclusions directly from his actions. Indeed, he may draw the opposite conclusion.

Larkin makes no mention of this inverted structure in his account of these poems. But it is very common. It is there, for example, in "Mr Bleaney": the opening five stanzas of the poem describe the poet's actions in moving into the guest-house bedroom:

Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook

Behind the door, no room for books or bags--
'I'll take it'. [CP, 102]

At the end of the fifth stanza of the poem, however, the

register of the poet's voice changes--from narrative to speculation--and this change coincides with a change in attitude to the room. In the closing two stanzas, the poem questions how suitable the room is. One might say that the poet takes the room but the poem rejects it. This inverted structure is typical.

The chief effect of this inverted structure is, of course, that the poem shifts its attention from the poet himself to the subject the poem is discussing. "Mr Bleaney" begins with a description of the poet's move to a new bedroom: it is a very narrow ambit. But in generalising the question in the last two verses from guest-houses to issues of home, roots, belonging and exile, the poem switches its attention from its original narrow focus, and finds space for concerns of a more general character. In widening the angle from the initial narrow focus on the poet himself and his actions to a wider view of the matter in hand, the dramatic monologues find space, indeed, for the reader.

"Church Going" works in this way. Like "Mr Bleaney," "Church Going" concentrates in its opening verses on the actions of the poet--objectively described, of course--and in particular on the relationship he strikes, on impulse, with the church. The poet's attitude is dismissive:

Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for. [CP, 97]

It is here, however, that the mood of the poem changes, with

the phrase "Yet stop I did" This is the hinge of the poem, when actions give way to reflections, and the poet (as actor) gives way to the general questions his actions raise. On the basis of these actions, one might expect that churches will be written off as anachronistic, over-formal, perhaps even superstitious institutions. But the concluding reflections of the poem do not bear this out. Once again, the inverted structure of the dramatic monologues asserts itself:

It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be suprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious [CP, 98]

These reflections, though they succeed fluently to the earlier description of the poet's activities in the church, seem incongruous once one remembers that the poet was neither silent nor serious himself, and that his chief "hunger" seems to have been to distance himself from the institution. But this tension between action and reflection is the typical way in these poems, and the hinge indicates that two very different attitudes--even two voices, two registers--are at odds in the poem.

Moreover, it suggests that the earlier narrow focus of the poem on the character of the poet himself will be abandoned, and wider issues will be addressed. In implicitly refuting the poet's experiences in the church,

this poem succeeds in moving away from the narrowly personal atmosphere of its opening lines into the wider angles of the closing verses. In the opening nineteen lines of the poem, the first-person singular pronoun is used ten times. This is a measure of the extent to which the reader must concentrate on the poet himself. In the process, the church itself, from which the poet distances himself, falls from view. In the last forty-four lines, however, from which the poet himself is largely absent, the first-person is used twice. In these lines, the poet largely disappears, and the poem is free to concentrate on the church. So, indeed, is the reader.

In the closing lines of the poem, then, the poet ceases to speak for himself, and begins to speak for humanity in general--or, at any rate, for those for whom the church was built. He moves, as it were, from the first-person singular to the first-person plural:

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.

The poet moves away from himself because he aims to refute the implications of his own actions: the church is not to be dismissed so easily. In doing so, the poem as a whole signals its willingness to accept responsibility: for its subject--whose significance is not addressed until the poet has disappeared from the stage--as well as for its readers and their own relationship to the church. It is here that the real meaning of the church is disinterred, its status as

an emblem of human affairs ("marriage, and birth, / And death, and thoughts of these") which are not particular and personal, but universal.

This generalising movement of Larkin's dramatic monologues is a movement from self to other, a centrifugal motion which suggests that the self and its experiences are not enough. In moving in this way, the poems release the poet from his own self-centredness, leaving him free to examine his theme, regardless of himself, and to establish the room to speak for his readers. Morrison observes that "just over a third of the poems in each of his mature collections ... profess to speak for their readers," and he adds:

In many poets, the habit of attributing to 'us all' particular feelings and beliefs ... might seem presumptuous. That it never seems so in Larkin ... is a matter of his strategy: he nearly always earns the right to spokespersonship by beginning with a personal experience, and only gradually and tentatively universalizing it. [16]

In moving away from their otherwise concentrated attention on the self, the dramatic monologues shift towards the other at the point of the hinge, the negative conjunction: in the process these poems universalize a theme which, hitherto, has had an extremely narrow application.

This transformation of the poem is effected, then, by the hinge that shifts attention away from the poet. There is a similarly abrupt shift from the personal to the universal in "Sad Steps" [CP, 169]. On the face of it, this poem seems quite unlike "Church Going," but thematically it

is extremely similar, and structurally it is almost indistinguishable. As in "Church Going," the poet's activities seem initially to liberate him from responsibilities to anyone but himself, but once again, the poem considers this attitude and rejects it, concluding that responsibilities can be faced. In his parody of the wailing moon-struck romantic, the character of the poet behaves as dismissively towards the moon as the character in "Church Going" behaves towards the church, determinedly isolating himself from the meaning or implications of the moon:

Lozenge of love! Medallion of art!
O wolves of memory! Immensements!

The character of the poet satirises the moon, dismissing it as unimportant to him and his single life. But here the poem's hinge ("No") indicates that the mood will change, and the poem will enquire responsibly--in a sense, impersonally, or universally--into the moon's meaning. Here again, the poet himself (as a character) is lost to the poem, and the author's deliberations adopt a generalised, wide-angled stance. The moon

Is a reminder of the strength and pain
Of being young; that it can't come again,
But is for others undiminished somewhere.

Once again the two voices contend in this poem: on one side, the first-person singular, alone and dismissive, and on the other, the third-person plural, on whom the poem concentrates at its conclusion. Significantly, the poem

moves in the process from a faintly cynical loneliness to a vignette of love shared. In this way, the narrow condition and thinking of the poet himself are abandoned, and the wider angles of the author's world are allowed to emerge.

Technically, then, the interest in these poems lies in the detached way the poet presents himself ("himself") to the reader, going about his mundane daily life, visiting a church, moving to a new room or merely "Groping back to bed after a piss" [CP, 169]. And structurally the dramatic monologues are of interest because of the tension they raise between action and reflection. This tension is understated, with the result that the poem moves fluently from the active opening through its "hinge" to a conclusion that is thoughtful, but nonetheless strictly incongruous, or at least contrary. Still, for all its fluency, this inversion is a very striking and unusual method.

But the real interest in this context is semantic. As the poem proceeds from action to reflection, larger considerations than the narrowly personal enter the picture, and the poet's sense of responsibility to his environment, to history and tradition, to the expectations of others, to community, to human nature and human life, or merely to other people in general--this sense of responsibility comes to the fore. To this end, the self and its interests are abandoned as the poem as a whole enacts the movement identified in the introduction to this thesis as typical of Larkin: from self to other.

For these reasons it is appropriate that "Sad Steps,"

which opens on a note of the poet's own unromantic loneliness, should end with the thought of "others ... somewhere" and the prospect they have of love and intimacy. In many of Larkin's early poems, as the third section of this chapter suggested, there is the strong instinct that "Anything else must not ... be thought / To exist"--other than the immediate and personal experience [CP, 94]. But in many of the dramatic monologues, this instinct is overturned, and the author dares to consider things other than himself.

It is in this universalizing process that one glimpses, if not the poet's absence, at least his sense of lives and attitudes other than his own: in a restricted sense, a movement from self to not-self, a transcendence of the self and its narrow preoccupations. In an interview given towards the end of his career, Larkin speaks of his sense of the limits of his own character:

I think that a point does come in life when you realize that ... there's a limit to what your own personality is in itself. [17]

At the same time, as Whalen observes, Larkin "self-consciously reacts to the limits of his established personality," and (especially in the dramatic monologues) seems ultimately bent on release from the self's narrow angles or interests. [18] It is fair to add that in Whalen's view, the poet's reaction against his own limits results in a poetry "which moves continually in the direction of self-criticism." In a piece like "Mr Bleaney,"

rational rather than emotional, reflective rather than active, and detached rather than self-conscious. This voice discusses not certain photographs in particular (and their impact on the self) but photography in general. Moreover, whereas the personal, first-person voice finds the photographs upsetting, this second voice sees much in photography to praise--for example, that it "records"

Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds,
And will not censor blemishes ...

But shows the cat as disinclined, and shades
A chin as doubled when it is, what grace
Your candour thus confers upon her face!

The character of the poet was disillusioned by the truth the photographs reveal. But the poem's second voice, rational and generalizing, praises photography for its "candour." Photography's propensity to tell the truth, says the second voice, is among its chief virtues. This tension suggests a fundamental dilemma within the poet himself, between the desire for ignorance and the need to know, between the individual impulse and a widely-shared conviction, or--more simply--between the emotional and the rational. In this context, however, the most striking conflict is again that between the personal and the universal. The poet finds things to curse in his personal experience, but (in general) things to bless when he abandons the personal, seeks relief from the self, and speaks more generally.

Larkin's method of "universalizing" his themes in these poems is typically ratiocinative, then, in that an emotional

voice, personal and immediate, is contrasted with a voice more detached and rational. But "The Whitsun Weddings" offers striking evidence of the variety of ways this "universalizing" may be accomplished.

In some respects, "The Whitsun Weddings" differs from those poems discussed above, first because it is written in the aorist tense rather than the present, and second because there is no lasting conflict here between the poet's actions and his reflections. But the poem has other of the semantic and structural conventions of the poems already analysed: primarily that the poet himself is conspicuously isolated among the couples at the poem's outset, so that the author's "camera" (as it were) focuses largely on his own character. For this reason, the first-person singular again dominates the opening stanzas of the poem, before the poet as a character is lost to the poem towards the end as the author seeks relief from the self, replacing his perspective with a lens (so to say) with wider angles.

The poet's distance from others early in this poem is implicit in what he does: he reads. So he remains oblivious to events outside himself:

At first, I didn't notice what a noise
The weddings made ...
And went on reading. [CP, 114]

Something of the poet's isolation in his environment persists late into the poem. In the penultimate stanza, the syntax underwrites the poet's distance from others:

none

Thought of the others they would never meet
Or how their lives would all contain this hour.
I thought of London

There is not a direct contrast here between thoughtlessness and reflectiveness. But distance and separation from others are implied. The corollary of these features is a failure, hitherto, to find the releasing motion from self to not-self on which these poems typically end.

But the closing lines of the poem succeed in bridging this gap between the poet and "the others" on the train, in the process liberating the poet from himself and his own isolation. The final image calls to mind ideas of harvest, fruition and creativity:

as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain. [CP, 116]

Strictly speaking, this sensation is experienced by the poet himself: it is he who feels "the sense of falling" and the rest. But the sensation is inspired by events in the lives of others, naturally succeeding to the marriages. From these events, the poet was formerly separate, but in this image his isolation--indeed, his self--is effaced. The experience is universalized, an effect which the objective description ("there swelled ...") of a subjective experience underwrites. In short, in switching his attention from the thoughts of the self to an experience inspired by "others," the author follows the practice established in poems like "Sad Steps": one that permits a vicarious relief from the self and its preoccupations.

Moreover, the reader too is implicated in the celebratory spirit of this closing image. The universalizing voice of "The Whitsun Weddings" is (strictly speaking) of a different stamp from that of, say, "Church Going" or "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album," being imaginative rather than ratiocinative. But it is nevertheless still right to describe the conclusion to "The Whitsun Weddings" as "universalizing."

In the dramatic monologues in general, then, two types of attitude are attempted. One is impulsive, emotional and self-conscious, and it typically leads to isolation, and to a concomitant concentration on the self and its narrow concerns. So in "Church Going" the poet is as distant from the church as the speaker in "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" is isolated from the woman, and the poet in "Sad Steps" is as imprisoned in his cynical middle-age as the narrator of "The Whitsun Weddings" is trapped in his isolation and his book. Then the second voice, normally more formal in tone and more general in theme, displaces the first, to convey an attitude that concentrates on others, or includes them, or speaks for them. The disappearance, in the second half of the poem, of the poet himself (or his character) is a natural precondition of this universalizing approach.

Larkin's dramatic monologues, then, describe some of the problems of isolation: from religion, from women, from love, from the past, from others. They describe an incarceration in the self. In a sense, though, they also

describe some of the solutions to it, whether rational or imaginative. In particular, in moving from the self-centred plane to the universal, they develop from a mood of displacement, loneliness and futility to an atmosphere of constructive engagement and commitment, of imaginative sympathy and understanding, and of wisdom wider than that of a single pair of eyes. The author's feel for reactions and interpretations other than the merely personal is not, perhaps, central to the character of the poet as he is presented in poems like "Church Going" and "Sad Steps." But some impulse to look out at others remains central, at any rate, to the character of the poetry.

v. Glimpses of the other in the poems in general.

The poet's preoccupation with looking--the role he creates for himself of voyeur--was mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. This habit is one aspect of the movement from self to other that is the hallmark of the poems in general. Often, as was mentioned, this act of looking is explicitly described. Equally, though, there are many poems in which the act of looking is implicit only. One thinks of "Afternoons":

In the hollows of afternoons
Young mothers assemble
At swing and sandpit
Setting free their children. [CP, 121]

There is no reference to the poet himself in this poem. Yet so accustomed is the reader to his presence (as Swinden

says), and so typically is his role that of the voyeur, that it is not easy to read this poem without imagining the poet himself, loitering on the margin of the scene he describes.

In this poem, as it happens, the act of looking has no ulterior motive. So the scene is described very simply, without any concentrated intellectualisation or "universalizing." But as "High Windows" demonstrates, the act of looking is not always disinterested. On the contrary, a sight seen is often no more than the prelude to a conclusion drawn:

When I see a couple of kids
And guess he's fucking her and she's
Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm,
I know this is paradise

Everyone old has dreamed of
all their lives [CP, 165]

The sight leads to the guess, which leads in turn to the speculation. And indeed, as the poem proceeds, the speculation leads on to a comparison between sexual licence and religious freedom. In short, the scene (the "couple of kids") is not described in any detail because the sight itself is not the point. The question is what use the poet can make of it. His answer is to compare lives.

This preoccupation with comparison, which is a persistent habit throughout the poems, is a corollary of the act of seeing, looking and looking out. Moreover, it constitutes a further instance of the movement from self to other. In drawing these contrasts, the poet compares his own situation, or example, or way of doing things with the

way of others. In this way, comparison of the self with others--that is, movement from self to other on a strictly semantic level--becomes, in fact, a mainstay of the poems, an impulse the poet allows its head on a great variety of questions and dilemmas.

The most common of these dilemmas is also among the most general. In poems about how to live, the poet repeatedly contrasts his own way with the way of others. This is implicit in "Toads": the poet wonders whether he should give up his life to his work, given that

Lots of folk live on their wits ... [and]
They seem to like it. [CP, 89]

In "Toads Revisited," the contrast between self and others is explicit: seeing the old men in the park, he exclaims:

Think of being them! [CP, 147]

The comparison--most unusually, in fact--does not favour the lives of others, and for once the poet rejects the other, and settles for his own way. But it is more typical for these comparisons to shed disadvantageous light on the poet himself and his life. That is, it is common for the poems to express doubts about the beauty of "Here" as a prelude to the drift "Elsewhere." In "Poetry of Departures," for example, he contrasts his own half-hearted yearning for freedom with that of someone who has taken positive steps to get free:

Surely I can, if he did? [CP, 85]

But the respect implicit in the contrast is less important here than the contrast itself, and the glance outwards, away from the self and towards others, that is implied.

A second significant point of comparison for Larkin is the matter of love. It seems typical that "Letter to a Friend about Girls" should turn out, in practice, to be a comparison between two love-lives:

After comparing lives with you for years, [CP, 122]

the poem begins: in his mature work, this "comparing" is certainly the poet's instinct. There is, indeed, a spirit of competition in this poem (the poet loses the competition), just as there is in "The Dance" (one thinks of "the weed" who courts the same woman as the poet himself), as well as in poems like "Love Again," in which the poet is displaced in the affections of his lover by somebody else. Lives are compared [CP, 154, 215].

These are specific cases. But there is also a number of poems in which the poet's more general exclusion from love is resented. The self is loveless, then, while others make merry. "Sad Steps" is of course one of these poems, with its closing reflections on those "others ... somewhere" for whom love is "undiminished." The contrast with the poet himself need not be laboured. There is a similar contrast between self and other in "Annus Mirabilis":

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(Which was rather late for me) [CP, 167]

In "High Windows," of course, the comparison between self and others begins with a sense of exclusion, then proceeds to the point of comparison:

I wonder if
Anyone looked at me, forty years back ... [CP, 165].

The poet wonders this because, to make sense of the fortunes of others, he consults his own experience, and compares lives. In "Love Again," his exclusion from love in general is a further point of contrast: love, he believes, is an "element"

That spreads through other lives like a tree ...
[But one which] ... never worked for me. [CP, 215]

Once again, the contrast between "other" and "me" is instinctively drawn.

A further example of the poet's instinct for comparison is the family. For the poet himself, his own single life is the point of departure for understanding the lives of others. "Dockery and Son" is an obvious example, a poem in which the contrast is very plain:

Why did he think adding meant increase?
To me it was dilution. [CP, 153]

The contrast is underlined in the closing lines: "For Dockery a son, for me nothing," the poet reflects tersely. "Self's the Man" covers similar ground, and is the occasion for a similar comparison between self and other--in this case, Arnold:

To compare his life and mine
Makes me feel a swine,

the poet concedes [CP, 117]. But for all his reservations, it remains a comparison of a kind he is much given to draw. On a wide variety of questions, it is among Larkin's most characteristic impulses, this cross-checking (so to say) between self and other. It is a reminder that though the poet's convictions may tell him that escaping from the self is impossible, his impulses continually agitate to do so.

This chapter has assessed the poet's "self-centred" manner in a variety of its manifestations. His poems certainly seem at first to be unusually preoccupied with their own author, to a point of elevating this preoccupation into a theory of the kind described in "Success-Story," and of re-creating the sense of imprisonment as a series of metaphors of which the cell in "Mr Bleaney" is the most expressive.

This is half the story, but it is only half. The fourth and fifth sections have aimed to indicate one aspect of the corollary of Larkin's self-consciousness. The poet's compulsive preoccupation with the self results only, it seems, in a kind of centrifugal force, as if the self had become a prison from which escape, however brief, was utterly desirable. So it seems at times as if the poet looks out through a barred window to catch whatever glimpses he can of life "beyond the glass" [CP, 20]. These glimpses, and what they mean, and how they are understood, and how

they relate to the prisoner himself: this is the theme of the second chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: "HERE" AND "ELSEWHERE" IN LARKIN'S POEMS.

i. Introduction: two common metaphors for self and other.

The two closing sections of the last chapter showed that although the poet himself (or his character) dominates a great many of these poems, he is not the only factor in the equation: the poems are equally curious to observe his relations with things and people outside himself. Indeed, on the evidence of poems like "Church Going" and "Sad Steps," in which the poet's attention ceases to concentrate on his own character (as it were) in order to reach a rounded, wide-angled and all-embracing appreciation of the matter in hand, many of Larkin's poems seem every bit as interested, ultimately, in the other as they are in the self.

The final section of the last chapter indicated that this curiosity in things other than the poet and his own way of life is at times expressed in a very straightforward way. "Toads Revisited" is a case of this plain-speaking [CP, 147]. The poem shows the reader two kinds of life, the first easy-going and free-wheeling, the second hard-headed and realistic. As examples of the first, the poem offers a variety of people (retired, unemployed, convalescent and so

on) passing their time in "the park." As an example of the second, the poem presents the poet himself and his life. The question arises, then, of how far he is happy with the life he leads, and though the answer is not fulsome and positive, it is at least accepting. In this uncomplicated way the poet compares self with other, or "Here" with an example of the social "Elsewhere."

Poems of this type are unusually straightforward in their design. A great many of Larkin's poems draw the same contrast between the life lived and the life unlived: that is, between "Here" and the social "Elsewhere." But very few of them do so in quite such an unadorned way. This is because Larkin's poetry has a series of common devices or metaphors for expressing this dilemma. These tend to recur in those poems which (like "Toads Revisited") set out to compare the poet's own life with lives led by other people--again, the social version of "Elsewhere"--or in poems which (like "High Windows") see "Elsewhere" as a matter of transcendence, and draw a comparison between the real world and some notional ideal or otherworld.

One device the poet uses to draw this contrast between the real world and some kind of otherworld is the poster. Thoughts of a better world, one different from the real, are not easy to formulate and express in a post-Christian, post-Marxist culture. Yet thoughts of a Land of Heart's Desire are a cultural mainstay, especially in poetry, it seems. In poems like "Essential Beauty" [CP, 144] and "Sunny Prestatyn" [CP, 149], Larkin offers two pictures of ideal

otherworlds. His tone in these poems is ironical: in neither case does he believe that such otherworlds are realisable. There may also be a question how desirable they are. But the poster enables the poet to compare dreams "Of how life should be" [CP, 144] with pictures of how life is. The contrast between the two worlds--the worlds of "Here" and "Elsewhere"--is so great as to be laughable. "Essential Beauty" exploits the surrealism of the contrast between the advertising poster and the real world to show how wide the gap between the real and the ideal can be:

High above the gutter
A silver knife sinks into golden butter [CP, 144]

"Sunny Prestatyn," similarly, ends with something of a black joke: the contrast between the ideal and the real, this poem suggests, is the difference between a beautiful woman and cancer. But though the ideal and the real are poles apart, they can be brought into a single comparison through this kind of contrast between the advertising poster on one side and, on the other, the real world to which the poster belongs, but which it also derides with its unlikely promises of "Elsewhere."

This example indicates that though these poems often set out to "compare his life and mine" (as "Self's the Man" puts it), they are equally inclined to draw comparisons between two states of mind or--as in "Essential Beauty" and "Sunny Prestatyn"--between two types of world [CP, 117]. But the principle behind these comparisons remains the same. Larkin's poems return time and again to this contrast

between things known and familiar on one side and, on the other, things unexplored and very often exotic. "Toads Revisited," "Essential Beauty" and "Sunny Prestatyn" are underwritten by this same principle of contrast between fields: a contrast of "Here"--realistic and familiar--with "Elsewhere," unfamiliar because different, mysterious, and often free.

A second means by which this contrast is frequently conveyed in Larkin's poems is the metaphor of dry land and the sea. Dry land symbolises things known and dependable, whereas the sea is different, shapeless, enigmatic and free. "Sunny Prestatyn" also draws on this device. The girl is distant from reality, an object of promise and desire:

Behind her, a hunk of coast, a
Hotel with palms
Seemed to expand from her thighs and
Spread breast-lifting arms. [CP, 149]

Similar dilemmas (between the real and the ideal, the accepted and the desired, the familiar and the enchanting) are explored in "Next, Please," a poem written in 1951, some twelve years earlier [CP, 52]. Here too, the poet's metaphor for this dilemma is dry land and the sea. Specifically, dry land is a metaphor for present reality in this poem, whereas the sea symbolises hope and desire. The poet pictures human beings trapped in the real world, yet

Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear,
Sparkling armada of promises draw near.

Such promises belong "Elsewhere," however: like the girl in

the poster, they are not of this world. For this reason, the poet counsels against any hopes that such promises may redeem themselves in real life: "Next, Please," like "Church Going," advances the view that the burdens of "Here" cannot be lightened by thoughts of "Elsewhere." On the contrary, thoughts of "Elsewhere" will only make such burdens harder than ever to bear.

A further use of the metaphor of dry land and the sea may be found in "Here" [CP, 136]. This poem might be described as a journey from the real to the ideal, or from things familiar to things free. In the process it follows the centrifugal model on which a great many of Larkin's poems are patterned. At its conclusion, therefore, it comes close (in spite of its title) to Larkin's idea of "Elsewhere." In doing so, it leaves behind the cluttered, the known, the worldly and tangible--

Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware,
 sharp shoes, iced lollies,
 Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers--

in its search for a place free and ethereal, almost otherworldly:

Here is unfenced existence:
 Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach. [CP, 137]

The dry land over which the opening two verses of the poem travel symbolises present reality, as it does in "Next, Please." The sea, by contrast, is the place where the land "Ends ... suddenly, beyond a beach": that is, the sea is the

home of light and water, familiar metaphors in Larkin's work for freedom and release. The place "beyond" the beach represents things flexible, "unfenced" and unformed, out of reach of space-time.

But perhaps the central factor in the contrast the poet aims to draw in poems of this type is between his own presence and his absence. The real world, hard-headed and well-known, is the poet's arena, as "Toads Revisited," "Sunny Prestatyn," "Next, Please" and "Here" imply in their various ways: the poet, after all, never looks back to land from the sea, nor at those who work as one who is unemployed, nor at the real from the angle of the ideal, nor at the trapped from the angle of the free. His perspective in these poems, whether explicit or not, is that of the known and familiar, the real. In short, the poet always looks from self to not-self, from self to other.

On the face of it, this fact of perspective makes the early poem "Absences" most unusual. Its theme is the "unfenced existence" (as "Here" has it) of the sea. From this poem, the poet as a character is absent, an absence to which the title and the closing line refer:

Above the sea, the yet more shoreless day,
Riddled by wind, trails lit up galleries:
They shift to giant ribbing, sift away.

Such attics cleared of me! Such absences! [CP, 49]

To one familiar with the metaphors by which Larkin indicates the two worlds of his poems, the poet's reference to his own absence seems superfluous: in those poems in

which these two worlds, the world of dimensions and the world of freedom, are symbolised by the land and the sea, the poet's presence is indicated by the land. The sea is the place from which he is absent: it is "out of reach," as "Here" says. "Absences" follows this pattern. In this sense, then, it is not unusual at all.

These two metaphors, then, the poster and the coast, are means to an end: they enable the poet to contrast the known with the exotic, the real with the ideal, the reliable with the ethereal, the fixed with the unfenced, and (above all, perhaps) presence with absence. But neither metaphor, in fact, is Larkin's most familiar means of drawing this comparison. A third metaphor for the contrast--more detailed and flexible in design--might even be said to dominate the poems. At any rate, this metaphor introduces the poet himself much more centrally to the comparison being drawn, and places him in what, in fact, is his most recognisable context.

ii. The room, the window and the outside world.

At the heart of this third common metaphor is the enclosed space. A great many of Larkin's poems locate the poet in a room, then describe his life and actions inside this room, before proceeding to speculate on the relationship between the inside world and the world beyond the glass. It is of course appropriate that the room should play a prominent part in poems which focus so emphatically on the personal and mundane. But the room is more than a

deictic of the poems: contrasted with the outside world, it is also a metaphor. Thus in a poem like "Talking in Bed"--to take one example--in which the chief theme is the enigmatic nature of psychological intimacy, the room is a metaphor for the physical intimacy of those inside it, containing them as it does, and isolating them from others [CP, 129].

"Mr Bleaney" is another example of this isolation, of course [CP, 102]. This poem, too, is set in a single room. It describes the room as a box, a "hired box." The rooms and boxes of Larkin's poems are extraordinarily various. They include a series of bed-sitters (from "Poetry of Departures" to "Mr Bleaney"), a series of bedrooms proper (from "Talking in Bed" to "Aubade"), a series of hotel bedrooms (from "Waiting for breakfast while she brushed her hair" to "Livings, I"), a series of dining-rooms (from "The Dance" to "Livings, III"), a series of sitting-rooms (from "Broadcast" to "Vers de Societe"), a series of railway compartments (from "I Remember, I Remember" to "The Whitsun Weddings"), together with a sundry assortment of church interiors, shops, offices, colleges, dance-halls and other public rooms.

Often these spaces are enclosed spaces. This may or may not be specified. In a poem like "Church Going," however, securing the enclosed space appears to be one of the poet's priorities:

Once I am sure there's nothing going on,
I step inside, letting the door thud shut. [CP, 97]

The door secures the enclosed space, and this is a fairly common event in Larkin's poems. The door here, in fact, plays a similar role to the "cotton-wool" in "Mr Bleaney." It isolates the poet from the world outside. At first, this physical isolation seems emblematic, a metaphor for the poet's deep-seated loneliness.

But despite his isolation, the poet is rarely, if ever, unconscious of the world "beyond the glass" [CP, 20]. He is, of course, almost invariably inside the rooms his poems describe, as he is in "Talking in Bed," "Mr Bleaney" and "Church Going." But just as often his attention cannot help but wander to what is outside:

Outside, the wind's incomplete unrest
Builds and disperses clouds about the sky,
And dark towns heap up on the horizon. [CP, 129]

The poet's compulsive glance to the world beyond the glass may at times induce a feeling of claustrophobia, even imprisonment. At the same time, though, it reminds the reader that another world exists elsewhere.

"Talking in Bed" is an exception in one respect, however. As the opening chapter indicated, the character the poet presents as himself in these poems is an isolated figure. But physically at least (if not psychologically), the character in "Talking in Bed" is not alone. In this respect, "Church Going" and "Mr Bleaney" are more representative poems. Asked by Hamilton why he wrote only two novels, Larkin replied that novels "are about other

people and poetry is about yourself," and added that "I must have lost interest in other people" [1] Whether or not this is true, Larkin does typically present himself (or "himself") as alone in his room, and others rarely appear there. When they do (as they do in "Waiting for breakfast while she brushed her hair" and "I Remember, I Remember"), they are never properly individuated, and besides, they do little to obviate or efface the poet's sense of loneliness. This, certainly, is true of "Talking in Bed."

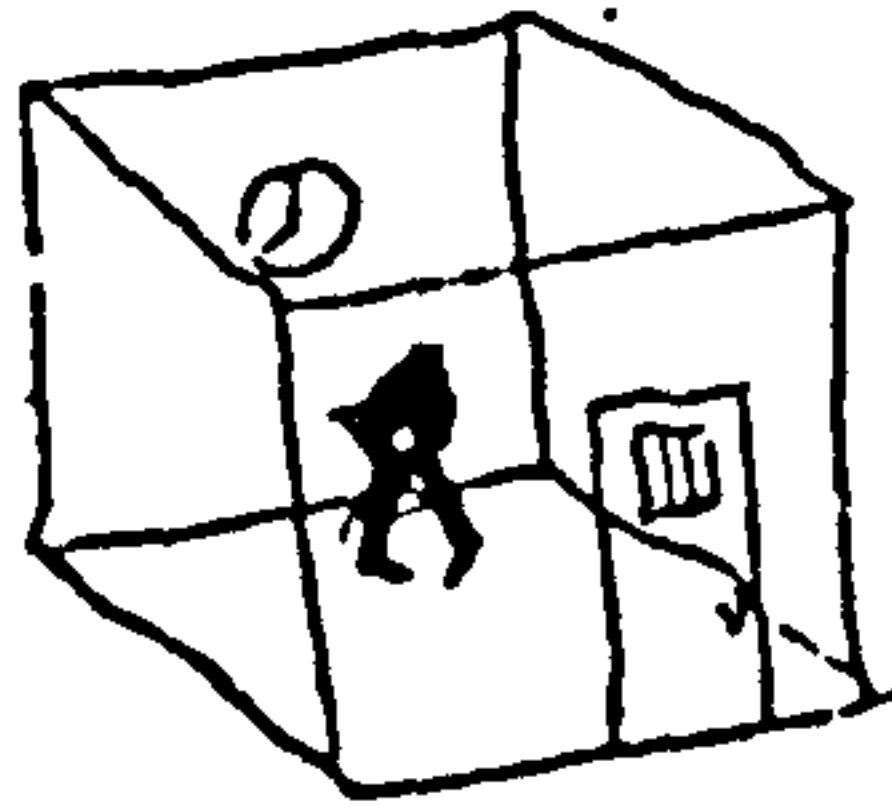
For these reasons, the reader may well take away from the poems the presiding impression of a man, alone, trapped in a room, a kind of cage, aware of the outside world but apparently unable to reach it. Poems like "Mr Bleaney" and "Aubade" do nothing to mitigate this impression of the poet as a kind of prisoner. As it happens, Larkin's secretary at Hull University Library reports that he kept a framed photograph of Guy the Gorilla on his office desk: "He admired this creature very much," she explains. "I think he thought he was a prisoner, as Guy was." The secretary's impression is confirmed by a series of doodles Larkin drew during a University administrative meeting, in which rooms are depicted as prisons, and ordinary human and animal lives are lived out in cages. Appropriately enough, one of the more memorable images from the B.B.C. Monitor programme on Larkin and his poetry was of the poet himself leaning out of an upstairs window, apparently looking out over Pearson Park in Hull. [2]

This vignette of the poet constitutes a second

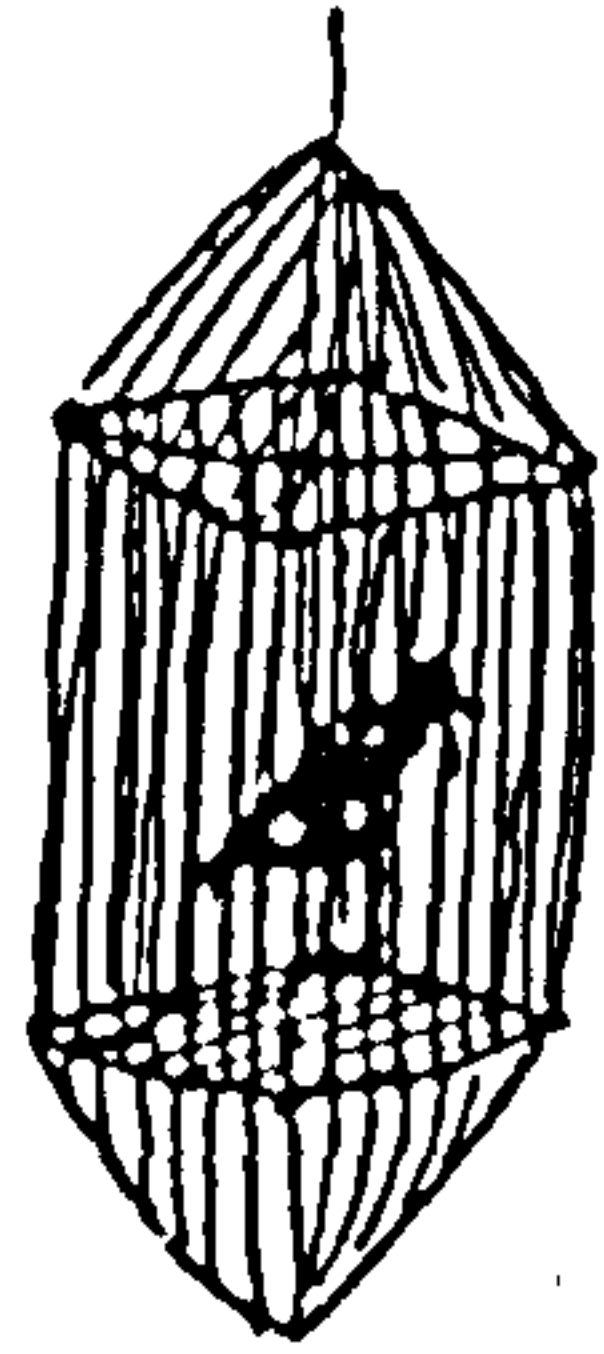
SOME DOODLES

Philip Larkin

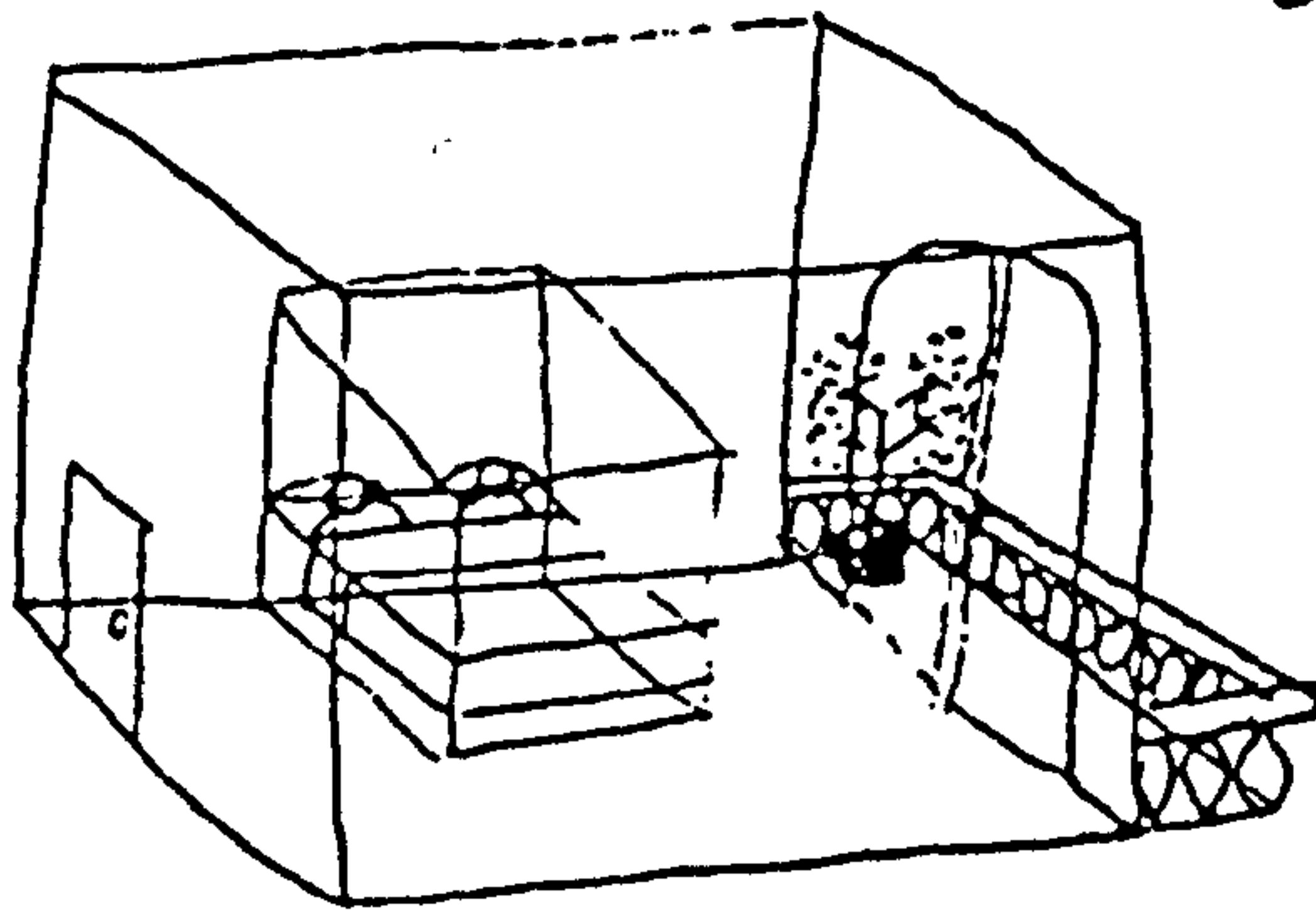
(Drawn on the back of the agenda paper during a meeting of the Board of the Faculty of Arts, University of Hull, 21 January 1981. Item 124 in the Exhibition catalogue.)



The Condemned Cell



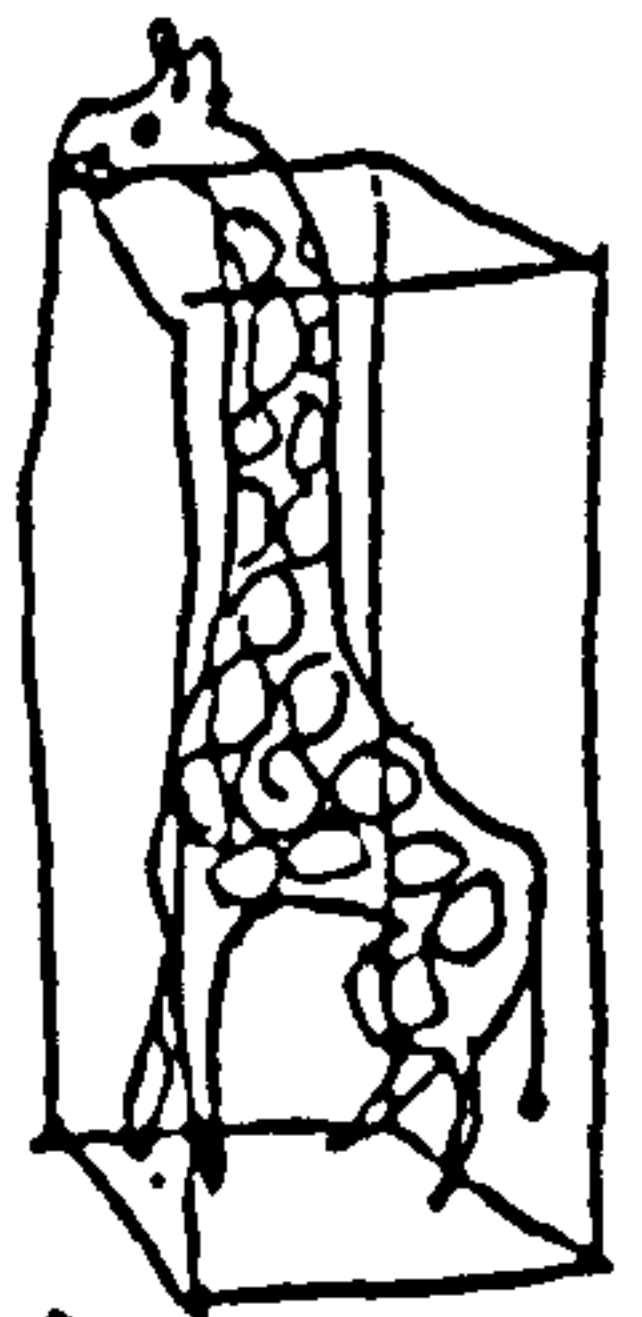
Bird cage



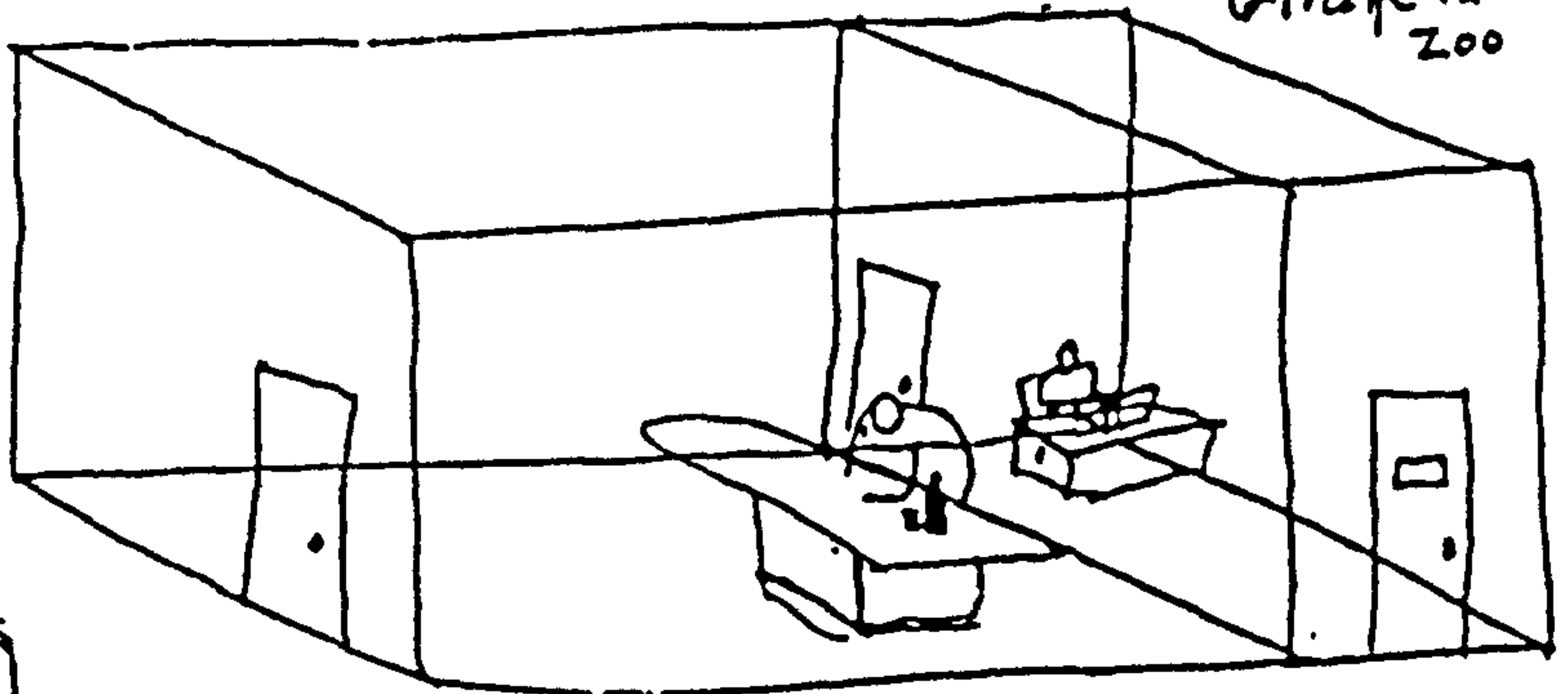
The Bridal Suite



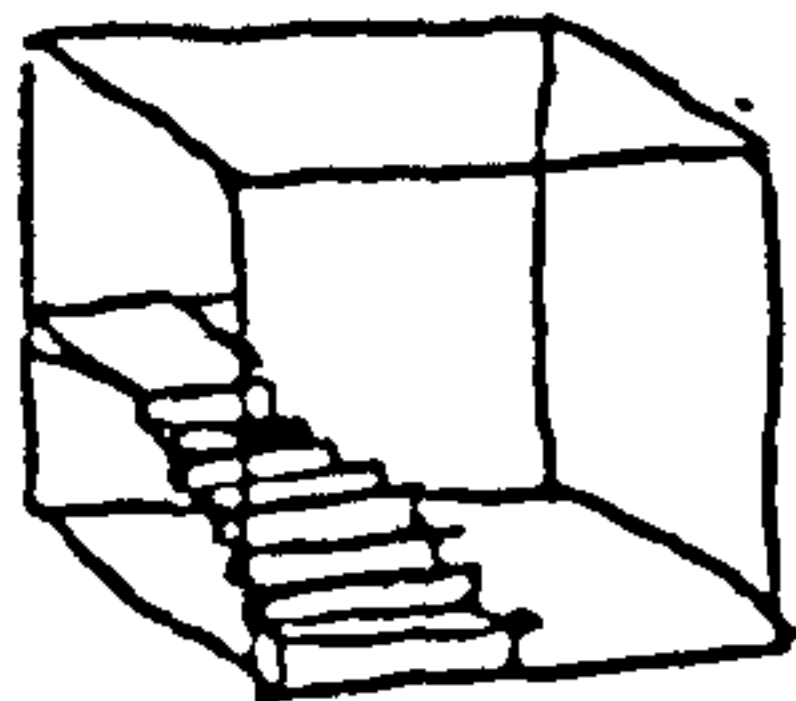
Cat in box



Giraffe in Zoo



Librarian's Office



The Secret stairs

representative picture the reader takes away from the poems: the impression of the poet's face at the window, looking out. Often he seems, as it were, "out on the end of an event" [CP, 115], or as if his situation is

Like something almost being said. [CP, 166]

In other words, the poet often seems to be caught face-to-face with another world, or trapped half-way between two lives, unsure which is better; or he may know which is better, but seem ignorant how to get from one to the other; he may, of course, only be curious, and content merely to compare, and, indeed, there are even times when the poet is simply relieved to be living the life he lives, given the alternatives. But doubt is perhaps his most typical response.

Thus, when the poet's face looms at the window in "Waiting for breakfast," he is questioning whether to devote himself to love or to art. Similarly when, in "The Building," he gazes down from a high hospital window onto the outside world, he seems trapped at an interface between life and death:

Outside seems old enough:
Red brick, lagged pipes, and someone walking by it
Out to the car park, free. [CP, 192]

"Outside" is where one is "free." Or at any rate, inside is often where one is trapped. In "Sad Steps," for example, it is the poet's middle-age that imprisons and separates him from the "strength and pain" of youth and love, symbolised

by the moon, glimpsed, once again, through a window:

Groping back to bed after a piss
I part thick curtains, and am startled by
The rapid clouds, the moon's cleanliness. [CP, 169]

It would be inaccurate to say that Larkin is never pictured outside: "Dockery and Son" is an example of this. But his characteristic place is inside, and his sense of being trapped inside is often intensified by the knowledge that "Outside" exists.

Poems like "Talking in Bed," "Waiting for breakfast," "Sad Steps" and "The Building," therefore, introduce much the most common of the three metaphors--along with the poster and the coast--by which Larkin compares two worlds, two states of mind, or two ways of life. The enclosed space typically symbolises the very reverse of that signified by the open, outside world. The room, like dry land, is contrasted with "unfenced existence" [CP, 137]. In this contrast, the role of the window is pivotal because, like the beach or "bluff," it serves as a link or interface between these two worlds.

But as well as linking the two worlds visually, the window also separates them physically. It is an ambiguous symbol, then, because it suggests both unity and division, proximity and remoteness, desire and doubt. This last is a psychological angle: the poet's face at the window is an emblem not only of desire, but also of uncertainty, even fear: the fear that the outside may be dangerous as well as desirable, and the doubt, in any case, whether it can be

reached. At the very least it expresses curiosity and the desire to compare. It is a striking fact that in almost every poem in which the poet pictures himself inside a room, he nevertheless has access to a window, explicitly or otherwise. Larkin's poems are much concerned with what happens inside the rooms in which the poet lives his life, but noticing what happens outside often seems just as important.

As a general rule, the room is a metaphor for what it contains. Primarily, then, it is an emblem of the poet himself and the life he leads. It is a metaphor for the real, for "Here." This real world, physical and fenced in, is the poet's own arena, as a poem like "Absences" suggests. The phenomena the poet observes outside the room are metaphors too, and a very disparate series of tenors these metaphors convey. [3] Understanding these tenors is a primary objective of this chapter. They are extremely various--more so, naturally, than the vehicles that denote them, which are easier to categorise. These vehicles are typically organic in character and natural in origin. The wind and clouds of "Talking in Bed" are a good example of what the poet sees outside the room.

Once again there is a strong impression here of a simple binary opposition because whereas the room itself is rigid, the world outside most often seems fluid and unformed--it is, as "The Building" suggests, the home of the "free"--and whereas the room is man-made, the outside world is often, in fact, simply the natural world [CP, 192]. But

again there are exceptions to these rules: "Talking in Bed" focuses on the wind and clouds, but also on towns. "The Building" focuses exclusively on a town. But in general, wind and clouds are typical of what the poet sees from his window, and towns are not.

The rooms of "Talking in Bed" and "Mr Bleaney" exist, naturally enough, on the same level as the poet's eye. By contrast, clouds and wind exist above his head. Given that both rooms and clouds are typical symbols of Larkin's poems (separated from one another, naturally, by a window), and that the characteristic progress of the poet's eye is from inside worlds to outside, then one may speak of a typical movement in Larkin's poems from eye-level to the sky. In making this movement, many of these poems anticipate their own structural development, which typically (as the fourth section of the last chapter described) is to drift from the particular and real into the rarefied air of speculation and imagination. In the same way, the attention of these poems, or the vision of the author, frequently moves outwards (away from the room and its confines), then upwards, to the sky and stars, the clouds and the rain, or the tree-tops in the breeze.

One example of this movement is "Livings, III." This poem, which opens with a detailed account of an Oxbridge supper, is apparently set in the eighteenth century. The atmosphere, described in the first two stanzas, is cosy and enclosed. The diners are familiar with one another, so their dinner is convivial and their conversation intimate.

Moreover, all this is described in particular and painstaking detail, down to the subjects the diners discuss:

Which advowson looks the fairest,
What the wood from Snape will fetch,
Names for pudendum mulieris,
Why is Judas like Jack Ketch? [CP, 188]

The detail is characteristic of the attention the poet pays to the contents of the room in the poems in general. The third stanza of "Livings, III" brings the poet to a detached and generalised conclusion as his attention moves outward (to the "fields around" and the "cobbled streets"), then upward to the bell towers, then the stars. This movement from the reassuring familiarity and detail of the enclosed space outward, then upward, is typical, of course. So, in one sense, is the reference to the stars, as the final destination of the poet's eye. Moreover, in moving from the particularity of the conversation to the detachment of the "constellations," this poem re-enacts the the drift--from specific to general--observed in the dramatic monologues.

Stars are typical of what the poet sees outside the room, or cage, because they are natural phenomena, distant, untamed and "out of reach" [CP, 137]. It is worth reviewing the range of natural phenomena glimpsed by the poet from his window before proceeding to question what these vehicles may signify, which is the central purpose of this chapter. Clouds and wind reappear in "Sad Steps," along with the moon. Again the typical movement of the poet's eye is outward from the box, then upward:

Groping back to bed after a piss
I part thick curtains, and am startled by
The rapid clouds, the moon's cleanliness.

Four o'clock: wedge-shadowed gardens lie
Under a cavernous, a wind-picked sky. [CP, 169]

The moon is a common destination for the outward, then upward movement of the poet's eye. In "Vers de Societe" the poet pictures himself at home inside his room, but alert to

the noise of wind,
And looking out to see the moon thinned
To an air-sharpened blade. [CP, 181]

The wind and clouds are equally common. When in "Mr Bleaney" the poet wonders whether Bleaney ever

stood and watched the frigid wind
Tousling the clouds,

the implication is that he himself does so--indeed, it is difficult to read this poem without picturing the poet in the act of gazing outwards and upwards [CP, 102]. "Best Society" offers a striking example of the poet's awareness of the world outside the room: "I lock my door," he says--in this way emphatically securing the enclosed space [CP, 56]. But almost immediately his thoughts turn from his inside world to the world outside:

The gas-fire breathes. The wind outside
Ushers in evening rain.

Such things happen beyond the glass. They exist "Elsewhere," and are different from "Here." Yet they have their place in the poem, and very prominent it is. The

locked door does not suggest that "Elsewhere" can be forgotten: indeed, just the reverse, it seems.

Clouds, wind and rain, the moon and the stars: these constitute a sample of the vehicles the poet observes from the inside, looking out. Apart from the fact that all these vehicles are natural, untamed and "out of reach," there is considerable variety. In "Livings, I" the speaker describes in great detail an evening passed in the dining-room of an hotel, then in the final verse observes a sky which

Drains down the estuary like the bed
Of a gold river--[CP, 186]

a thoroughly Romantic, otherworldly image. In "Waiting for breakfast" the poet's face again looms at the window, and his examination of the scene again moves outward, then upward as the poet peers towards

Sunk ... with mist down to the roofs. [CP, 20]
the loaded sky,

Skies are not invariably bleak and leaden in Larkin's work. In a familiar case of Larkin's outward-then-upward movement, it is the sun throwing its beams against the window that he describes:

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
The sun-comprehending glass,
And beyond it, the deep blue air [CP, 165]

The sky and the air, the mist and the sun: to these amorphous natural phenomena, caught instinctively by the poet when his face peers out of the window, may be added a

final phenomenon. In "Vers de Societe," the poet's outward-then-upward movement is conveyed in a single line:

The gas fire breathes,
the trees are darkly swayed. [CP, 181]

Trees seem particularly to catch the poet's eye (as in this poem) at night. In "Broadcast" the poet sits, it seems, in a darkened room, listening to a concert on the radio. When he looks beyond the confines of his room, it is again trees that catch his eye: "I lose," he says,

All but the outline of the still and withering
Leaves on half-emptied trees. [CP, 140]

Similarly, in "The Dance," as the poet prepares in front of the mirror for a gruelling evening being companionable, his eye wanders outside to where

White candles stir within the chestnut trees. [CP, 154]

Again, this is an evocative and ethereal image. But the general point is that, while it is fair to regard the trapped life the poet leads as characteristic of Larkin's poems, it is not the whole of what is characteristic. There are invariably, it seems, other kinds of life and world within view. While the poet is isolated "Here," his thoughts cannot help but stray "Elsewhere." The reference to towns in "Talking in Bed" suggests, equally, that nature is not all that the poet sees when his eye wanders to the window. But the natural and organic remain, it seems, most

characteristic of the world "beyond the glass" [CP, 20].

Trees, clouds and crescent moons might be taken at face value. They might be regarded as significant in themselves: an indication that Larkin, despite his fabled urban bias, still impulsively takes his bearings from the natural world, or alternatively--the other side of the coin--as a benchmark for his instinctive sense of separation and isolation from things natural, a sign that he feels cut off from nature, separated from it, and part of a different world, man-made and displaced. However, there seem to be two reasons--one implicit, the other more straightforward--for thinking of these various natural phenomena as metaphors.

Implicitly, the movement from room to nature seems so precise, balanced and well-organised that, at the very least, a comparison seems to be intended. The light that gathers around the curtain-edges in "Aubade" seems intended to serve as a contrast with the darkness in the room. This room strongly resembles the coffin, and on one level serves as a metaphor for death. By contrast, the appearance of light at the window reminds the poet that the

Intricate rented world begins to rouse. [CP, 209]

As the darkness symbolises death, the light signifies life. It is not Larkin's purpose here merely to celebrate daylight. Rather, he aims to draw a contrast between the room's interior and the world beyond the room, and his metaphor for this contrast is darkness and light. Given the tenor of which the room is the vehicle, it is the obvious

contrast.

The explicit reason for regarding the natural phenomena of Larkin's poems as metaphors is that the poet himself often does so. "Sad Steps" announces its principal metaphor (or vehicle)--which is "the moon's cleanliness"--then proceeds to identify which tenor in particular this vehicle denotes:

The hardness and the brightness and the plain
Far-reaching singleness of that wide stare

Is a reminder of the strength and pain
Of being young [CP, 169]

In other words the moon does not appear in this poem because the poet feels close to the natural world, nor, indeed, because he feels cut off from it, but because it is a metaphor for a situation and way of life that he means to understand. The moon, says David Timms, is "always in Larkin's poems a symbol for the untrammelled." [4] It seems to be so here, and it seems to be so in "Dockery and Son," where the "Unhindered moon" (a symbol of purity) contrasts with the "Joining and parting [railway] lines," symbols of complication [CP, 152]. Whether the moon is a symbol of the untrammelled in "Vers de Societe" is another matter [CP, 181]. What is clear is that the moon is expected to carry metaphorical ramifications of this type. The tenor of the moon in "Sad Steps," characteristically, is a way of life different from that of the poet himself. It is an "Elsewhere"--or, as the poem itself says, a "somewhere": love is "for others undiminished somewhere."

This section has suggested that the inside and outside worlds of the room--though both are symbolic--symbolise opposites in much the same way as the poster or the coast. Some cursory references have already been made to the tenors of which these natural symbols are vehicles. This chapter now aims to examine a selection of these tenors, and the dilemmas they represent, in greater detail. In the great majority of the cases analysed below, the dilemma is conveyed through the machinery outlined here: that is, through this contrast between inner and outer worlds. For this reason, in the pages that follow, the room and the outside world will be regarded not as deictics but as metaphors.

iii. Prominence and absence.

If these various natural phenomena--the sea and the stars, the wind, the clouds and the rest--are to be seen as metaphors, then the room itself must also be regarded as a metaphor of a kind. In practice it is a metaphor of the most diverse and flexible kind. As a general rule the room is a metaphor for whatever it contains. Much the most prominent of its contents is the poet himself.

This prominence need hardly be laboured, given the analysis advanced in the first chapter. But it is worth summarising briefly four factors that underline it. First, there is the poet's isolation inside the room which, because it often compares with the prospect (or threat) of sociability and companionship outside, seems particularly

pronounced. Poems like "The Dance," "Vers de Societe" and (in a different way) "Mr Bleaney" are written around this theme. The inside world is an isolated world.

The second factor is the detachment with which the poet is presented. In the dramatic monologues especially, it is not his opinions that seem to dominate, but his actions and appearance. The poems set up a stage on which the poet performs. On these occasions, Larkin's seems a poetry of the television age. The reader is offered an extra dimension--a visual dimension--in an account given to drama and narrative rather than opinion. For this reason too, the poet's prominence in the poem and in the environment it describes seems unusually pronounced.

The third factor is Larkin's habit of concentrating his descriptions of "himself" and his actions into a clearly-defined area of the poem. In "Church Going" there are twelve references to the first-person singular in sixty-three lines: ten of these are concentrated into the opening nineteen. The same pattern emerges from "Mr Bleaney," a poem in which the poet's actions--the narrative--are concentrated into the opening five of the seven stanzas, before action give way to speculation. Similarly in "The Whitsun Weddings," a poem of seventy lines, four of the poet's five references to himself are confined to the opening thirty-two lines. The remainder of the poem is given over to description, then imaginative speculation. The result is that the poet's appearance, concentrated into a particular part of the poem, makes a very bold impact.

Moreover, as the first chapter suggests, many of these poems open with the "appearance" of the poet and close on his disappearance. This is the pattern in the three poems mentioned above. Its effect is to implant firmly on the reader's mind a sense of the poet's presence in and behind the poem. "High Windows" also works in this way: the poem contains twenty lines, but the three references to the poet himself are confined to the first nine. The same pattern is emphatically followed in "Aubade," a poem that makes four references to the first-person singular in its fifty lines: all of them in the opening seven. The result is that it becomes impossible to read the poem--which contains numerous generalized reflections and speculations on death throughout its length--without some kind of reference to the poet himself, sitting up in bed and staring, characteristically enough, at the curtained window.

The church in "Church Going" is, of course, as enclosed a space as the poet's own bedroom. That being so, these five poems answer to the pattern described in the second section of this chapter: the poet in the locked space, dominant, active and alone, yet (in four of the five cases--"Church Going" is the exception) with an eye on the window and beyond. Thus the poet dominates the room but, despite his absence from the world "beyond" the four walls, he cannot quite forget that such a world exists, with its promises of freedom and absence.

There is a number of poems in which this absence from the outside world comes as something of a relief, however.

The room may be a constraint at times, but if, for example, it defends the poet from the attentions of "some bitch / Who's read nothing but Which" (as "Vers de Societe" puts it), then so much the better [CP, 181]. "Best Society" puts the argument economically: "if," says the poet,

Deprived of solitude, you chafe,
It's clear you're not the virtuous sort.

Viciously, then, I lock my door. [CP, 56]

Solitude is often the poet's preferred condition. So the enclosed space is often a haven and refuge from others--and, indeed, from things other.

But in the great majority of these poems, the poet is irked by his allotted place on this side of the glass or, alternatively, overcome with an acute sense of exclusion from the world on the other side. There is even something of this spirit in a poem like "Mr Bleaney," in which, although the poet hires the room quite voluntarily, there is still an atmosphere of resentment and antagonism towards the "hired box." In this poem, as it happens, there seems to be no alternative to it, because the world outside the window (the "frigid" wind, the strip of land, "Tussocky, littered") seems no more appealing than the world within. But rarely is the world beyond the glass presented in so unattractive a light.

The issue here is how far the room is a haven and how far a prison. Most often, the enclosed space constrains. In "Autobiography at an Air-Station," for example, the

virtues of the outside world are the virtues of freedom and adventure. As the light "ebbs," the poet, trapped in the airport, sees his own dreams of freedom ebbing likewise. It is almost as if the air and light refuse him, and his resentment at this exclusion underwrites the bitterness of the closing lines:

I set
So much on this Assumption. Now it's failed. [CP, 78]

There is less bitterness in "Talking in Bed" at the poet's own absence from the world glimpsed at the window, but his sense of exclusion from it is quite plain. Surveying the wind, the clouds, the sky and the towns, he observes ruefully:

None of this cares for us. [CP, 129]

His sense of isolation and exclusion in "Sad Steps" is the theme of the poem. Just as air and light in "Autobiography at an Air-Station" are metaphors for freedom, so here the moon is a metaphor for youth and first love:

it can't come again,
But is for others undiminished somewhere. [CP, 169]

The poet's sense of being gradually cut off from a life that continues unabated "for others" beyond the glass reaches its height in poems like "The Building" and "Aubade." In these poems, the enclosed space signifies death, and the poet's presence inside this space anticipates his fate: the "end of choice, the last of hope" as "The Building" says [CP, 191].

Little wonder that this box is resented. In "The Building," the poet's absence from the world beyond the glass is regretted because of the youthful pleasures, evoked in greater detail here than in "Sad Steps," from which the window separates him:

short terraced streets
Where kids chalk games, and girls with hair-dos fetch
Their separates from the cleaners--O world,
Your loves, your chances, are beyond the stretch
Of any hand from here! [CP, 192]

Inevitably as the world of "games," "girls," "loves" and "chances" gradually drifts "beyond the stretch" of the poet and "out of reach," his sense of his own absence from the world beyond the glass anticipates his approaching death. The pun on "stretch" (a reference to jail sentences, apparently) underlines the poet's sense of imprisonment. There is a sad irony in the poet's reaction to this glimpse of the outside world: in "Aubade" he confesses that it is his inability to see outside the room (because it is dark) that makes

all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die. [CP, 208]

At the same time, as "The Building" suggests, when in these late poems the poet is able to see beyond the glass, he seems most acutely aware, of all he sees there, of his own absence. In both senses, there seems to be no escape. At any rate, as the introduction to this thesis suggested, the chief dilemma the poems in general raise is one between

presence and absence: a dilemma the contrast between interior and exterior worlds is well suited to convey.

iv. Isolation and companionship.

If the room symbolises what it contains, then it is consistently (and even, perhaps, primarily) a symbol of the poet's isolation. This is underlined by the fact that, in addition to symbolising solitude, the room very often also creates and secures it. In this respect "Waiting for breakfast," "I Remember, I Remember" and "Talking in Bed" are exceptions, because in these poems, other people are allowed inside the room. In the poems in general, however, isolation (desired or otherwise) is the rule--a condition the room both symbolises and secures.

Isolation is a constant, then. But the poet does nevertheless experiment with a variety of attitudes towards his own solitude: these are worth investigating, and a variety of types of companionship and attitudes to it is worth establishing. As a general rule, isolation is welcomed in the early poems, challenged in the mature work, and resented in the late. Or, to put it another way, "Elsewhere" has an emphatically social dimension in the relatively early poems, when other people are other, but this is lost in the later works, when "Elsewhere" begins to assume transcendent proportions, and the company of others seems less alien.

In relatively early poems like "Church Going," then, the poet is only too keen to isolate himself from others by

ensuring that the enclosed space is indeed enclosed. This anxiety is of course underwritten by the determination only to visit the church when "there's nothing going on" [CP, 97]. Similarly, when in "Mr Bleaney," the room fails to defend the poet from the outside world, he reinforces his isolation with cotton-wool. In these poems (composed in 1954 and 1955 respectively), the poet seems to achieve the first wish expressed in "Wants" (1950): "the wish to be alone" [CP, 42]. It is the room that grants the poet his wish. This is expressly established in a third early piece, "Best Society" (1951). Here again, the poet is anxious to "lock my door" if only because

Uncontradicting solitude
Supports me on its giant palm ... [CP, 56]--

and the room, with its locked door, supports the solitude. In the relatively early poems in general, then, the room serves not as a prison, but as a haven and defence against others, a means of keeping the social "Elsewhere" out of reach.

In three poems composed in Larkin's mature years, or middle-period, the enclosed space is breached in an assortment of ways, but the breach (symbolising companionship) is accepted with varying degrees of reluctance. In "Reference Back," the poet places himself in the "unsatisfactory room" at home playing records, while his mother calls to him from the "unsatisfactory hall" outside [CP, 106]. This act of communication, however truncated,

suggests that the room is now less shuttered and defensive than it was, and indicates that the poet himself can tolerate its breach (by his mother's remarks) without recourse to cotton-wool. Her comments, he reflects, succeed in constructing a "sudden bridge" between mother and son--a bridge between the two worlds, outer and inner. A bridge between worlds, it need hardly be said, is what the locked doors and stuffed ears of "Best Society," "Church Going" and "Mr Bleaney" are intended to prevent.

The reference to the poet's "keys" in the opening stanza of "The Dance" might normally be taken to suggest that he means to lock himself into his room. In this poem, though, they signify the reverse: that he is about to lock himself out. Characteristically, this poem (composed in 1963-4) begins in the enclosed space, apparently in the poet's bedroom. Again the room signals isolation: the poet, in fact, is looking at himself in the mirror. By contrast, leaving the room betokens companionability. The poet does not leave the room because he has tired of it or (more significantly in this context) because he has grown impatient with his own company. On the contrary, he seems reluctant to go. But he has a positive reason:

Cigarettes, matches, keys--
All this, simply to be where you are. [CP, 154]

It is for romance that the poet is willing to abandon the room--in the process sacrificing his instinctive bias towards isolation to a hunger for romance. This is clearly rather a development on "Mr Bleaney." Moreover, it seems to

be no coincidence that the one occasion in the poem when the poet's nerve fails and he determines to head for home ("Ring for a car right now") arises when, in fact, he has temporarily left the dance itself and made for the Gents [CP, 157]. One enclosed space reminds the poet of another, perhaps: returning to the dance, the decision to leave is quietly forgotten.

In one sense, the poet's room is not breached here: it remains (with its mirror) an emblem of isolation. But his willingness to abandon it, even temporarily, for the "Alien territory" of a social function (as "The Dance" has it) is a significant development on "Best Society" or "Wants" [CP, 154]. It is not that isolation is rejected, merely that love seems more enticing. The room is beginning to seem like a prison, and love seems to offer the promise of escape. Moreover, if the room symbolises the self, then love, in enticing the poet away from the room, may offer him the beauty of somewhere he isn't. It is, of course, a significant promise.

"Vers de Societe" was written in 1971, seven years later. By now the room's power to protect has lost much of its attraction, and it is this sense of imprisonment and oppression that governs the poet's thinking. At first, it is true, the poet is unwilling to trade the ease and comfort of isolation for the company of the "bitch / Who's read nothing but Which." Moreover he is conscious of "all the spare time that has flown / Straight into nothingness" while in the company of others [CP, 181].

Isolation, however, "brings / Not peace but other things": this is a complete change of heart. For the first time, the room is arraigned on its own terms. It is no longer enough and may indeed be too much. Being alone, the poet now feels, is the straight route to feelings of "failure and remorse." "Vers de Societe" rejects the constraints of the room and the life it implies for the first time since "Autobiography at an Air-Station," a poem composed some two decades before. The substantial point here, however, remains that the author is clear about his own metaphors: to remain inside the box is to remain alone. Companionship, like freedom, happens "Elsewhere."

The progress from "Best Society" to "Vers de Societe" is one in which the poet's protective carapace (to extend the metaphor of the room) is gradually and reluctantly sloughed off. This development continues into Larkin's late poems. Increasingly the room comes to be seen as a metaphor for death--or, rather, of being trapped in a life that is heading for death--and much this is resented. Something of this has already been seen, but it is worth adding that a large measure of what the poet fears about death is its loneliness. In "The Old Fools" he speculates that old age may be a matter of

having lighted rooms
Inside your head, and people in them, acting--

then qualifies the simile with the suggestion that the thought of approaching death is the thought of "only /

The rooms themselves ...": the people have gone [CP, 196]. The world of other people seems much desired by now. But it remains (as ever) somewhere else. The point is amplified in "Aubade." Specifically, death means

no sight, no sound,
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
Nothing to love or link with [CP, 208]

It seems typical that Larkin should speak of "Nothing to love," rather than "no one." But other people are now desired rather than resented or locked out--an impression underlined when, in the fourth verse of "Aubade," the poet comments that death frightens most "when we are caught without / People or drink" [CP, 209].

A final case of the poet's developing sense of his own metaphor occurs in "Ambulances." Here again the room is a metaphor for the grave, for death. But the relationship between this room and death is metonymic too, in that the ambulance carries the dying to their deaths. These two registers are elided in the poem's closing verse: the dead must lie, it seems,

Far
From the exchange of love ...
Unreachable inside a room
The traffic parts to let go by [CP, 133]

The sight of the "fastened doors" in this poem (here they are viewed from the outside) brings none of the reassurance of "Best Society" or "Church Going." On the contrary they suggest a death sentence of which to lie far from the exchange of love, "Unreachable" to others and trapped in "a

room," is the most disagreeable feature.

But whether or not the poet is at ease with his own room and his isolation in it, his affection for others is never quite wholehearted. This important fact best manifests itself in "Vers de Societe," in which the poet leaves the room not because he feels unusually cheerful or friendly, but because for once the room oppresses him. Other people do not appear in Larkin's poems with any great regularity, and when they do appear, they are rarely individuated. Of those that are individuated, the majority (like the landlady in "Mr Bleaney," perhaps, the "shoptalking shit" in "The Dance," or the ill-educated "bitch" in "Vers de Societe") are less characters than caricatures. But it is an instructive exercise to establish the poet's attitude to others individually, and to suggest an explanation for it.

Most of the characters to appear in Larkin's poems are excluded from the room. Of those who appear with the poet inside the room, little can be said. The reader is told the gender of the person in "Waiting for breakfast while she brushed her hair," but is told little more than that; and (s)he is told still less about those that appear (inside the room) in "Talking in Bed" and "I Remember, I Remember." It is fair to add that the landlady in "Mr Bleaney" is seen inside the room, before it becomes the poet's own. After that, the cotton-wool excludes her.

But of those who belong outside the room, more can be said. There is a variety of types. One type is kindly,

friendly and sociable. If the poet's landlady in "Mr Bleaney" could have her way, the poet himself would belong to this group:

'Mr Bleaney took
My bit of garden properly in hand,'

she hints, a little transparently [CP, 102]. But the poet does not intend to meet her half-way on this matter, instinctively setting his face against the kind of companionable charity she invites. It is of a kind he ridicules in "Best Society":

Good neighbours need whole parishfuls
Of folk to do it on,

he says of ordinary human charity, and he proceeds to accept with equanimity that he is "not the virtuous sort" [CP, 56]. But then, as "Vers de Societe" suggests, "Virtue is social": in his own eyes the poet is neither a virtuous animal, nor a social one.

Earnest middle-class enthusiasms are equally ridiculed. They constitute a second type. These may centre on the associated ideas of nostalgia and conservation. In "Church Going," for example, the poet describes the type with venomous disdain: they are "the crew"

That tap and jot and know
what rood-lofts were [CP, 98]

Or alternatively (in the same poem) he disparages the

ruin-bibber, randy for antique,

Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes [CP, 98]

Such people are disdained not least, it seems, because they are preoccupied with the church's deictics (its vehicles, in fact) but blind to its purpose, or tenors. A similar charge might be levelled at the poet himself, but he dissociates himself from such people by describing himself as "bored" (as opposed to enthusiastic) and "uninformed." How far "Church Going" is in fact an uninformed account is a very germane question. But enthusiasm of any kind is perhaps unlikely to be welcomed by the author of The Less Deceived. In "The Dance" the poet finds himself separated from his would-be lover and waylaid at the bar:

I let the barman tell me how it was
Before the war, when there were sheep and grass
In place of Social Pathics; then I tread
Heavily to the Gents [CP, 157]

Middle-class enthusiasms for vanished worlds (whether sheep-folds or rood-lofts) do not appear to arouse the poet, except to ridicule.

A third type towards whom he develops an aversion is the academic, the scholar or intellectual. In "The Dance" the poet finds himself "caught"

By some shoptalking shit who leads me off
To supper and his bearded wife, to stand
Bemused [CP, 156]

The poet has nothing to say to them, and as quickly as he can he makes an exit. It is from the academic that he shrinks in "Vers de Societe": the thought of "Asking that

ass about his fool research" seems less than enticing. And in a series of poems like "Ape Experiment Room" and "Posterity" the poet advertises his aversion to the perceived heartlessness and careerism of academics and intellectuals [CP, 160, 170].

The charitable, the enthusiastic, the nostalgic and the academic: what is perhaps most striking about these types is their similarity to the poet himself. A late poem like "To the Sea" provides concise evidence of Larkin's capacity for enthusiasm, nostalgia and charity:

Still going on, all of it, still going on! ...

If the worst
Of flawless weather is our falling short,
It may be that through habit these do best,
Coming to water clumsily undressed
Yearly; teaching their children by a sort
Of clowning; helping the old, too,
as they ought. [CP, 173 - 4]

Nostalgia and kindness are both staple ingredients of Larkin's later works. Of the poet's intellectual attainments, little more need be said, perhaps. As a general impression of Larkin's evaluation of others, it seems fair to say that the poet dislikes those too similar to himself. He expects others, indeed, to be other.

v. Silence and sound.

The great virtue of the poet's room in the early poems, then, is the privacy it permits. Conversely, its great vice in the later works is the loneliness it imposes. But this

permanently solitary confinement is also, in practice, largely a silent confinement, and when this silence is interrupted, the interruption originates and belongs elsewhere.

Silence must naturally be a property of the poet's solitude unless he plays records or talks to himself. In "Reference Back" he does the former, and that poem serves as an exception to the general rule that the poet's chosen environment is a quiet one. Elsewhere, however, the rule holds. In these poems there are only four conversations inside the room: two of these occur in the "Livings" poems (in which the character of the poet, of course, plays no part); a third is the poet's monologue on the train in "I Remember, I Remember"; and the fourth the landlady's remarks at the beginning of "Mr Bleaney." In other respects the poet seems to lead an unusually quiet life, the centre of which is his room, suffused as it seems to be (like the church in "Church Going") by a "tense, musty, unignorable silence" [CP, 97].

The world beyond the glass, by contrast, is a noisy one, alive with conversation (much of it aimless, apparently), radio sets and telephones, music ancient and modern and the general hum of urban life. Thus, whereas a poem like "Talking in Bed" is, in fact, a poem about being silent in bed, the world beyond the glass consists, in general, of "loud noons of cities," of "known" bells chiming, of uncles "shouting smut," of telephones crouching "getting ready to ring," of "jabbering" radio sets, of

nagging wives and "shop-talking" shits and "Which-fed" discussions, of "seaside quack" and of "Asking that ass about his fool research." [5] The world of other people is, it seems, a noisy and cacophonous place--one from which the room serves as a refuge.

Many of those poems in which the poet leaves the room (albeit briefly) express this contrast between the silence of "Here" and the noisy character of the social "Elsewhere" very concisely. There is an atmosphere of slow motion and silence about the interior of the room: an atmosphere accentuated by the poet's occasional excursions into an outside world of noise. The contrast in "The Dance" between worlds interior and exterior is partly (not wholly) this contrast between the poet's element, which is silence, on one side and, on the other, the "slug" and "snarl" of music, together with the raucous cacophony of conversation, much of it uninspiring. This contrast is underwritten by a shift from the visual to the aural in Larkin's account. The opening stanza pictures the poet as he examines his own image in the mirror, and

in the darkening mirror sees
The shame of evening trousers, evening tie.
White candles stir within the chestnut trees.
The sun is low. The pavements are half-dry. [CP, 154]

Having reached the "familiar barn," however, it is the poet's ears, rather than his eyes, that dominate the narrative:

The floor reverberates as with alarm:
Not you, not here. I edge along the noise

To the background of the music's "slug" and "snarl," the evening is dominated by conversation, first with the "shoptalking shit," then with the long-remembered barman, and next with the "weed," who

Unfolds some crazy scheme
He's got for making wine from beetroot [CP, 157]

All this is followed finally by the "Which-fed argument." Beneath these various conversations--or, more accurately, monologues, since the poet himself takes no part in any of them--the music persists, "deafening" and "omen-laden" as it seems. The poet himself, however, seems to say nothing--and neither, curiously enough, does the woman to whom the poem is addressed, who communicates, apparently, through a "silent beckoning"--eschewing, for reasons unexplained, more conventional methods of making her intentions clear. This is striking because, as this section aims to show, silence is the poet's territory, and normally his alone.

The same contrast between the silent interior and the noisy world of other people is drawn in "Vers de Societe." Again, silence governs "Here," noise the social "Elsewhere." The poet presents a specific contrast: to be with others, and to be elsewhere, is a matter of having to "catch the drivel of some bitch," or of "Asking that fool about" By contrast, to be at home is to pass the time

Under the lamp, hearing the noise of wind,
And looking out to see the moon thinned
To an air-sharpened blade. [CP, 181]

The aural / visual contrast of "The Dance" recurs here, then. In general, though, to sit at home--"by a lamp," perhaps--is to be lulled by the sound of the gas fire as it "breathes," or to be discomfited by the "Whispering" of guilt. Principally, though, it is to look, to notice the appearance of things. But to be with others, as this poem suggests, is simply to be deluged with noise, a cacophany of "forks and faces" and jabbering conversation.

To venture out of one's room, then, is to enter a world of noise--noises, moreover, of all sorts and conditions, from the "thrush" in the early poem, "Coming,"

Laurel-surrounded
In the deep bare garden,
Its fresh-peeled voice
Astonishing the brickwork, [CP, 33]

to the "crowd" in the late poem, "Going, Going":

The crowd
Is young in the M1 cafe;
Their kids are screaming for more--
More houses, more parking allowed,
More caravan sites, more pay. [CP, 189]

The noisiness of the outside world may be relished or resented. Either way, however, sounds happen there, not "Here." But perhaps the most striking property of the world beyond the glass, given the poet's well-known love of jazz, is music.

"The Dance" is a prime example of this, of course. But "Reasons for Attendance" is a second. Here the poet is drawn by the "trumpet's voice" to watch a crowd of young

couples dancing to the music, to the "beat of happiness."
He is drawn, as the poem explains, not by hopes of sex--as
in "The Dance"--but by the music: it is

The trumpet's voice, loud and authoritative, [that]
Draws me a moment to the lighted glass [CP, 80]

But despite the appeal of the jazz, the poet remains an
outsider, because although he can hear the music, strictly
speaking it happens elsewhere: on the other side of the
"lighted glass" that separates him from the couples.
Typically, then, other people are on the other side of the
glass, and so is music.

Music is characteristically the food of love in these
poems. It is so in "The Dance" and "Reasons for
Attendance," as well as in poems like "Love Songs in Age,"
in which the poet himself plays no part [CP, 113]. In
"Annus Mirabilis" this same equation between love and music
is suggested:

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(Which was rather late for me)--
Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles' first LP. [CP, 167]

Again, the poet is an outsider, however. It all happened,
not "Here"--in his own life--but "just too late for me": a
kind of chronological "Elsewhere." But this is the typical
pattern, because music (like sex and love) happens to
others, and belongs somewhere else.

"Broadcast" is a summary of the observations made in
this section. Again, music is associated with love; again,

love is elsewhere; and again the poet's room is defined by visual, not aural, observations. The poet tries to imagine his lover's face "among all those faces" at the concert she is attending:

Here it goes quickly dark. I lose
All but the outline of the still and withering
Leaves on half-emptied trees. [CP, 140]

But the window, giving out over the trees, is not the only medium to "Elsewhere" in this poem, because the "glowing wavebands" on the radio provide a metaphor for the glass (the "lighted glass" in "Reasons for Attendance") that separates the poet from the source of love, music and the outside world. Once again, however, where the poet's life and world are touched by music, it belongs "Elsewhere," and comes from the outside in.

These associated ideas come together in "For Sidney Bechet." There is no question of a room in this poem, but even so, in picturing "New Orleans reflected on the water" the poet seems to summon up a version of an "Elsewhere" in which the water seems to be as significant as the music. Moreover, this impression of an ideal otherworld seems to be confirmed by the description the poet gives of

Everyone making love and going shares--

an unreserved antidote to the isolation and separation that usually attends the poet in his room [CP, 83]. Describing this otherworld as "My Crescent City," the poet proceeds to

collect together the various strands outlined in this section--music, love and things otherworldly--as the poem moves towards its close:

On me your voice falls as they say love should,
Like an enormous yes. My Crescent City
Is where your speech alone is understood

It is as clear a picture as Larkin gives of music: it happens somewhere else, not in the real world symbolised by the enclosed space, but in an ideal otherworld, somewhere free, beyond the room. In The Bicycle-Clipped Misanthropist, a B.B.C. radio programme in memory of Larkin, one of his acquaintances describes the enthusiasm and ebullience with which he used to react to the music of Sidney Bechet and others: Larkin, his old friend recalls, "was outside himself." [6] With its suggestions of escape from the self, it is a most striking phrase in this context. At all events, music belongs outside the room, beyond the glass. Whether it belongs to the social "Elsewhere," as one might expect from poems like "The Dance," or to the transcendent type, as might be imagined from this example, it is not easy to say.

But perhaps the issue can best be answered by applying the question this section has asked to the transcendent "Elsewhere." When the poet peers out of his window to where

White candles stir within the chestnut trees, [CP, 154]
or, alternatively, leans out to be "startled by"

The rapid clouds, the moon's cleanliness, [CP, 169]

or, again, sits alone at home

 hearing the noise of wind,
And looking out to see the moon thinned
To an air-sharpened blade, [CP, 181]

he peers up into a transcendent "Elsewhere" whose sublime indifference to the bustle and bluster of life below is not the least reason, one feels, for its magnetism. If the social "Elsewhere" is cacophonous, then, the transcendent type is serene: a distinction between the two types to be examined in its proper context below.

vi. The tangible and the amorphous.

If the poet's environment is best described visually, and the world "beyond the glass" aurally, then it follows that the poet's world has a largely physical and visible character which, as a general rule, distinguishes it from the outside world. Or, to put it another way, if the poet's room symbolises what it contains, then it must symbolise not only such abstractions as isolation and silence, but also the beds, books, chairs and china that litter it throughout the canon.

There is a great deal of such bric-a-brac in the various rooms that contain the poet's life. This includes, among other things, the "wardrobe" in "Aubade," the "Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb" and "saucer-souvenir" of "Mr Bleaney," the radio-set in "Broadcast," the "gas-fire" of "Best Society" and the "gas fire" of "Vers de Societe" along

with the lamp from that poem, the "good books" and the "good bed" from "Poetry of Departures," the unspecified reading-matter in "The Whitsun Weddings" and the litter basket in "As Bad as a Mile," the "in-tray" in "Toads Revisited," the "Cigarettes, matches, keys" in "The Dance" together with the mirror from that poem and various other mirrors in poems like "Send No Money," the wallet in "Wild Oats" and the bed in "Talking in Bed," the "Books" and "specs" from "A Study of Reading Habits," and the whole collection of domestic clutter that brings "Home Is So Sad" to a close:

Look at the pictures and the cutlery.
The music in the piano stool. That vase. [CP, 119]

Everett describes High Windows, Larkin's last volume, as

strongly void of opinion, which it derides . . . : instead it has objects. Poems like 'Show Saturday' and 'To the Sea' are so dense with things" [7]

But it seems equally fair to say that throughout the canon, the poems are dense with things, and that the home of the great majority of these things is the room itself.

By contrast, the world beyond the glass is populated with what is amorphous, or intangible, or unfixed. One aspect of this is of course the sounds with which the world beyond the poet's window reverberates. So in a poem like "The Dance," the cigarettes and keys have a physical, tangible character which the music and conversation lack. In the same way, in "Vers de Societe," the fire and lamp have a physical presence whereas the "noise of wind" is an

unfixed, unformed and vicarious phenomenon, impossible to touch, capture or tie down. And although it is unusual for the poet not to notice these noises as they invade the box from outside, as happens in "The Whitsun Weddings"--

At first, I didn't notice what a noise
The weddings made ...
And went on reading--

still, it seems appropriate that it is through the medium of noise that the outside world invades at all [CP, 114]. Sounds, after all, belong elsewhere.

But this incident from "The Whitsun Weddings" is not the only occasion on which a physical object within the room (here, a book or magazine) competes for the poet's attention with an amorphous phenomenon (cries of pleasure, it seems) outside. In "Mr Bleaney," similarly, the contrast between the physicality of the box and the unfixed character of life outside is one aspect of the hiatus--it has many aspects--which opens up between the fifth and sixth stanzas: between, that is, the bed, the chair, the bulb and the ash-tray on one side, and on the other, "the frigid wind / Tousling the clouds ..." [CP, 102]. The physical world--in a sense, the real world--belongs here, on this side of the glass.

There is a similar contrast between inner and outer worlds in "Livings, I," a poem in which the cluttered furniture of the hotel is described in precise detail ("I drowse / Between ex-Army sheets," and so forth) in specific contrast with the world outside, where

a big sky

Drains down the estuary like the bed
Of a gold river. [CP, 186]

Once again, inside the room, matter is specific, tangible, metonymically detailed and, like all matter, it has a history. Outside, by contrast, phenomena are impressionistic, amorphous, imaginatively recreated and often metaphorically described.

In a sense the distinction being drawn here is no more than an extension of that drawn between the visual and the aural. But the world beyond the glass is so typically composed of light, air, water, wind and sound that it seems worth asking what these have in common. Part of the answer, certainly, is that they have no place among the tawdry man-made bricabrac of the poet's room. But the heart of the answer seems to be their freedom, real or imagined, from the tyranny of dimensions which informs the world within the room. The wind (to take one example) cannot be contained in a room, captured and restrained as a piece of furniture can be. Nor, as has been seen, can sound, with its habit of breaking through walls (if not cotton-wool) to disturb the poet from outside. And in this respect, of course, phenomena like wind and sound distinguish themselves from the room's most prominent prisoner.

For these reasons it seem logical that, after removing his hat and cycle-clips, the poet's first act in "Church Going" should be to

Move forward, run my hand around the font. [CP, 97]

The poet's environment has this physical quality to it: it can be touched and depended on. In "Church Going," similarly, his first instinct is to ensure that the furniture of the church, for all its sacred ramifications to the Christian mind, is real and stable, dimension-bound and a property of a world he can recognise, and make sense of. So, indeed (as the poem proceeds to establish), is the church itself.

vii. Familiarity and freedom.

Above all, though, the room is known, orderly and safe, dependable not least because it is familiar, and the poet's feeling that it isolates him from the excitement and novelty of the outside world is a source of continuous doubt as to how far it is a defence, and how far a trap. For in protecting the poet from the "chances" of life (as "The Building" has it), the room may also, like an over-anxious parent, separate him from the world's challenges and rewards [CP, 192].

At first it seems that this dilemma belongs chiefly to Larkin's early maturity. In poems like "Toads" and "Poetry of Departures" (both written in the Spring of 1954), the poet ruminates on the virtues of the life trapped and orderly [CP, 89, 85]. It is fair to say that the poet's room does not appear in "Toads." But the poem investigates the dilemma that the room often raises. The folk who "live up lanes / With fires in a bucket" live the kind of life that happens "Elsewhere": a life disorganised and unplanned,

dangerous and exciting. By contrast the poet's life is well-managed and fine-tuned, but lacking real challenges. His concern is chiefly with the dangers of this other kind of life. But although he satisfies himself on that point--

No one actually starves--

he still resolves, at the end of the poem, to adhere to a life of order [CP, 89]. In short, it is the room, rather than the lane, that remains the poet's metaphor.

Even so, in "Poetry of Departures" the "audacious, purifying" move of leaving one's own life behind seems instinctively attractive. The idea of starting a new life, free and spontaneous, leaves the poet nothing less than "flushed and stirred." It is not only the challenge and excitement of a new life that stirs him. He also resents his old existence, the way of life--secure but unexciting--with which he is familiar and at ease. His symbol for this way of life and its properties is, once again, the room:

We all hate home
And having to be there:
I detest my room,
Its specially-chosen junk,
The good books, the good bed,
And my life in perfect order [CP, 85]

He might almost be talking about the rooms in "Mr Bleaney" and "Aubade": poems in which the room and what it represents do certainly seem loathesome.

But "perfect order" (which is the complaint in "Poetry of Departures") is not as likely to upset and disrupt one's

life as either sterility or death (the themes of "Mr Bleaney" and "Aubade"). In this poem, then, he feels on reflection that he can live with it. Besides, it has its compensations. The ordered life is a life, he argues, more realistic than an "artificial" existence on the "nut-strewn roads." It seems a peculiar argument, given that the deictics by which his present life is denoted (the "good books, the good bed") seem more artificial, less natural, than the "nut-strewn roads." There again, nature is invariably part of the province of "Elsewhere." It is the man-made world that exists here, where the poet means (on this showing) to stay.

His dilemma here arises out of a developing hunger for excitement and unpredictability. The "lanes" of "Toads" and the "roads" of "Poetry of Departures" constitute, he fancies, a life wholly different from the trapped life of the room: movement is opposed to stasis. The same principle of antithesis underwrites "Best Society," though in this poem it is chiefly the safety of the room that attracts the poet. In particular, it seems, other people frustrate him, intimidate and outshine him. The room is a haven from them and from social pressures in general:

Uncontradicting solitude
Supports me on its giant palm;
And like a sea-anemone
Or simple snail, there cautiously
Unfolds, emerges, what I am. [CP, 56 - 7]

In "Poetry of Departures," the room is reluctantly accepted, perhaps because the orderly life in this poem (as in

"Toads") has the ring of inevitability about it. The poet is resigned to a room he professes to "detest." In "Best Society," by contrast, the room is actively accepted and welcomed because its familiarity serves as a bulwark against the unpredictable. "Best Society" was written three years before "Poetry of Departures": in Larkin's later works, as has been shown, the poet's room (and the life it implies) is rarely given so glowing a testimony as it is in this early work.

The late poem, "Livings, I," helps to illustrate the poet's developing antipathy to the life in the room, the trapped life. The poem is set, as the last line explains, in 1929. The habitual, familiar character of the life lived is emphasised by the use of the present continuous tense, and this force of habit is further stressed by the exactitude with which the events of the evening--a typical evening, apparently, rather than a specific one--are detailed. The speaker of the poem glances through the local paper:

Births, deaths. For sale. Police court. Motor spares.

Afterwards, whisky in the Smoke Room: Clough,
Margetts, the Captain, Dr Watterson;
Who makes ends meet, who's taking the knock,
Government tariffs, wages, price of stock. [CP, 186]

It is a comfortable life, its characters, rituals, events and even conversations pre-ordained by custom. The speaker's companions are too familiar to him for there to be any question in this poem (as there is in "The Dance") of "Alien territory" [CP, 154]. On the contrary, for this

speaker (as for the speaker of "Best Society") the box enables "what I am" to emerge. Yet for all that, the speaker here is not satisfied with the life he leads--he is not satisfied, perhaps, with what he has become--and the easy comforts described in the opening two verses are challenged in the third: the speaker retires to bed, and after a symbolically significant glance out of the window--there are other ways of life--he falls to "wondering why / I think it's worth while coming." The poem's last line delivers a decisive rejoinder to these doubts: "It's time for change," the poem concludes.

Given the traumas about to be visited on the travelling salesman (among others) in the early nineteen-thirties, such sentiments may have a double edge, and it is perhaps the poet's intention here (in the last line in particular) to highlight the dangers awaiting those who abandon a familiar life for something more exciting. At any rate, it is from the familiar and well-ordered that the speaker of this poem recoils. One might feel that Larkin could only arrive at a decisive rejection of the familiarity of the room through the medium of a speaker clearly not himself. But an early poem, "Arrival," would cast doubt on this, because here the novelty and unfamiliarity of a new town and life are immediately appealing:

For this ignorance of me
Seems a kind of innocence.
Fast enough I shall wound it:
Let me breathe till then
Its milk-aired Eden [CP, 51]

The unfamiliar, the adventurous and the dangerous always appeal to Larkin--in theory, at least--and they do so here. But only rarely do they seem realistic. The poet seems fated, normally, to a fenced existence in the room, with all that entails of a life uneventful and safe, and the concomitant--and increasing--sense of being trapped. "Arrival" is (so to say) a departure because here the unfamiliar is tasted, and the poet's appetite is whetted. It is no coincidence, one feels, that

the windows flock open
And the curtains fly out like doves

Rather than separating the poet from things unfamiliar, the windows here introduce him to it. Typically in these poems, the role of the room is to protect the poet from things new and unknown. In this early piece, however, it seems he wants and needs no such protection. Yet so insistent is the poet's metaphor for himself and his life that, though the windows are open and the curtains flutter, the poet remains, it seems, this side of the glass.

viii. Two aspects of "Elsewhere."

Commentators have been divided on the question of how far Larkin's poetry developed over the three decades of his mature work. A number of critics argues that Larkin's work remains remarkably consistent over these years, especially in its themes. Timms comments on

how constant Larkin's themes have remained since 1946: disappointment in life, the pressures of society on the individual, the desire to escape those pressures together with the fear of isolation such escape brings, the encroachment of time. [8]

In short, Timms argues, the "themes that have continued to occupy him were established in his first book." [9] Petch, similarly, finds that Larkin's two novels, published in the mid 'forties,

introduce the concerns and interests that pervade the subsequent poetry: the difficulty of ever fully knowing ... what we think of as 'the self'; the transient nature of human emotion; our constant awareness of death; and the limitless capacity of mankind for illusion and self-deception. [10]

Other critics take a quite different position, however. Lindop argues that Larkin's last collection, High Windows,

shows the re-emergence of tendencies kept carefully out of sight since Larkin's first collection, The North Ship (1945). [11]

In other words, the four collections reveal a kind of split personality, one side of which shows its face in the first volume and the last, the other in the middle two. Everett takes a similar view, finding the poet in the final collection to be a departure from the "visible poet" of The Less Deceived and The Whitsun Weddings. Instead she finds

the intense, unnoticing artist given up to embodying his own experience, whose presence in the novels and The North Ship makes them so impossible and yet so gifted and promising. [12]

Whether Larkin's themes remain constant or move away from their origins only to return, the poet himself is typically

evasive. Asked by Hamilton in 1964 whether he wanted to change, Larkin replied, "I don't think I want to change; just to become better at what I am." [13] Eight years later, his position had modified: he aims now, he says, to write

different kinds of poems, that might be by different people. Someone once said that the great thing is not to be different from other people, but to be different from yourself. [14]

Learning to be "different from yourself" as a poet must clearly involve some kind of development. Indeed, in the context of the metaphor this thesis has outlined hitherto, it might be said to involve some kind of leap. In another context, however, Larkin dismisses the idea that he himself may have changed, and quotes Oscar Wilde: "only mediocrities develop." [15]

In one respect, however, evidence of development seems unarguable. This thesis has advanced a binary analysis of the poet's world, or world-view: on one side is "Here," the home of the real, the physical, the tangible, the limited and the poet himself, symbolised by the room. And on the other is "Elsewhere," home of the nebulous and amorphous, the free-ranging and unfenced, symbolised by the natural, untamed world "beyond the glass."

This picture, however, is only a partial picture. It is probably fair to say that "Here"--the poet's arena, the life lived, the real and familiar--does not change substantially over the course of the poems, either in its

deictics or their significance: the "good bed" of "Poetry of Departures" (January 1954) reappears largely unaltered (it might seem) in "Aubade" (November, 1977). In both poems the room ("in perfect order") symbolises a life trapped [CP, 85]. And in both poems, there is the strong sense of a life unlived, and perhaps ultimately unavailable, on the other side of the glass. This is "Here," a remarkably enduring landscape.

But the meaning of the world beyond the glass is nothing like so stable, as the introduction to this thesis suggested, and it is here that evidence of development may be found. Larkin's poems in general are not strictly binary but triangular, because they present, in addition to "Here," two versions or aspects of "Elsewhere." This thesis has described these as the social aspect and the transcendent, and has advanced the general rule that when, in the earlier poems, the poet looks from "Here" to "Elsewhere," he finds himself looking at other people, whereas when the pattern is repeated in the later works, "Elsewhere" is less other people than other states of mind or being, even, perhaps, some kind of otherworld.

In the earlier works, then, "Elsewhere" consists almost exclusively of other people. These may be specific characters like Arnold in "Self's the Man" (1958), specific types of characters like the tramps of "Toads Revisited" (1962), or simply other people in general of a kind resented by the poet in "Best Society" (1951?). In poems from these years, the poet's assumptions do not alter: he is different

from those he describes; this difference can be established through comparison and contrast; and this comparison encompasses the whole question, so no third dimension need be raised. To be interested in the field of not-self is to be interested in other people. When the poet looks away from himself in these relatively early works, then, he does so on the basis that the proper study of mankind is man.

"Breadfruit" (1961) is a good example of this. The poem is based--it is a familiar structure--on a variety of contrasts: for example, the contrast between what the "boys" hope love will bring and what love delivers in reality. The chief interest in this context, though, is the contrast between the "boys" and the poet himself. On one side is unrealistic optimism, fantasising, desire and--inevitably--disillusion, and on the other is hard-headed realism, wisdom, experience and sobriety. When the poet looks out, then, from the home of the self to the fields of not-self (as it were), what he sees there is his fellow human beings living lives that are different from his own. This is typical of the early poems. When he sets out to "compare his life and mine" or to "Think of being them," he compares "Here" with "Elsewhere" in the familiar way [CP, 117, 147]. But it is an "Elsewhere" composed only of other people, rather than other states of consciousness, or mind, or being, or existence, or, indeed, non-existence.

The structure of many of the later poems is identical, of course: it is the same centrifugal structure in which "Here" leads to "Elsewhere," and self to other. But

"Elsewhere" is no longer simply a matter of the poet's fellow human beings. That is, the poet's purpose in such poems as "High Windows" (1967) and "Vers de Societe" (1971) is less to compare himself with others (though comparisons may be implicit) than to find fields of not-self in which both self and others--and the differences between them--are transcended. This brings a third dimension to the later works. "Vers de Societe" moves from the self and "Here"--

Day comes to an end.
The gas fire breathes--

on to a picture of others and "Elsewhere"--a picture

of all the spare time that has flown

Straight into nothingness by being filled
With forks and faces--

before the poem finally discovers a vision of a true "Elsewhere" which promises not only release from the self but also release from human life in general: one which consists of

the noise of wind,
And looking out to see the moon thinned
To an air-sharpened blade. [CP, 181]

This poised, free, icy "Elsewhere" exists far beyond the poet's compass: it is "beyond the stretch" in a way that cannot be said of characters like Arnold and the "boys" [CP, 192]. Indeed, so distant is the "air-sharpened blade" from "Here" as to render rather less significant the merely human differences between the self and others on which the earlier

poems are based. At the end of "Vers de Societe," of course, the poet accepts the invitation to the party. By contrast, the moon remains a true constituent of "Elsewhere," unequivocally out of reach.

Then there is, of course, the same third dimension in "High Windows," and its effect is much the same: it suggests that any differences between the poet himself and the "couple of kids" are insignificant. Poems like "High Windows" do not quite regard other people as constituents of "Here," of course. But other people are no longer interesting enough, or different enough, to constitute a real alternative, a real "Elsewhere." Larkin's late poems, in fact, seem to lose interest in other people:

When I see a couple of kids
And guess

And immediately

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
The sun-comprehending glass,
And beyond it, the deep blue air [CP, 165]

The "kids" stop mattering, because in human affairs there is no real release from the self, whether in sex or religion, and the incarceration of other people no longer offers the poet any real prospect of an alternative to his own imprisonment. But the world beyond the glass offers that precisely. This is its appeal.

This loss of interest in other people is implicit in the structure of these later works in the sense that the poet pauses on a vignette of those who represent the social "Elsewhere" before he proceeds to consider things

transcendent. So as the introduction to this thesis mentioned, the history of Larkin's idea of "Elsewhere" is contained in a poem like "High Windows," and summarised by the movement of the poet's eyes as they move first outwards, then upwards. But it is fair to say that there is one exception to the rule this section has outlined, that the social aspect dominates the early works, and the transcendent the late.

"Autobiography at an Air-Station" was composed in 1953. As in the great majority of the relatively early poems, the poet here is at pains to put distance between himself and others, taking the view that "Friendship is not worth while" [CP, 78]. It would be characteristic of these early works if he now proceeded to examine his fellow passengers from a distance, with a view to comparing them with himself. But in practice the poem forgets about them, and turns its eyes instead straight from ground level to the sky:

The kiosk girl is yawning. I feel staled,
Stupefied, by inaction--and as light
Begins to ebb outside, by fear; I set
So much on this Assumption. Now it's failed.

The glance "outside" is, of course, typical of the poems throughout the canon. So is the equation of light and water (the metaphor "ebb") with freedom. But it is quite untypical for the early poems to cast their eyes so high, either literally or, indeed, metaphorically. In speaking of an "Assumption," the poet strikes a transcendent note incongruous in the context of the human scales and values of the relatively early poems.

ix. Conclusion: the room revisited.

This chapter has assessed five tenors of the metaphor of which the room and the outside world are vehicles. These are not the only tenors. Indeed, Chapter Five will assess in detail much the most significant contrast in Larkin's work, one based very largely on the vehicles analysed here, and representative of them. But these five dichotomies do give an impression of the range of questions Larkin's poems explore through the device of the two worlds, and they offer a clue to the poet's purpose in creating these worlds.

The basis of this device might be called the "framing-enclosure." Everett argues that "framing-enclosures" are common in Larkin's poems, and she offers some examples:

posters or snapshots or even playing-cards: or in one case even a small Dutch genre painting, filled to the brim with a 'secret, bestial peace' [16]

The framing-enclosure traps, defines and concentrates. It shuts out the other, and insists on introspection. It emphasises the separate nature of (a) in relation to (-a), and upholds the impossibility of things merging into their opposites. A frame isolates what it contains from its context, insisting on difference. Larkin's poems seem to do this: distinctions seem to be kept very clear, and definitions precise, as the land / sea contrast suggests. In particular, between the poet and other people, other ways of thinking, other ways of life and other states of being there is a significant gap, one most commonly established by

the room and its window.

It so happens that Everett mentions "edges of windows" as the first of her framing-enclosures. Clearly the window has an emblematic significance for Larkin. But its role is not simply that of the framing-enclosure. Larkin's windows do not merely isolate one phenomenon from another. They are, rather, a kind of compromise between positions, a middle-ground between phenomena, an interface between the worlds inner and outer. They play just the same role as the beach or "bluff" in a poem like "Next, Please": the heart of the gap between "Here" and "Elsewhere." Larkin's windows, in short, are the means by which the poet may simultaneously link, yet separate, the two worlds of the poems: worlds otherwise largely at odds.

But because the poet necessarily belongs to one world only, the reader looks through the window with the eye of an insider: it is the medium through which the inside world observes the outside. In the process, the window seems to offer an incentive to escape, an invitation to believe in things other, whilst simultaneously serving as a defence against danger. The poet's dilemma, as "Poetry of Departures" shows, lies in the fact that the former cannot be had without the latter.

Seen from within, the window comes to symbolise a wide variety of human emotions: as various as doubt, fear and aversion on one side, and yearning and desire on the other. And very often indeed, the window may symbolise both aversion and desire simultaneously. When in "Sad Steps" the

poet's face looms at the window, what he finds outside is a metaphor for "the strength and pain" of youth. The strength may be desired, but the pain will not be: yet they are inextricably linked. Perhaps the argument matters little here because the poet has no choice anyway: middle-aged is what he is. But in a poem like "Vers de Societe," in which the poet is no less ambivalent about the outside world, the matter is perhaps a little more urgent.

In "Sad Steps," the poet must "part thick curtains" to get a view of the outside world. It may seem to be stretching a point to analyse the role of the curtain in the poems of Philip Larkin. But it is a striking fact that the curtains about the windows become more prominent, more fixed and more often closed as Larkin's poems progress. The place of the curtain is to block off the window, the interface between worlds. It is to shut out the outside world. In the second of "The Two Guitar Pieces," composed in 1946, the poet sits himself "at the window that has no curtain" [CP, 8]. In "Arrival" (a slightly later poem--1950), the "windows flock open" and "the curtains fly out like doves ..." [CP, 51]. In "Mr Bleaney" (written five years later, in 1955) the curtains are less mobile: "thin and frayed," they hang limply by the window, ready to shut out the outside world, though (as the penultimate verse suggests) they do not actually do so [CP, 102]. "Sad Steps" was written some thirteen years later, in 1968. By now the curtains cover the window, and have to be parted [CP, 169]. In "Aubade," written late in 1977, the curtains are closed, and the poet

(rather than opening them) merely waits for their "edges" to "grow light" [CP, 208]. Alternatives to the life the poet lives seem less realistic as time passes, and the poet's desire to sample the world beyond the glass seems less likely to be satisfied.

This raises the question of the room's purpose--beyond its role as a significant component in a literary machine efficient at exploring dilemmas. It seems possible to think of the rigidity of the room's form as a metaphor for Larkin's own poetic practice. As a general rule, Larkin finds such formal limitations as "metre and rhyme" protective and enabling:

I think one would have to be very sure of oneself to dispense with the help that metre and rhyme give and I doubt really if I could operate without them. [17]

The character the author presents as himself in poems like "Mr Bleaney" or "Aubade" does not always seem "very sure" of himself. Indeed, as the first chapter stressed, uncertainty is among the poet's most prominent characteristics. At the same time, the organic nature of the world beyond the glass and the kind of life it is possible to live there (according to poems like "Poetry of Departures" and "Toads") might be seen as metaphors for a more spontaneous, less formal approach to writing, a metaphor for organic form.

But the analysis of the window which this section has advanced suggests a more general tenor: that the room is a symbol, not for Larkin as a poet and for the poems he writes, but for the poet as a character and for the life he

leads. That the room is a metaphor has been one of the tenets of this analysis. And that it contrasts with the world outside, this chapter has aimed to establish. Yet in poems like "Toads" and "Toads Revisited," in neither of which is there the slightest suggestion of a room, the same contrast between inside and outside, self and other, "Here" and "Elsewhere" is raised and examined. In poems like these, the poet is conscious of a life very different from his own. And, in "Toads" especially, the poet's sense of being trapped is very pronounced. The debate itself is familiar: so, too, are the terms on which it is conducted. The result is that although there is no room in this poem, the debate between "Here" and "Elsewhere" is not impeded. In short, the room is a tool of the poems, a means to an end.

This end is to establish a contrast between the poet's own life, gender, manner, assumptions and situation, and those of others. In this contrast, the room is a metaphor for "Here," and "Here" is the poet's way. So whatever is unarguable, like-minded, realistic, known, tangible, present, concretely formed and dimension-bound belongs inside the room. These are familiar and dependable, though they are also, of course, limited and (evidently) easy to grow tired of. By contrast, the world beyond the glass is a metaphor, above all, for "Elsewhere," and "Elsewhere" is a metaphor for whatever is different from the poet and alien: things free of time and space, or free of fixed dimensions; things spiritual and sacred, or perhaps perfect; but above

all, one feels, for freedom, fulfilment and an end to the prison of self-consciousness.

In poems like "The Building" and "Aubade"--in poems in which the room is a metaphor for death--it is, of course, precisely this personal absence that the poet fears. Yet in poems like "High Windows" the loss of consciousness, of individuality, of presence, even of life itself: these seem desired. And this desire is explicit in a poem like "Wants." To return briefly to the land / sea dichotomy, "Absences" makes clear that it is his own absence in particular that the sea seems to promise, and which most appeals to the poet:

Such attics cleared of me! Such absences! [CP, 49]

In much the same way, it may well be that in looking beyond the glass, the poet yearns above all for a place "cleared of me"--a place, in short, with "the beauty of somewhere you're not." The point is neatly summarised in A Dictionary of Symbols: a room, the dictionary suggests, is

A symbol of individuality--of private thoughts. The windows symbolize the possibility of understanding and of passing through to the external and the beyond, and are also an illustration of any idea of communication. Hence, a closed room lacking windows may be symbolic of virginity ... and also of other kinds of non-communication. [18]

To communicate at all, it seems, is to risk losing one's "individuality." It is this, perhaps, that most frightens the poet about the world beyond the beach, or glass--and what most thrills him. The third chapter will now examine

how far Larkin's use of language contributes to the dilemmas described in this chapter, before the thesis proceeds to question how far "Elsewhere" is desirable to the poet and, if it is, whether it can be reached.

CHAPTER THREE: "HERE" AND "ELSEWHERE" IN LARKIN'S METAPHORS.

i. Introduction: three approaches to Larkin's metaphors.

The study of metaphor has been one of the growth industries of twentieth-century literary criticism. Indeed, new insights into metaphor and metonymy, and into their respective mechanics, have been at the heart of literary theory in the past thirty years. Moreover, on the basis of a perceived contrast between the two, the entire map of literary history in this century has been redefined. "The mind is a connecting organ," as I.A. Richards observes: "it works only by connecting and it can connect any two things in an indefinitely large number of different ways." [1] In recent years, critics like David Lodge have succeeded in connecting metaphor with modernism and literary experiment, and metonymy with anti-modernism, realism and literary conservatism, and divined in the history of literature in this century a permanent conflict between the two. [2]

The significance attached to metaphor is a linguistic and therefore a contemporary phenomenon, in that, despite the compulsion of succeeding generations of English literary critics for explaining how metaphor ought to be used, it was not until 1936 that a theory was advanced to explain how it

actually works. Before this, the discussion had been prescriptive rather than descriptive, much given (especially in the eighteenth century) to value judgements: "the traditional discussion of metaphor," says Richards, "is hardly more than a set of cautionary hints to over-enthusiastic schoolboys." [3] It was Richards himself who set out to rectify "the backward state of the study." [4]

His chief contribution was to coin the terms that distinguish the sense of the metaphor from the means by which the sense is conveyed. For the underlying idea, Richards suggests the word "tenor," and for the medium by which this idea is delivered he uses the term "vehicle." [5] Richards is careful to distinguish these two terms from the "meaning" of the metaphor because, as he says, the proper meaning resides not in either of them but in both. Therefore when the evening sky is said to resemble "a patient etherised upon a table," the meaning of this metaphor lies not in the tenor (the sky) nor in the vehicle (the patient) but in their combination or "interaction," and in whatever connection the reader can make between the two. [6] Richards summarises the position in this way:

In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction. [7]

In short, Richards' purpose was to separate the two levels of meaning upon which metaphor depends, then to reconcile them in the "single word."

Richards' terms, however, though they constitute a

significant advance in the history of the study of metaphor, did not enable him to take the study a great deal further. One explanation for this may lie in the terms on which he bases his analysis. His interest is mainly semantic, not formal. He was interested in meaning, and in the peculiar ability of metaphor to suggest two meanings simultaneously whilst conveying a third. It was for this that he coined the terms. He is not at all concerned, however, with the distinction between metaphor and metonymy, nor with the principles on which these work, nor with the tendency of literary texts to organise themselves structurally in accordance with the principles of one or the other.

The following brief comparison of two poems organised on opposite structural principles may serve to demonstrate not only the virtues of the structural approach, but also its presiding vice. An example of a metonymic poem, whose structure depends upon contiguity in reality, is Larkin's "The Whitsun Weddings" [CP, 114]. The poem presents recognisable and individuated characters, a realistic setting, a wealth of detail, a sparing use of metaphor and a strong narrative structure. Above all, the poem describes a journey from a real place north of Lincolnshire to a real destination, London. These various characteristics are typical of the metonymic poem.

An example of a metaphoric poem is Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night." [8] This poem has no individuated characters (including the poet himself, whose voice is impersonally raised, almost "bardic"), no setting

at all, no realistic detail, an abundance of metaphor and very little development. It proceeds largely on a principle of repetition, restating its single case in a variety of different ways, each of which recalls the last. The principle of its development, then, is not contiguity but similarity.

Naturally enough, the kind of analysis that distinguishes one poem from another solely on the basis of structure is unlikely to convey much information on the question of the poet's use of metaphor. An attitude towards metaphor on the poet's part is perhaps suggested, but no concrete information on the question is supplied. This is characteristic of the study the subject has attracted in the past thirty years. More recently, this kind of structural approach has begun to be questioned. Guido Latre argues that a structural analysis of the kind advanced above

defines the poetic function of language on formal rather than semantic grounds:

in short, much may be explained, but much may also have to be overlooked. [9] Terence Hawkes offers a fuller explanation of the position:

The trouble with much modern linguistic analysis of metaphor is that it does not (and perhaps cannot) take into account the full context involved--and ultimately that would include the living human voice and persona. [10]

Thurley takes doubts of this kind to their logical conclusion:

rather than waste time trying to decide whether simile, for example, is more metaphoric or more metonymic, ... it would be better to jettison the whole business, and admit that Jakobson's theory does nothing to throw light on literary texts. [11]

Certainly, the analysis advanced above does throw precious little light on the way metaphor is used in the poems in question. This was the kind of oversight that Richards set out to rectify. One might feel that the study is not much less "backward" now than he found it then.

Many methods of approaching metaphor suggest themselves, but three in particular seem fruitful. These might loosely be called the formal method, the contextual, and the semantic. One might ask first the formal question: that is, one might examine, when tenor and vehicle may be distinguished in the two poems by Larkin and Thomas mentioned above, the mechanics of this distinction. "The Whitsun Weddings" invests in inanimate objects the power of animation. The landscape seen from the train window is almost personified:

Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and
Canals with floatings of industrial froth;
A hothouse flashed uniquely; hedges dipped
And rose ...
Until the next town, new and nondescript,
Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

None of these observations is true (no farms went by, no hedges dipped, no towns approached) though to one sitting at a train window, they may all seem to ^{have} been ^{doing so}. Personification might be described as the act of investing in inanimate phenomena powers of animation. Davie's analysis is more

technical:

the habit of throwing metaphorical force from noun to verb produces personification. For it must seem that an abstraction is personified to some extent as soon as it can govern an active verb. [12]

Davie's analysis has a tentative air, and this chapter will suggest an amendment to it. But the substantial point remains that where an abstraction commands an active verb, personification results. Thomas himself uses the method:

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Deeds cannot dance (though again they may seem to). But Thomas supplies an active, forceful verb--indeed, an anthropomorphic one--so as to invest in his poetry an active, energetic atmosphere. The tenor for the vehicle ("danced") is "seemed" or "appeared." Clearly, he chose the more graphic word.

A second formal aspect of Larkin's use of metaphor is his practice of describing a sensation or emotion in objective, visible and even physical terms. This, again, is very typical of the poems in general. "The Whitsun Weddings" closes with a case of this:

And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain. [CP, 116]

The vehicle is an arrow-shower, but the tenor is an emotion: a sense of freedom or release. Larkin's poetry repeatedly

describes the emotional as if it had a phenomenal or physical existence. Falck observes that Larkin is much inclined to

attempt direct descriptions of emotions themselves as if they were simply another kind of object, to be observed and recorded with all the other objects of the external world [13]

A sense of freedom is not an arrow-shower: rather, it is the tenor of which the arrow-shower is the vehicle.

Thomas' poem is an altogether more elusive piece of writing, yet he too looks for the physical vehicle that will convey the psychological tenor. He instinctively seeks these, not in the man-made world, but in nature:

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

The "last wave" will wash into the "green bay." Thomas's concern here is not with oceans, however, but with pulses of life and, in particular, the resolve to "rage against the dying of the light." In this way, he too converts an emotion into a phenomenon, one capable of being apprehended by one of the five senses. Both poets, it seems--whatever their structural differences--aim to personify and make concrete (or perhaps phenomenal). To analyse the relationship between tenor and vehicle in this way and in particular to look into the nature of the vehicle are fruitful formal approaches to metaphor, which this chapter will take.

It will also present a contextual analysis, and

investigate the relationship between vehicle and poem. "We would expect," says Lodge, "the writer who is working in the metonymic mode" to make his metaphors

subject to the control of context--either by elaborating literal details of the context into symbols, or by drawing analogies from a semantic field associated with the context. [14]

In Lodge's analysis, Larkin is such a writer. [15] At the same time, one might question how far an arrow-shower may be said to belong to the semantic field of "The Whitsun Weddings": the vehicle is apparently medieval in a poem that is clearly contemporary, and menacing (indeed, murderous) in a poem that is celebratory and fruitful. This is not an attempt to evaluate the vehicle, but to analyse the extent to which it fulfils our expectations of "the writer who is working in the metonymic mode." The answer to that question is apparently not very far. The "arrow-shower," in fact, is what Lodge would describe as a "violation of context." [16]

Ironically--given that Thomas is not a writer who works in the metonymic mode--his use of metaphor shows, if anything, a greater respect for context than Larkin's. His is a poem about death, but also about life and the regrets that surround it at its close. The poem is governed by the metaphor of night ("that good night") and--by implication--of day and daylight. Predictably, Thomas' vehicles are more plentiful. What is less predictable is the extent to which they are accountable to the semantic field of the

controlling metaphor: "night ... day ... light ... dark ... lightning ... bright ... the sun ... see ... blind ... blaze" and so on, the poet refers to many of the senses, but chiefly to the eyes:

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears

There is a good deal of metaphor in the poem, especially when compared with Larkin's more fastidious use of the figure. But it remains unexpectedly loyal to the semantic context in which it appears.

The third angle that suggests itself--which might be described as a purely semantic approach--is a variation on the contextual. This third approach aims to identify, as a very general rule, where Larkin's vehicles as a whole originate. This approach makes no specific reference to the tenors of these metaphors, and is not concerned with the relationship between vehicle and context. But it aims to ask whether Larkin has a particular semantic field from which, in general, he takes his figures.

This approach must necessarily be general, because it will inevitably allow of numerous exceptions. "The Whitsun Weddings" is an example of this. The vehicles in this poem are not dominated by a single semantic field. The closing vehicle, the "arrow-shower," belongs to the field of medieval battle, it seems, and this is ostensibly a far cry from the rural imagery of the penultimate figure in the poem:

I thought of London spread out in the sun,
Its postal districts
packed like squares of wheat [CP, 116]

The image of the "squares of wheat" shocks the reader by its incongruity. It seems inappropriate to describe the urban in terms of the rural. Yet throughout his work, Larkin evidently regards nature as a fruitful semantic field for the vehicles of his metaphors and similes, and his poems repeatedly link the urban with the rural, or the artificial with the organic, in this way.

This chapter will analyse these three aspects of Larkin's use of metaphor, then, before proceeding to relate the laws that guide the poet in his use of metaphor to the central concerns of his poetry as a whole. In the process, however, no definitive distinction between metaphor and simile will be drawn, and because that may seem a rash step, it had better be explained first.

It is unclear, as the remarks by Thurley cited above suggest, how far metaphor and simile belong to different spheres of language or, indeed, of literature. The Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics gives a concise summary of the problem:

some passages in the simile form achieve a genuine metaphorical relation, and some passages in the metaphor-form are submerged similes. [17]

It is accepted that metaphor is the original and superior figure, as well as the more compact and powerful. At the same time, Lodge is only one among many to speak of both simile and metaphor as metaphor. He explains this practice

in this way:

Although Jakobson does not comment on simile as such it must belong on the metaphorical side of his bipolar scheme since it is generated by the perception of similarity [18]

In an analysis of metaphor and simile that is principally semantic--as this analysis will be--the real interest lies in what kinds of similarities the poet perceives. This is the central question this chapter will ask. Nonetheless it is worth advancing a formal analysis of the difference between the two figures: namely, that with metaphor the reader is presented merely with the vehicle, in that the tenor of the metaphor has always to be supplied--the use of the word "danced" in Thomas' poems is a case of this--whereas with simile the reader is given both vehicle and tenor: one thinks of the "sky" and "patient" in Eliot's poem. The result is to invest metaphor with an impact alien to simile. But the question of impact does not, of course, affect the question of the relationship, one of similarity, between tenor and vehicle.

ii. A formal analysis: three types of metaphor.

"We would expect the writer who is working in the metonymic mode," says Lodge, "to incline towards simile rather than metaphor proper when drawing attention to similarity between things dissimilar." [19] One would expect, on first reading, that Larkin is indeed a writer "working in the metonymic mode," and one might very well

imagine that when he draws attention to "similarity between things dissimilar," Larkin fulfils the expectations Lodge describes here, and inclines towards simile:

Your mind lay open like a drawer of knives. [CP, 32]

I thought of London spread out in the sun,
Its postal districts
packed like squares of wheat. [CP, 116]

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf. [CP, 180]

But statistically at least, this is not the case. To take one example: in the early poem, "Deceptions," there are something like seventeen metaphors, of which only one is a simile. This is not a representative proportion, but it helps to suggest what seems to be the case: that Larkin's similes, though they may often be more dramatic than his metaphors and more memorable, are less numerous.

Most writers on this subject are anxious to record how deep-seated in language are the roots of metaphor. At the same time, metaphor is only a convention, which like all literary conventions demands a measure of acquiescence from the reader. It demands, perhaps, a willing suspension of disbelief. Thus when a reader is told that human misery deepens "like a coastal shelf," or that a mind may lie open "like a drawer of knives," (s)he has every reason to reject this except that the established convention encourages three responses: to look for "similarity between things dissimilar," as the poet has done; to value the graphic

quality of the metaphor, which is what makes it worth drawing; and to relish the originality of the metaphor, which is what makes it "live."

For the creator of the metaphor, however, there is also a large measure of pretence. (S)he asserts that two phenomena are similar when (s)he knows that in a number of ways they have little in common. The following pages will present an analysis of the particular character of the pretences in which Larkin invites his reader to collude. In particular, they will analyse which phenomena typically act as tenors in Larkin's poems, by which vehicles these tenors are typically conveyed, and how tenor and vehicle are typically related to one another. This may seem a cumbersome process, but such is the scarcity of agreed terms that one may have no choice but to seem cumbersome.

As a general rule, Larkin's poems present three types of vehicle. Each of these types is used, as it happens, in the poem which, from the angle of metaphor, is perhaps the most complicated and labyrinthine of his significant works, as well as the first of them to be composed. "Deceptions," as was mentioned, contains around seventeen metaphorical figures in its seventeen lines [CP, 32]. First, there is a good deal of personification in the poem:

The sun's occasional print, the brisk brief
Worry of wheels along the street outside
Where bridal London bows the other way,
And light, unanswerable and tall and wide,
Forbids the scar to heal, and drives
Shame out of hiding.

The "print" of the sun is apparently a foot-print, the

"Worry of wheels" is anthropomorphism if it isn't personification, and "bridal London" (an abstraction governing an active verb) is certainly personification.

But the last two and a half lines are most striking because of the small drama they convey. Personified abstractions in Larkin's poems frequently appear to imitate literary and other archetypes, and these archetypes are frequently bound up in such half-concealed dramas. At the heart of "Deceptions," the reader is presented with an authority-figure (light, who is "unanswerable," and who delivers edicts), a tool of this authority (the scar, forbidden to act as "he" wishes), and a refugee from this authority (shame, who has been in hiding). Personification, it can be seen, is a significant weapon in Larkin's armoury, and one he exploits in a graphic and dramatic way.

The process from tenor to vehicle here leads the reader from the abstract to the human, from the inert to the animated. The inanimate is given human attributes. The second device of which Larkin makes common use takes the opposite course, and renders a human tenor in a vehicle that is inert and concrete. This section will call this process "phenomenalisation"--not a very attractive word, but one which aims to convey the sense (common in Larkin) that an emotion looks, or feels, or tastes like an object in the external world. The arrow-shower in "The Whitsun Weddings" is such a case: an emotion made "phenomenal," or capable of being apprehended by the senses. This technique occurs in "Deceptions": "All the unhurried day," the poet tells the

victim,

Your mind lay open like a drawer of knives.

Shame and guilt are "like a drawer of knives": a visible, tangible phenomenon. Phenomenalisation makes use of all the senses, not just the sight and the touch. The opening lines of "Deceptions" are a case in point:

Even so distant, I can taste the grief,
Bitter and sharp with stalks, he made you gulp.

Grief is presented as a drink: it can be tasted, or it may have to be gulped. Either way, it is bitter and sharp. An emotion (the poem asserts) is a thing. This is the way with phenomenalisation. It is a device which, in presenting the emotional world as phenomenal (grief is a drink, shame is like a drawer of knives), gives shape and physical presence to what was hitherto nebulous and intangible.

The third kind of vehicle-making process to which Larkin is much attached might be called "localisation," a deviation from phenomenalisation because in this method, the poet presents the abstract not as thing, but as a place. So the vehicle of the metaphor is a room, an area, a territory, some kind of a building. In "Deceptions," the tenor is despair, and the vehicle is a place--in fact, an attic. The rapist is pictured

stumbling up the breathless stair
To burst into fulfilment's desolate attic.

Fulfilment (and its consequence, which is disappointment)

Larkin's most common vehicle is probably personification. It is already clear that the inanimate world of "The Whitsun Weddings" is in fact subtly animated--a practice that is highly characteristic of Larkin's work. In that poem it is the landscape that comes to life. In Davie's terms, such a presentation of a landscape constitutes personification because it contains the two necessary ingredients, the abstraction and the active verb.

inanimate, by which they are conveyed. the use the poet makes of the vehicles, personified or section will indicate some of those tenors while examining phenomenon or a place--regardless of the tenor. This concentrating on the vehicle: normally it is a person, a relationship between tenor and vehicle in Larkin's poems by Larkin's use of metaphor. That is, they describe the localisation--aim to stake out the ground covered by These three terms--personification, phenomenation, it is a technique of which Larkin's poems make frequent use. it aims to signify the re-creation of an emotion as a place. Localisation is, again, not the most elegant of terms. But

Receives them like a grand hotel. [20]

"Anxiety," he says of the disinherited, verse: one thinks of Auden's graphic use of the trope: inhabits. But this fiction is deeply embedded in English a psychological condition is an atmosphere, a condition one certainly, that an emotion resembles a place, an attic, that are graphically recreated as a place. It is a fiction,

It may be that anything less than this is mere anthropomorphism. But it is difficult not to see personification in a poem like "Coming," an early poem that presents two examples of personification, in neither of which is the combination of Davie's conditions met:

On longer evenings,
Light, chill and yellow,
Bathes the serene
Foreheads of houses. [CP, 33]

Light is clearly personified here, and as in "Deceptions," it is an authority figure in that the metaphor as a whole seems to appeal to a rite of baptism. But that being so, the houses must also be personified, not just because "Foreheads" suggests they have human qualities, but because in the drama half-concealed here, they too play a human part: that of the child baptised. The houses are not abstract--indeed, they could hardly be more literally concrete--and they do not command the verb. But they are made to live and even, perhaps, to play an active part.

It may be possible to amend Davie's definition of personification. One might argue that when an abstraction or phenomenon governs or is governed by a verb, adjective or noun which suggests that it has human characteristics, it is personified. Some justification for this approach may be found in a second example taken from the same poem. "A thrush sings," says the poet,

Its fresh-peeled voice
Astonishing the brickwork.

The brickwork cannot be astonished by anything, one might feel. But the poet animates the bricks, and gives them life, claiming for them the ability of human beings to have expectations that are usurped, or to be bored, then brought to life. Some sense of being awakened is intrinsic to the poem as a whole: "It will be spring soon, / It will be spring soon" By being astonished, the brickwork shares the animation and activity of the season, and demonstrates by its reaction to the voice of the thrush a human reaction. At the same time, brickwork is not abstract, and it does not command the verb.

If this definition is followed, that the endowing of the inert with human characteristics produces personification, then the use Larkin makes of this figure is extensive. It is worth reviewing a selection of his personifications before passing, finally, to examine one particularly common tenor of which personification is the vehicle. It has already been seen that houses have foreheads, that the sun leaves foot-prints, that wheels may worry and that bricks can be astonished. Work, similarly, has arms:

Give me your arm, old toad;
Help me down Cemetery Road. [CP, 148]

Time, meanwhile, is impressively proportioned:

Standing under the fobbed
Impendent belly of Time
Tell me the truth, I said,
Teach me the way things go. [CP, 146]

Eyes, by contrast, themselves have hands, and they use them
to wring out their own unhappiness like a sponge:

their eyes squeeze grief [CP, 126]

The landscape has eyes too, and it weeps:

As when, thawing, the rigid landscape weeps. [CP, 126]

And motor cars have eyes:

Large cars parked round the lawn
Scan my approach [CP, 154]

Days, too, have eyes--or, at any rate, they may be eyeless:

I know, none better,
The eyelessness of days without a letter [CP, 69]

The moon has a face:

The hardness and the brightness and the plain
Far-reaching singleness
of that wide stare [CP, 169]

Bells, like the thrush, have voices, and they speak:

The bells discuss the hour's gradations [CP, 188]

And the trumpet, like the bells, has a voice:

The trumpet's voice,
loud and authoritative [CP, 80]

Even the dining-room can speak:

Through open doors, the dining-room declares
A larger loneliness of knives and glass
And silence laid like carpet. [CP, 163]

Meanwhile, the gas-fire has lungs:

The gas-fire breathes [CP, 181]

And grass, too, is credited with breath:

Brief is the breath
Mown stalks exhale [CP, 183]

The town can breathe, too. It has a chest much as "Time"
has a belly:

close-ribbed streets rise and fall
Like a great sigh out of the last century. [CP, 191]

This is not an exhaustive list. But once one notices the method, personification seems rife in Larkin's poems. It might almost seem that he overuses it. Yet his poems as a whole seem balanced and without artifice, and one would search in vain for a critical account of Larkin's practice of personification. But it is clearly widespread in his poems, and great life, no doubt, it generates in them.

Personification is a device that creates a vehicle. The area of the tenor, as the list above indicates, is extraordinarily flexible: from time to a town to a pile of grass. But it is worth mentioning one single tenor around which a great deal of diverse personification clusters, which is the tenor of sound. Something of this has been seen already: the "Worry of wheels," for example, or the "trumpet's voice," which, "loud and authoritative, / Draws me a moment to the lighted glass" in "Reasons for

Attendance" [CP, 80]. To these various noises and voices might be added the discussions of the bells, and the sombre declaration of the silent dining-room.

There are many other examples: in "Church Going" the poet notices the "echoes snigger briefly," and in "The Dance,"

Chuckles from the drains
Decide me suddenly [CP, 97, 157]

Three lines from "Love Songs in Age" will serve to show how the poet slips almost unnoticed into a series of metaphors that draw out sounds and endow them with human qualities and even, at times, human situations. The old lady is pictured

Relearning how each frank submissive chord
Had ushered in
Word after sprawling hyphenated word [CP, 113]

Beneath the surface of the metaphor there lies once again the dramatic moment, or scene. On this occasion it might almost be taken from P.G. Wodehouse: the butler, at once candid but deferential, ushering the aristocrats into the room where, blue-bloodedly hyphenated, they sprawl as languidly as anything in Prufrock. The aristocrats, incidentally, are the words, rather than the music: the poet's priorities, naturally enough. But the general point is the instinct with which Larkin makes human beings out of sounds: in a diverse field of tenors, the aural is much the most widespread.

It is worth pausing to ask what effect this extensive use of personification leaves on the reader. In his

analysis of a passage from Oliver Twist, Lodge comments that the "anthropomorphism" he finds there "invests the environment with a certain quality of menace" [21] With the occasional exception (the cars that "Scan" the poet's approach in "The Dance" perhaps), it would be difficult to sustain the same argument for Larkin's use of the measure. His landscapes are rarely menacing. Rather they are jumbled, cluttered and alive, vibrant and active, concrete and humane. From an anthropological angle, personification on the scale discussed here may seem to originate in animist ideas that the whole of landscape--human, animal, vegetable or inert--is alive. Such ideas are typically benign, and this is the atmosphere of Larkin's use of the figure.

But a second, quite different analysis seems equally valid. The character of the poet himself (this thesis set out to demonstrate) is a lonely figure of a kind that only enters a church when "there's nothing going on," or spends his time "Stuffing" his ears with cotton-wool isolated in his guest-house bedroom. Yet the landscapes he presents, as this section has shown, are remarkably vivid and vigorous, even over-populated. Davie comments that Larkin

makes himself numb to the nonhuman creation in order to stay compassionate towards the human. [22]

On the evidence of Larkin's widespread use of personification, however, one would have also to say that Larkin is given to take the nonhuman (drains, towns,

trumpets, gas-fires) and to find in them a human character that belongs (one might almost argue) less to the traditions of literature than to those of the fairy tale.

Two very general rules distinguish the personified vehicle from the "phenomenalised": the former re-casts the inert as human whereas the latter recreates the human as inert, and the personified vehicle has an active flavour about it ("Chuckles from the drains / Decide me suddenly") whereas the phenomenalised vehicle is normally inert and static, like the grief which the rape victim in "Deceptions" must "gulp." Phenomenalisation is not, of course, unique to Larkin. The same technique appears in, for example, Auden's poem on A.E. Housman, that unhappy man who

Kept tears like dirty postcards in a drawer. [23]

The human ("tears") becomes the inert and inanimate ("postcards in a drawer"), the more graphically to demonstrate Housman's reluctance to reveal his grief and, by extension, his own humanity.

A phenomenon might be described as anything that can be apprehended by the senses. Grief and guilt cannot in themselves be so apprehended, but postcards can. By means of metaphor, grief and guilt are made phenomenal. To "convert" an emotion into a phenomenon is to create a metaphor or simile, and Larkin's figurative speech is heavily dependent on this measure. But at times he goes further than this: when he calls a series of photographs

Too much confectionery, too rich,

the poet describes one phenomenon (available to the sight) in terms that imply a second (available to the taste) [CP, 71]. Similarly, when he describes a tune as a "flock of notes," he describes a phenomenon apprehended aurally as one that is in fact available visually [CP, 106]. This particular method (from the aural to the visual, from the visual to the olfactory), which is common in these poems, might be described as cross-phenomenalisation because it depends on the pretence that between one sense and another, borders can be crossed. But it is best to begin by analysing the method that enables a human idea, abstraction or emotion to be apprehended by the senses.

Human emotions (sadness, love, desire) constitute one set of tenors of which phenomenalisation creates its vehicles in Larkin's poetry. Human attributes constitute a second set: memory, wit, the sense of freedom. Among human emotions, happiness is a matter for "Catching" (as "Coming" has it), as if it were a ball or perhaps a bird; fulfilment is of course an "arrow-shower," and "elation" (as "The Dance" says) can be "snapped off short" like a stick; thoughts of freedom may be summarised, perhaps, as the "thought of high windows"; and then, conversely, human misery deepens from age to age "like a coastal shelf" [CP, 33, 116, 156, 165, 180]. These are all emotions converted into visible, tangible or olfactory phenomena. What was abstract becomes concrete, and so capable of apprehension by the senses.

The same is true of many human attributes: "memories" may be "like flies," as "At Grass" remarks; "wit," potentially at least, is a "pitchfork" ("Toads"); and desire is a matter of "imperfect eyes" that "stare beyond this world," as "Essential Beauty" asserts [CP, 29, 89, 144]. Loving care is "warm spring rain," so "Faith Healing" says [CP, 126]. More ambitiously, a sense of security is said to resemble

rain round a conservatory
Oafishly warm inside. [CP, 157]

Finally, religion is a "brocade" ("Aubade"), while failed ambitions "warp tight-shut, like doors" ("Dockery and Son") [CP, 208, 153]. It is a rather mixed bag. But there are clearly general conventions that Larkin followed. The last two or three pages have aimed to give an overview of vehicle while focusing attention on tenor. The point remains that when Larkin sets out to describe, with the aid of metaphor, a human abstraction, he repeatedly gives it characteristics that render it capable of apprehension by one or more of the five senses.

Cross-phenomenalisation is a minor deviation from the type. It involves, as was mentioned, the pretence that one sense may do the work of another: a version of synaesthesia. Larkin's youthful imitations of Keats, mentioned in the introduction to his Collected Poems, may be his original source for this technique. [24] At any rate, in poems like "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats repeatedly cross-phenomenalises:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the bows,

for example. Similarly:

But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown. [25]

In these two examples, the poet looks first for what (in more prosaic speech) he would smell and, second, for what he might touch. One sense does the work of another. It is a technique of which Larkin makes frequent use. In "First Sight," for example, the poet observes that soon after the lambs are born,

their bleating clouds the air,

in the process offering a visual vehicle ("clouds") for an auditory tenor [CP, 112]. The process here is from sound to sight, and this is the typical method, it so happens: a tune, as was mentioned, is a "flock of notes," and bird-song (so "An Arundel Tomb" suggests) is a

Litter of bird-calls. [CP, 110]

Similarly an orchestra (so "Broadcast" says) will produce

Cascades of monumental slithering

(the metaphor taken from the waterfall) or alternatively,

rabid storms of chording. [CP, 140]

Or one might come across

silence laid like carpet,

so "Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel" suggests [CP, 163]. Again, it is a mixed bag. But the common theme throughout these examples is the poet's tendency to present sounds as tangible, dimension-bound phenomena.

Other processes are also used, however: when the poet describes the "slug / And snarl of music" in "The Dance," he presents a tenor that may be heard ("music") through a vehicle that will be felt ("slug") [CP, 155]. Alternatively, when in "Church Going," he estimates that the silence has been

Brewed God knows how long,

he moves adeptly from the auditory ("silence") to the olfactory ("Brewed") [CP, 97]. The most concentrated example of cross-phenomenalisation, however, provides the opening sentences of "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album":

Too much confectionery, too rich:
I choke on such nutritious images.

My swivel eye hungers from pose to pose--

three lines in which the visual is re-created as the olfactory: in this way, the visible is tasted [CP, 71].

In general, then, phenomenalisation is the process by which an abstraction, idea or emotion becomes apprehensible by the senses, or by which phenomena normally apprehended by

one sense are just as easily apprehended by another. The effect of this "pretence" is, again, to fill the poems with things, littering them with the shapes, sights and sounds of human emotions. For a poet like Larkin, for whom the real and tangible are significant, and even at times enchanting--

Look at the pictures and the cutlery,
The music in the piano stool. That vase--[CP, 119]

the appeal of this method with metaphor is self-evident: to put it briefly, the poet's bias towards phenomenalisation is an empirical bias. His verse may be governed by abstractions as Falck argues, but its personnel are very largely recruited from the ranks of the concrete and phenomenological. [26] It is, in fact "all dry and hard," as T.E. Hulme required modern verse to be. [27] Not the least reason for this is the practice of phenomenalisation through metaphor of what was otherwise amorphous and abstract. In this respect he may have been guided by the writing of his own early years. To "yoke abstract and concrete violently together," comments Lodge in an analysis of metaphor and the 'thirties,

is very characteristic of Graham Greene, but ... is also ... a common feature of 1930s writing generally. [28]

Yet Larkin seems to take the process one step further: it is not so much that he yokes abstract and concrete together as that he "converts" (through metaphor) the abstract to the concrete, and endows the amorphous with the properties of the phenomenal.

The third group of metaphors in Larkin's poems was described above as "localisations." These vehicles typically recreate an emotion or abstraction as a place. The attic that is at once fulfilment and despair is one example of this type. "The Whitsun Weddings" provides a second case. A sense of impending loss, of coming nostalgia, of sadness and regret (says the poem) is to stand out on the end of an event

Waving goodbye
To something that survived it. [CP, 115]

It is perhaps a type of phenomenalisation. Still, an emotion or cast of mind becomes a place that the senses alone cannot identify, and this is what specifically distinguishes the second type of vehicle from the third.

In "The Dance," similarly, it is arrogance (like nostalgia, a cast of mind) that the poet presents as a place or territory: so it seems at any rate when, approaching the dance-hall, the poet hears himself "hailed / Across the wide circumference of my scorn"--a brilliant figure for the distance pride establishes between people. Death is similarly a place: it is, says "Aubade," the "sure extinction that we travel to" [CP, 208]. Music is also localized: in "The Dance" the poet pictures himself as he is forced to "edge along the noise / Towards a trestled bar"--a figure that recreates the purely aural as a territory. This is the essence of localisation: like the attic it asserts that emotions and abstractions are also in fact places where a man might make himself at home, and pass the time.

But time is the principal tenor of which localisation creates vehicles. Time in Larkin's poems is most often a place:

Days are where we live.

So the poet says in "Days" [CP, 67]. But time is the tenor of each of the three types of vehicle in Larkin's work. There is, of course, nothing new in this willingness to recreate time in metaphor: from Homer's rosy-fingered dawn to Marvell's winged chariot (respectively, personification and phenomenalisation) time has provided a frequent tenor of which vehicles and metaphors are made in Western verse. But there are of course different types of time, and as these examples indicate, a particular time (dawn) is not the same as the passage of time, the winged chariot.

Larkin's vehicles recognise this. Time personified in Larkin's work tends to be the particular time of day. This is especially true of the early poems. In "Going" for example, the poet presents the evening as a kind of unexpected guest: "There is an evening coming in," the poem observes, "Across the fields, one never seen before" [CP, 3]. In "Wedding-Wind" by contrast, it is morning that is personified, presented as a lover: "Shall I be let to sleep," the poem's speaker asks, "Now this perpetual morning shares my bed?" [CP, 11]. In a third early poem, "At the chiming of light upon sleep," morning is more menacing, and resembles the assailant or villain: "Morning, and more / Than morning," the poet observes, "crosses the floor" [CP,

14].

Larkin is equally given to phenomenalise time, to recreate time as a thing. In "Mother, Summer, I," the poet pictures his mother as she "Holds up each summer's day and shakes / It out suspiciously ..." [CP, 68]. So just as (in "Aubade") religion is a "brocade," here a summer's day is a blanket or groundsheet. But typically it is a particular stage in a single life that Larkin phenomenalisises: youth, for example, becomes "a spring-woken tree," and the essence of old age, it seems, is "lighted rooms / Inside your head" [CP, 113, 196]. These two figures recall the physical or visible character of the phenomenalisised metaphor. An image Larkin uses in "Aubade" for adolescence is equally physical:

An only life can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never

Youth is a trench, perhaps, or a mountain [CP, 208]. The late poems take this idea further: in "The Old Fools" extinction is an "alp," and in "The Building" it is a "clean-sliced cliff": two highly visible metaphors for stages in an "only life" [CP, 197, 192].

But days, above all, are "where we live." Larkin's most common way with time is to suggest that it is a place, and his typical metaphors for time are localisations. So the poet may speak of "blocks of days" that he will "rent" as if he were discussing a boarding-house bedroom [CP, 50]. Alternatively, he may observe that ambulances "thread / Loud noons of cities" as if it were the time, not the town, that

one would find on the map [CP, 132]. Or he may draw attention to a "white steamer stuck in the afternoon," as if the afternoon were an area of quick-sand [CP, 173]. In the same spirit, he speaks of the "hollows of afternoons" as if a day were an area of heath [CP, 121].

History is also a place, and it, too, is localised. The past, says the poet to the young lady whose photographs he is browsing through, is a place "calm and dry":

It holds you like a heaven, and you lie
Unvariably lovely there [CP, 72]

Finally the present tense too has its own topology: the Earl and Countess in "An Arundel Tomb" are presented as

 helpless in the hollow of
An unarmo^rial age ..., [CP, 111]

and, as if to stress the point, it is to this hollow that they have made their "supine, stationary voyage" [CP, 110].

Personification, phenomenalisation, localisation: or to put it another way, the abstract is rendered as concrete, and the concrete as human. There may be many exceptions in the mature poems to the methods outlined here, but only one comes to mind: in "For Sidney Bechet," when the poet says,

On me your voice falls as they say love should,
Like an enormous yes,

the simile recreates a phenomenal experience (the voice) as an emotion, affirmative, enthusiastic, optimistic [CP, 83]. This is to reverse his typical practice, in which the emotion is recast as a phenomenon. It is an isolated

exception, however.

This section has aimed to analyse the formal mechanics of the poet's extensive metaphor-making: that is, it has aimed to understand the relationship between tenor and vehicle. Accepting for the moment that localisation is a type of phenomenalisation--because it makes phenomena of abstractions, whether these phenomena are available to the senses or not--it transpires that, between tenor and vehicle, two distinct relationships exist.

As a general rule, the inert is given human characteristics (the "trumpet's voice," and so on), whereas, just as commonly, the human is converted into the inanimate: wit becomes a pitchfork. For a poet (or "poet") justly notorious for his isolation from others, and willing to admit that he "must have lost interest in other people," the first of these procedures is ironical--though not, perhaps, unexpected: in place of his fellow man, the poet surrounds himself, it seems, with teeming crowds of things, so that though his life and landscapes are at times forlornly empty, they still give an impression of vivid and excited life.

The second procedure was perhaps more predictable. Through Larkin's use of metaphor, the emotional and abstract become as tangible and dimension-bound as the cluttered furniture in the poet's room in "Mr Bleaney." As a general rule, it seems quite possible to speak, as many critics have, of the jumbled variegated landscapes of Larkin's England without specifically acknowledging that one element in the clutter is a whole series of human emotions, human

characteristics, times of day, sounds, ideas and other abstractions, often presented as no less concrete than the side-streets, drain-pipes and the mortgaged half-built edges on which many critics have traditionally concentrated their attention.

iii. A contextual analysis: three questions of coherence.

To the twentieth-century mind, the difference between tenor and vehicle in a particular metaphor is at least as important as the identity. This desire for difference has not always been the case, however. "If we mean calling attention to likeness," ^{Richards} comments, "we get a main 18th century doctrine of metaphor." [29] But Richards rejects any doctrinaire preoccupation with similarity:

We must not, with the 18th Century, suppose that the interactions of tenor and vehicle are to be confined to their resemblances. [30]

And in general, the modern mind, following Richards' advice, has proved interested not in resemblance and tidiness, but in tension: the similarity between tenor and vehicle, says Stephen Ullman, "must be accompanied by a feeling of disparity," and he adds that tenor and vehicle "must belong to different spheres of thought." [31] Again one is reminded of the sky and the patient. Eliot, says Lodge,

pushes Jakobson's poetic principle to an extreme: substitution not merely projects into, but radically disrupts combination, and the similarities on which substitution is based are often strained or recondite. [32]

Lodge prefaces this analysis with the view that it is on this principle of disruption (rather than similarity) that "most modernist verse" is based.

This relation (or dis-relation) between tenor and vehicle raises questions about the relationship (or dis-relationship) between vehicle and poem in general. The modernist writer may be expected to stretch the bounds of his text--often, indeed, to break them--in his use of metaphor and simile. By contrast the metonymic author will tend to exercise the discipline of coherence with context. Lodge remarks that metonymic writers may be expected to make their

metaphorical devices ... subject to the control of context ... by drawing analogies from a semantic field associated with the context. [33]

In the case of a poem like Auden's on A.E. Housman--which is a metonymic poem--and in particular of its most striking figure, this expectation is fulfilled. When Auden comments that Housman "Kept tears like dirty postcards in a drawer," his simile, though powerful (because so unexpected), is not random: it succinctly captures the theme of emotional confusion (of grief with guilt, of the erotic with the pornographic) that constitutes the semantic sphere of the poem.

But this simile does more than this, and in so doing, may enable Lodge's theory to be developed one stage further. The powerful simile in "A.E. Housman" is in one sense, as

Lodge predicts, conditioned by the semantic sphere of the poem. But it also, in practice, introduces this sphere. There is no mention of Housman's "private lust" up to this point, and the simile marks the introduction of the theme. It may be, then, that the best metonymic writers, so far from subjecting their similes to the semantic hegemony of the poem in question, may often permit them to advance that sphere.

The same device--the semantically-suitable simile that extends the range of the poem by introducing new material--may also be found in Larkin's work. There is an example of the type in "The Whitsun Weddings": the idea of London's "postal districts packed like squares of wheat." The poem has not yet begun to concentrate on the repercussions of the marriages. That celebration of tradition, creation and reproduction must wait for the final couplet and its transcendent metaphor. For this reason, the image of harvest may seem, at first, to disturb the reader's concentration, diverting attention away from the theme of the poem as a whole. But in practice this image of harvest introduces the poem's substantial theme, preparing the reader for the celebratory conclusion.

A simpler use of the type occurs in "For Sidney Bechet" [CP, 83]. "That note you hold," the poem begins,

narrowing and rising, shakes
Like New Orleans reflected on the water

The simile offers a visual experience of an aural sensation: a simile one might describe as "cross-phenomenal." At the

same time, for readers to whom Bechet's name is unfamiliar, the simile develops the poem, at once introducing and crystallising in a single phrase ("New Orleans") the poet's theme. Such similes are incremental: they intensify and concentrate the poem, telling its tale in terms that simultaneously permit the tale to advance. In the examples given here, there is no dilution of the reader's concentration because, though our concentration may seem to be disturbed when our attention is drawn to similarity between things dissimilar, this dissimilarity is found, in the fullness of time, to be of a piece with the poem as a whole.

There are very good reasons for the poet to make his figures accountable to the semantic sphere of the poem as a whole. The late poem "Aubade" is an example of the dividends that accrue to the poet willing to concentrate his metaphors largely on the matter in hand [CP, 208]. It is fair to say that this poem is at times eclectic about its figures: "An only life," the poet suggests,

can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never:

the poet's metaphor is taken from mountaineering, it seems, and although this is a common metaphor in Larkin's work for old age (one thinks of "Extinction's alp" in "The Old Fools"), it nevertheless falls well outside the semantic sphere of the poem.

At the same time, "Aubade" is dominated to a notable

extent by metaphors and similes drawn either from death or from the metaphor the poet offers for death, which is the darkened room. In the first place, death is an "anaesthetic": it seems justifiable to think of death as being part of the province of medicine, and this province is recalled in the poem's closing line. As day breaks, the poet observes,

Postmen like doctors go from house to house.

But Larkin draws his metaphors not only from the province of medicine. When he remarks that "realisation" of death's approach "rages out / In furnace-fear," for example, the metaphor calls up an image of the crematorium--and even, perhaps, thoughts of Hell. When he speaks of religion as a "brocade," one may be reminded of a shroud, or perhaps the robes of a priest. When he describes the sky as "white as clay," the reader may well be reminded of Shakespeare:

Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away [34]

In these cases, the poet is free to choose his figures from any sphere, but he chooses them from the sphere of the poem, and they concentrate the reader's mind (as is appropriate) wonderfully.

Larkin's governing metaphor for death in this poem is of course the room, symbolising not only the life trapped, fast approaching an end from which there is no escape, but also the grave. The poet draws regular attention to this metaphor through his figures, in this way keeping it in the

forefront of the reader's mind. Thus when he suggests that death "stands plain as a wardrobe," his simile refers the reader not only to death but also to the metaphor for death: a concentration on the matter in hand one might describe (in other circumstances) as overkill. Even in the ostensibly innocent observation that

In time the curtain-edges will grow light,

the reader may well recall the role of the curtain in the theatre, or the implications of the slang word "curtains."

Concentration on the poem's theme to this degree must deliver its own dividend. Larkin's tactic, as it is in "The Old Fools," is to present the reader with a theme

that we can't escape,
Yet can't accept--

the phrase is from "Aubade"--and then to make us accept it through the ingenuity with which he outwits our defences, attacking from one angle after another. It may well be (as Lodge argues) the particular prerogative of the metonymic writer to draw his figures from the appropriate semantic sphere or context, but the writer out to present unpalatable truths--whatever the tradition, or indeed, medium, of his writing--would do well on this evidence to follow his example.

There are clear and compelling reasons, then, for a poet to concentrate his figures specifically on the subject of his poem. But it is fair to say that, statistically at

least, Larkin figures are far more diffuse than the example of "Aubade" might suggest, and are likely to be drawn from beyond the semantic remit of the poem. Indeed, in general it seems almost a matter of principle with Larkin to surprise the reader and usurp his expectations with the semantic heterogeneity of his metaphors and similes.

The closing metaphor in "The Whitsun Weddings" is one indication that Larkin does not invariably feel himself constrained by the semantic sphere of the poem in question. As in "Aubade," there may be compelling contextual reasons for the poet's choice in an individual case. The simile that escapes from the semantic sphere of the poem in which it appears is positively a device of liberation. This is especially true if the poem in question is one which otherwise insists on a limited, disciplined picture of a recognisable world. In "The Whitsun Weddings," for example, the effect of the arrow-shower--which is, of course, an image of release--is to liberate the reader from the semantic sphere of the poem.

Lodge's analysis suggests that on this question a writer has two choices: (s)he may make his metaphors subject to the context of the poem, or (s)he may offer a metaphor that violates the context. It is a strictly binary tension: either the example of "Aubade" or that of "The Whitsun Weddings." The pages that follow, however, will not only introduce this second, violatory kind of metaphor--which is very common in Larkin's poems--but also identify a third kind, one whose relationship to the context in which it

appears is neither coherent nor violatory. It is best to begin with the simpler of the two, the method Lodge posits as the conventional alternative to the kind analysed in the discussion of "Aubade" above: the liberating kind that closes "The Whitsun Weddings."

Of these there are numerous examples. An excellent case occurs in "Dockery and Son" [CP, 152]. The poet muses here on our "Innate assumptions," and on the decisive consequences that flow from them. When "looked back on," he comments--the poem describes, after all, a return journey--such assumptions "rear"

Like sand-clouds, thick and close

Sand-clouds, deserts, beaches, high winds, meteorological freaks and other related phenomena have played no part whatever in this poem, and it would not be possible to make out a case for including them within the semantic sphere of what is nevertheless a metonymic poem. For this very reason they constitute a most appropriate simile, because a substantial theme of the poem is the idea that life offers "what something hidden from us chose." One might almost say the same of the sand-clouds, because they, too, have come from nowhere--or at least from somewhere "hidden from us."

A similarly abrupt departure from the terms of the poem occurs in "Faith Healing" [CP, 126]. On the face of it, the poem describes an evening of quasi-religious ceremonial. But its real theme is "A sense of life lived according to love," the impossibility of living such a life, and the

momentary experience of it at the ceremony conducted by the evangelist with the "deep American voice" for the benefit of a number of disabled women. But a life of love is not possible, the poet concludes, and realising this, the women are suffused with an

immense slackening ache
As when, thawing, the rigid landscape weeps

Once again, the poem has had nothing to say about spring, snow, mountains or whatever else this simile calls up to mind. But again this makes it inversely appropriate, because at the heart of this suburban occasion (the man in "rimless glasses, silver hair, / Dark suit, white collar," the women "Moustached in flowered frocks"), new vistas of existence and ways of life have opened up to them, and awoken them from sleep (the poet's word). This is the very effect the simile leaves on the reader.

"Dockery and Son" is no more a poem about deserts, and "Faith Healing" no more a work about mountains, than is "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" a poem about hospitals. When Larkin draws his figures from deserts and mountains, he disrupts and violates his context in much the same manner as Eliot in drawing his simile from medicine. The result is that the reader's attention is (so to say) untimely ripped from the matter in hand. This may be expected of Eliot, but it comes as a surprise in Larkin. But it is Larkin's most characteristic practice to posit this kind of dis-relationship between figure and context, in the modernist manner. Perhaps this can best be shown by returning to

"Deceptions" [CP, 32].

The poem is written around a rape in Victorian London, which seems to have coincided with a wedding. The second verse, which advances the view that the satisfaction of human hungers leads inevitably to disillusion, also constitutes part of the poem's legitimate semantic sphere, the context of the poem. This is a discrete field, then, consisting of hunger, violence and disillusion, expressed through a rape.

The metaphors here, however, have a very wide range: the opening couplet draws its reference from drinks, which is outside the sphere of the poem. In speaking of "stalks," which seems to mean the stalks of plants, the matter is further complicated. The references to the "Worry of wheels" and the "scar" in lines 4 and 7 respectively may come from within the context, but the "drawer of knives" in line 9 (unless a Freudian analogy is being attempted here, which seems unlikely) seems to belong in the kitchen or dining-room: strictly well beyond the field of the poem. In line 13 the vehicle of "readings" for "feelings" calls up notions of the science laboratory--a powerful and effective violation of context. Finally the references to the "breathless stair" and "fulfilment's desolate attic" again intrude on the immediate semantic sphere.

It would be possible to make out a case for the suitability of this. The male, after all, is an intruder himself, a violator, and for the female, shocked, confused and usurped, the sense of a "heap of broken images" is

surely very apt. [35] But that is beside the point, because these pages aim only to show that Larkin's typical practice is to collect his metaphors from whatever quarter seems appropriate--or perhaps inappropriate--and in doing so, often to violate and intrude almost as a matter of principle. In "Deceptions," it seems, the metaphors, ranging as they do from the dining-room to the science laboratory, gather from all quarters.

It might be argued that for any poet with a compulsion for things different from himself--a compulsion at the heart of Larkin's poetry--such figures from beyond the sphere of the poem will be most attractive. The effect of metaphors of this second type is to sweep the reader's attention abruptly away from the matter in hand, and invite him to attend to something quite different. Accordingly, such figures serve as an escape from the poem's theme, not a concentration of it. This is what distinguishes them from metaphors of the kind found in a poem like Auden's "A.E. Housman."

This kind of analysis is effective for the kind of poem that has a single identifiable theme and semantic sphere. But it becomes more difficult to make this kind of division between the field of the metaphor and that of the poem when the field of the poem is itself divided. Yet such a division, as the last chapter showed, very often lies at the heart of Larkin's poems. In texts whose attention is itself deeply divided between an inside world and the world beyond the glass (to put the matter at its most superficial), talk

of a single semantic field may be something of an oversimplification.

In a small number of these poems, however, that otherworld beyond the glass is briefly made available to the reader through the poet's use of metaphor. Such metaphors do not fall beyond the remit of the poem. They underline what the poem will proceed to declare in its own time. Yet neither do they fall within the field in which they appear. To suggest a quite different field is the purpose of such figures. They are underwritten, in the process, by likeness and unlikeness at once. They are both coherent and violatory.

"Toads" offers two kinds of life: the life lived, and then the other kind of life, untested but compulsively desirable [CP, 89]. The life lived is modern, urban, regular, conventional, trapped. The life unlived, by contrast, is haphazard, rural, hand-to-mouth, spontaneous and free. The poet's life ("Here," in fact) is of the first kind, his dream ("Elsewhere") is of the second. Yet when he describes his own life and character, he draws his metaphors from the sphere of the life unlived:

Why should I let the toad work
Squat on my life?
Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork
And drive the brute off?

Larkin was asked where he came by the metaphor of toad for work, and answered flippantly, "Sheer genius." [36] But it seems a fair question, and one might ask the same of

"pitchfork" and "brute." These metaphors are largely rural: they belong to the context of that half of the poem which, explicitly, they are not intended to describe. They belong to the lives of those who "live on their wits," as the third verse has it, and with those who

live up lanes
With fires in a bucket.

In general, work and regular living seem to the reader of this poem as urban phenomena, contrasted with the rural existence lived up lanes by the free and easy. The two kinds of life are set up in contrast with one another. To live one is to leave the other unlived. Yet the former is described in terms of the latter: a singularly inappropriate metaphor, yet one that glimpses the life unlived and advertises the poet's compulsion for it. The general point is that the metaphor originates outside its own context--that is, it constitutes a violatory figure--yet, at the same time, there are aspects of the poem with which it conforms: in this sense it is an example of coherence. The result of the ambiguity is this: to speak of toads and pitchforks is as free formally as it is semantically; but they appear here to denote not freedom at all but the life constrained and restricted.

Whether such figures violate or cohere it is not easy to say. Apparently they are ironical, because they offer and retract at one and the same time. The ironist, says Sartre, "leads us to believe in order not to be believed."

[37] The simile in the closing stanza of "This Be The

Verse" is similarly ironical [CP, 180]. The poem is concerned, characteristically, with thoughts of freedom on one side and, on the other, the cell. It is the cell that dominates: the cell of human misery passed from one generation to the next. "Man hands on misery to man," the poet observes gloomily:

It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as quickly as you can.
And don't have any kids yourself.

The obvious place to go, if one must "Get out," is in fact the coastal shelf, for the sea matters immensely in Larkin's poems, a place of promise ("Sunny Prestatyn"), of hope ("Next, Please"), almost of freedom ("Here") [CP, 149, 52, 136]. It is an image of "Elsewhere." From the angle of the poet's thinking, it is hard to think of a simile less appropriate than the coast for deepening human misery.

This is as true formally as it is semantically: for the poem to address the reader on the matter of inescapable human misery, then to "cut" to a "shot" of the sea, is to liberate the reader from the sphere of his initial concentration. It is a supremely (even a sublimely) unsuitable simile, then, freeing the reader in the act of telling him that freedom there is none. Thoughts of the coast and "unfenced existence" (as "Here" has it) are a challenge to the reader, a temptation. All the while the poet warns the reader not to give in to temptation. Indeed it is more than this: the reader is quite unable, reading the poem over, to prevent his mind being drawn briefly to

the sea, to "Elsewhere." The poem briefly takes the reader there, the while insisting there is no such place.

This section has aimed to show three relationships between figure and context. In the first kind, the metaphor coheres contextually, the more powerfully to concentrate the poet's distasteful thinking. In the second, the metaphor frees itself contextually, often--though not necessarily--to indicate the unpredictable or unfathomable nature of events. In the third, the metaphor speaks for that part of the poem which the text in which it appears rejects or denies. Like the first kind then, it anticipates, and like the second, it escapes. Yet unlike the first kind, it denies its own context, and unlike the second kind, it returns to the field of the poem in time.

The first type of contextual relationship--the coherent type--seems supremely fitted to descriptions of "Here," of the room, and of the life lived there, because the first type expressly refuses to permit escape. Rather, by insisting on coherence, it intensifies and concentrates the reader's attention on the matter in hand. The use of this type in "Aubade" is especially apposite, given the poet's inability in that poem to escape the room and what it implies. However, it is fair to say that, for all that his use of metaphor is extensive, very few of Larkin's poems insist on coherence to this degree.

The second type--the violatory type--represents the opposite principle, since it encourages some kind of release, however brief and vicarious, from the terms of the

poem. With this kind of sudden and abrupt interruption in his concentration, the reader seems momentarily released from the confined quarters of "Here," liberated into an airy and otherworldly "Elsewhere." In this way, whatever the semantic force of the poem, thoughts of freedom are kept tenuously in the reader's mind. This second type, which seems to be most common among modernist poets, nonetheless represents Larkin's most typical practice.

But it is, perhaps, the third type--the type that coheres and violates simultaneously--that bears the poet's particular signature, since this kind of relationship best expresses his double-vision, trapped as he is in a context that he can neither fully accept nor fully escape. In leaping for freedom, as these figures seem to do, they express the poet's preoccupation with lives, places and casts of mind other than the type lived and known; yet in failing to find it, which is their fate, they seem to reflect the fate of their own creator.

iv. A semantic analysis: a source of Larkin's vehicles.

There is a final point, a semantic foot-note, to add to this analysis of Larkin's metaphors: a note on the origins of his vehicles. To the question of where his vehicles originate, there is a surprising answer. Larkin is typically seen as a poet of the English urban landscape. Something of the accuracy of this view can be seen in "Toads," a poem that finds (for all that the field of its

metaphors is rural) that there is no alternative to the life urban, or suburban, a poem in which nature is depicted as a kind of romantic otherworld, to be equated with the organic and free-wheeling.

Larkin's critics have not been slow to describe the significance of this urban bias. Bayley places Larkin typically in the "lounge bar"--that most suburban of refuges--while Eric Homburger sees him as the habitue of the "supermarket." [38] Either way, Larkin's natural home does not seem to be the country inn or the village shop. Philip Hobsbaum goes further, seeing Larkin as the first poet in the English tradition to accept urban England for what it is: a place he calls "Larkin's England," a landscape of "brickwork, drain-pipes, mortgaged half-built edges." [39] The last phrase comes from "Here," of course, a poem in which Davie detects on Larkin's part

a perverse determination that the ultimate ('terminate') pastoral shall be among the cut-price stores and nowhere else. [40]

Edna Longley concedes that Larkin "seems interested in trying to bring the urban into some kind of significant relation with the rural," but still sees Larkin's typical environment as "'Cemetery Road.'" [41] In general, it seems, few critics would want to dissociate themselves from Homburger's analysis that

There has rarely been an English poet who found nature so profoundly 'untalkative.' [42]

But this is not the conclusion to be drawn from a study

of Larkin's vehicles. On the contrary, in his use of metaphor, Larkin reaches out to the natural world to a remarkable degree. Culture, the human and the artificial, in fact, are repeatedly described in terms of nature. Man may be an urban animal in Larkin's work, and the poet himself may be reconciled to this, yet the natural world remains Larkin's typical source of metaphors for man's condition. Human emotions, human attributes, stages in human life, even life itself--things human tend in Larkin's poems to be conveyed through metaphors that have their roots in nature.

Something of this has been observed already. There is, of course, something quixotically inappropriate in the thought of the "postal districts packed like squares of wheat," and there is just the same kind of wilful unsuitability in "Essential Beauty," when the poet describes advertising hoardings that tower surreally over "rained-on streets and squares" as

sharply-pictured groves
Of how life should be. [CP, 144]

"Groves" seems an implausible vehicle for a tenor so human and artificial as a cluster of advertising hoardings. Yet it is peculiarly characteristic of Larkin to remind the reader, in the act of examining the life of the city, that there exists another kind of life and that man remains in a kind of urban exile. "Arrival" is a third case [CP, 51]. Specifically a description of arriving to live in a "new

city," this poem's metaphors are not predominantly urban but rural and natural:

And the windows flock open
And the curtains fly out like doves.

Once again there is a subtle sense of dislocation here. Moreover (to speak more generally), it seems equally typical of Larkin that when he presses his imagination for a figure for human life, it is to the unexpected, even the ironic figure--that is, to nature--that he turns.

Larkin's poems are much possessed with the idea that certain stages in human life resemble phenomena in the natural world. Indeed (as "The Old Fools" asserts), life itself is a "million-petalled flower" [CP, 196]. In the same way, a child is a "Tightly-folded bud" (as "Born Yesterday" says) as well as a "spring" of "innocence and love," while youth (so "Love Songs in Age" suggests) is a "spring-woken tree" [CP, 84, 105]. By contrast--a less optimistic mood, apparently--adolescence becomes (as "Aubade" puts it) a trench to "climb / Clear" of [CP, 208]. But teenagers remain (as "High Windows" says) "like free bloody birds" nonetheless [CP, 165]. Meanwhile, death is either an "alp" (as "The Old Fools" has it) or (so "The Building" says) a "clean-sliced cliff" [CP, 197, 192]. Finally the distinction between old and young is denoted (in "Wires" at any rate) as the difference between "Young steers" on the one hand, and "old cattle" on the other [CP, 48].

In each of these cases, the human takes its bearings in

the natural world, which is the reference-point for the poet's vehicle. Larkin's instincts are no different when he comes to describe human emotions. Joy (as "Wedding-Wind" says) is a matter of "new-delighted lakes," while conversely disappointment (so "Faith Healing" asserts) comes across "As when, thawing, the rigid landscape weeps" [CP, 11, 126]. By contrast, misery, as "This Be The Verse" suggests, deepens from age to age "like a coastal shelf" [CP, 180]. More optimistically, a feeling of security (as "The Dance" says) is "No more than"

rain round a conservatory
Oafishly warm inside. [CP, 157]

Love is similarly referred back to the natural world: in "Love Songs in Age," it is an emotion that "broke out" like the sun; in "Love Again," it is an "element" which "spreads through other lives like a tree"; alternatively, in "Faith Healing," the reader is presented with the "warm spring rain of loving care" [CP, 113, 215, 126].

Human lives and human emotions, then, are based (it might seem) in the natural world, and human attributes have the same origin in Larkin's metaphors. Memories are "like flies," as "At Grass" suggests, and "wit" (as "Toads" says) is potentially a "pitchfork" [CP, 29, 89]. Ambition, as "Toads" suggests, is as "cold as snow" (in the poet's case, at least), and of course work is first a "toad," then a "brute." Meanwhile in "Dockery and Son," the "assumptions" a man makes about his life may "rear / Like sand-clouds,

thick and close" [CP, 153]. Finally, if the notion of history can be seen as a human element, then the present tense, as "An Arundel Tomb" suggests, is the "hollow of / An unarmo[ri]al age"--the metaphor taken from the heath, one imagines, or the common; and as "High Windows" reflects--a little eccentrically, maybe--a social anachronism is "an outdated combine harvester" [CP, 111, 165].

In the context of the analysis advanced in the second chapter, Larkin's consistent recourse to the natural world for his vehicles is extremely striking. It was shown there that the natural world is the world beyond the glass, a phenomenon to be observed from a distance only, one emphatically out of reach. Both as deictic and metaphor, nature encompasses that which is organic, amorphous and free-ranging, the very antithesis of the poet himself ("himself") and the sterile life he is forced to live this side of the window. In reaching out to that world as the prime source of his vehicles, the poet serves notice that boundaries--however distinct semantically--can still be crossed, and that though, in general, his tenors may belong "Here," they can still be united with the vehicles of "Elsewhere."

v. Intimations of freedom in Larkin's metaphors.

The mechanics of Larkin's metaphors, which this chapter has called their formal character, suggest that the narrow boundaries implicit in the distinction between "Here" and "Elsewhere" will not be observed. The poet recreates the

inert as human, filling the world in which he finds himself alone with the faces and voices of the normally inanimate; or else he converts the dimension-free into the dimension-bound, so that the amorphous and free-ranging become as "dry and hard" as the furniture of his bedroom.

In the poet's approach to the relationship between the vehicle and the poem as a whole, boundaries between "Here" and "Elsewhere" are again dismantled, but in this area of Larkin's work, a profound impulse for freedom is given its head, expressed in the metaphor that refuses to obey the thinking of the poem and settle for confinement or coherence. The simile of the "coastal shelf" in the closing lines of "This Be The Verse" is a particularly graphic example of a general case: Larkin's vehicles have a seemingly wilful character, which is expressed in their determination to disrupt the decorum of the poem in which they appear. Not all Larkin's metaphors disrupt their contexts so effectively, but the tendency of these figures is to surprise the reader, and in these escape-attempts (as it were) from the semantic hegemony of the poem, which is disciplined to a degree, may be discerned the poet's own impulse for "Elsewhere."

This impulse is best expressed, however, in the general tendency of Larkin's vehicles to originate in the most unexpected quarter, which is the natural world. Chapter Two has demonstrated that the poet's eyes are often raised from his own narrow surroundings to the natural world beyond the glass. That world of freedom from dimensions, the real, the

known and the self stays "out of reach," it seems--on the semantic level at least. Among the real achievements of Larkin's metaphors is that, having battled with a sense of imprisonment in their formal aspects, and sought to break out of it in their contextual, they finally slough it off in their semantic life, bridging the gap that underwrites the poems in general, and bringing to the arid quarters of "Here" brief glimpses of another, quite different, kind of world.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISSATISFACTION AND RELEASE IN LARKIN'S NOVELS.

i. Introduction: a context for Larkin's novels.

In spite of the poet's sense of incarceration, then--or, no doubt, because of it--he is highly sensitive to worlds beyond the limits of his own. The introduction mentioned his preoccupation with looking, and then the first chapter showed his predilection for comparing matters personal with things external, his habit of looking out from the confines of his own life and character to the lives and characters of others. And the second chapter showed that the chief metaphor for the poet and his life is a vehicle well able to express this curiosity, or desire.

It is as if the poet's determination to erect barriers is matched only by his determination to break them down. Whalen's suggestion that Larkin is "continually struggling against the limits of his own personality" seems to understate the case: at any rate, the third chapter demonstrated that the poet struggles against the limits of rather more than merely his personality. [1] Indeed, he struggles even against the limits of his own material as an artist. Timms suggests that in general the Movement poets were not much moved by any "sympathy for the different."

But he adds that Larkin's poems are in this respect an exception, since they are underwritten by just this sympathy, this curiosity. [2] But again, one might go further and speak not of Larkin's sympathy for the different, but of his compulsion for it.

This is not to say that the poet is invariably impressed by what he sees when he looks out from his own life, character or, indeed, room. Certainly there are occasions in the poems--relatively few of them, but they do exist--when "Here" seems preferable to "Elsewhere." "Toads Revisited" is a case in point. The poet's comparison there between two types of life--one free-ranging, shapeless, spontaneous and disorganised, the other rigid and structured--culminates, of course, in the conclusion that it is his own life that he prefers:

Think of being them,

he comments, a little disparagingly, seeing the tramps and ramblers in the park [CP, 147]. In this poem, then, he is ultimately unimpressed by what he sees. But to "Think of being them" is indeed the poet's reflex.

This, at any rate, is the case with the mature poems. Only in a small number of the poems, principally written before the publication of The Less Deceived in 1955, does the poet obey his self-denying ordinance not to look beyond the narrow world he chooses to inhabit. So in poems like "Wires" and "Next, Please," hopes of a life better--or even other--than the life lived are derided, partly because such

hopes cannot be realised anyway (the individual, after all, is incarcerated in his life) but mainly because, when we discover the futility of the attempt to improve our lot or escape it altogether, we react with disillusion. In these relatively early poems, the poet feels certain that present reality can never be illuminated by the delights of life "Beyond the wires" [CP, 48]. Yet he cannot forget that such a life exists.

In his mature poems, though, Larkin does begin to surrender to his own impulse, and his thoughts stray continually to life "Elsewhere." In general, such thoughts are entertained on the basis that the poet's own life--"Here"--is too rigid and stultifying, or at any rate frustrating. The impulse to "compare his life with mine," to which he surrenders in "Self's the Man," seems the natural reaction to this sense of frustration [CP, 117]. When comparisons are attempted in these poems, it is not always lives that are compared. In "Letter to a Friend about Girls," for example, it is two types of women that the poet contrasts, and in "Breadfruit," the comparison arises between dreams and reality. But even in poems like these, the question of what kind of life one wants to live seems to lurk beneath the surface.

This question preoccupies Larkin's poetry. The poet is conscious that there is only a "single life" to be lived [CP, 208], and that on the whole, this single life seems less than fulfilling. Whether to change it, and whether change is possible, and what to change to--these questions

underwrite the poems in general. But they are also the underlying theme of Larkin's two novels, Jill and A Girl in Winter, which were written and published between The North Ship and The Less Deceived. [3]

In both these novels, a single character finds a single life profoundly frustrating and disappointing. It is familiar territory. Yet both these characters have ambitions to relieve their present sense of privation and suffering. In both novels, love is to be the means by which release is effected. Each character hopes that life "Elsewhere," beyond the wires that mark out the narrow confines of present reality, will be richer than "Here." In short, Larkin's novels, like many of his poems, are underwritten by the desire to escape from the frustrations of present reality to a dreamy otherworld of love. But they are underwritten, too, by the author's determination to unmask such hopes as illusory.

ii. Present reality: loneliness and alienation.

The two central characters of the novels, John Kemp in Jill and Katherine Lind in A Girl in Winter, are superficially very different from one another. Respectively male and female, British and foreign, working-class and middle-class, student and professional, these two initially seem to have little in common. This impression of difference seems to be confirmed by a brief review of the lives they lead: whereas John is forced to share his life with numerous contemporaries, Katherine lives alone, and

whereas John's life is relatively free of obligations, Katherine's work ensures that her days are filled. Finally, whereas John's family--indeed, his past in general--makes repeated intrusions into the life he leads in Oxford, Katherine's family (if she has one) maintains a respectful distance throughout the novel.

But beneath these superficial differences--class, gender, and other sociological categories--the two central characters have a great deal in common. In their own way, each is a stranger in a strange land, with no connections between the immediate present and the past, yet no strong attachment to the present either. John's alienation is stressed the moment he arrives in Oxford. When he is introduced in his room to the social circle of Warner, his room-mate, "a sense of his alien surroundings came over him" [p. 28]. This alienation is underlined when he is the first to be offered a cup of tea:

"Visitors first," said Christopher Warner, filling a cup for John. [p. 31]

The cup, like the room, belongs to John, so he is no visitor here. But in practice he never comes to feel at home in this room. On his first night in Oxford, for example,

He looked around the room for evidence of his own presence, but found very little, [p. 37]

and as late as late November, after two months in the college, he instinctively knocks at his own door before entering the room [p. 174]. In his own room, then, John

(unlike the poet himself) will never feel at home.

John does not belong here. But his alienation from Oxford is compounded by a similar alienation from his own past. This is well expressed in his behaviour towards his family. He largely ignores their efforts to get in touch with him: sometimes he reads his family's letters, then forgets all about them; at other times he does not even bother to collect the letters from the lodge [pp. 224, 230]. Moreover, when he invents for himself a sister, he gives her the surname "Bradley," apparently to dissociate her from his own family [p. 131]. Finally, he fantasises that his roommate's mother is his own, and when the thought of his real mother occurs to him, he banishes her "angrily" from his mind [pp. 90-91].

This isolation from his own past is symbolised by what happens to his home-town in the Blitz. Seeing the destruction the war has brought to Huddlesford, John quickly draws the psychological metaphor, and tells himself:

all the suffering connected with that town, all your childhood, is wiped out. [p. 219]

At the same time, it is right to add that he is overcome with genuine concern for his parents when he first hears about this bombing [p. 204]. But again, although he now regrets having been so indifferent towards his family, he quickly forgets his intention to maintain the relationship responsibly [pp. 211, 224]. The sight of John peering through the windows of his old house to examine his past is

of course an expressive image in the context of this thesis [p. 215]. In a sense this vignette expresses John's escape from Huddlesford and the past. But it also emphasises how detached John has become from his own background. And this only underlines his loneliness in Oxford, his sense of belonging nowhere.

Katherine, the central character of A Girl in Winter, is cut off, like John, from the past, but also alien (as he is) in the present. A foreigner in England during the war, she believes that the English

were characterized in time of war by antagonism to every foreign country, friendly or unfriendly, as a simple matter of instinct. [p. 22]

This antagonism is personified in her new life by Mr. Anstey, her superior. He is the man responsible, she believes, for the fact that "any odd job that was really nobody's duty fell to her"--a phenomenon that "stressed"

what was already sufficiently marked: that she was foreign and had no proper status here. [p. 25]

This foreign status is underlined by the narrator himself in his regular references to Katherine's "own language," her "own country," and even her "own life" [pp. 129, 139, 167]. The reader is not told which language, country or life these are. The effect is to stress that Katherine is foreign, and that to be foreign is to be different, because there are no degrees of foreignness, especially during the war. Moreover this vagueness suggests how remote her "own" life has become, because it implies that the trifling details--

country, language, way of life--have now all been forgotten, or at any rate, need not be remembered.

Two results of Katherine's alienation from her own country--and her own past in general--are that when she remembers a time for which she now feels nostalgic, it is a pre-war summer spent in England that she recalls, and that when she yearns for a family life, she focuses her attention (much like John) not on her own family but on somebody else's: in this case, the Fennels, the family she stayed with during that summer. One might see the rubble of central Europe from which she seems to have escaped as a metaphor for a life she has left behind. If this is fair, then in this, too, she resembles John.

Both John and Katherine are cut off from the past, then, but now find they are strangers in the present too. Moreover this double-alienation is underlined by a profound experience of personal loneliness, which only serves to increase their sense of being homeless and belonging nowhere. For both characters, being alone is almost emblematic. The first thing John does in Jill, for example, is to lock himself away in the railway lavatory to eat his sandwiches--presumably because he feels that human beings may only do human things in private and alone [p. 22]. The human individual, locked away in a room, is again a familiar figure in the general context of this thesis. But it is not a happy figure.

Similarly, John's introduction to life in Oxford is also an introduction to the loneliness he will meet here.

Surrounded by his room-mate's coterie, he looks from face to face, but finds himself

feeling he had wandered into a place where he had absolutely no counterpart. [p. 33]

Only one friend shows John much kindness and fellowship in Oxford, but something in John prevents him from returning it. Whitbread is a natural "counterpart" for him, if only because they share a similar background. Moreover, he eats his meals, drinks cups of coffee and gossips with John, reveals his own background to him in a confidential and affecting way, and he shows genuine concern for John when Huddlesford is bombed. By way of repayment for these kindnesses, John denounces Whitbread as "an awful man," and steals his cake [p. 175]. Later, he vandalises Whitbread's rooms.

It may simply be that John prefers isolation, and would echo the poet's own view, expressed in "Wants":

Beyond all this, the wish to be alone. [CP, 42]

This may be especially true where Whitbread is concerned. And, indeed, the incident in the railway lavatory would seem to support this view. But although John is typically alone, this is not what he most wants. This makes his loneliness in Oxford harder still to accept. His feelings of loneliness are most bitter when his desire to be friendly has been rebuffed. For example, when he hears Christopher and his girl-friend Elizabeth swapping insults about him, he

first feels anger, but then "loneliness began to displace his rage" [p. 113]. Similarly, after Christopher is joined by his friends and girl-friends at the theatre, John is abandoned,

hollow with grief, as if there were a great well of aloneness inside him that could never be filled up. [p. 180]

It is at times like these, when John has set his heart on companionship and then seen his overtures rejected, that his feelings of loneliness are most acute.

But although the root cause of John's loneliness in Oxford, and especially of his isolation from Warner's group, is principally class, there may be nothing particularly malicious in this on their part. It is the result of what might be called a "culture-gap." John cannot reminisce about his days at public school because he did not go to one. So he did not learn there to copy essays, throw people in fountains, dodge authority figures, cut tutorials and the other pastimes practised in public schools and refined at Oxford. These rites are quite alien to him. But the more alien they seem, the more attractive they become. In stealing Whitbread's cake, John imitates those who are culturally distant from himself, and injures one who shares his background. Actions like these seem to indicate that John is anxious to escape from--among other things--himself and those too like himself.

Katherine is a newcomer not only to England but also to the town in which she now finds herself:

"I don't know anybody here at all,"

she insists when one of her colleagues asks her about her social life [p. 55]. So Katherine is isolated not only from "her own people," but from "our people" too.

As it happens, Katherine's isolation is underlined by her instinct for solitude: "she was not a person to make friends carelessly," the narrator says of the adolescent Katherine, and her adult life suggests that nothing has changed [p. 67]. Indeed, late in the novel she acknowledges this characteristic in herself, and determines to make the best of it. Other people, she argues, "seemed not to affect her" at all, and that being the case,

they could not help her, and if she was going to go on living she would have to get the strength for it solely out of herself. [p. 184]

So it is fair to say that Katherine's loneliness is not just the result of her fate in finding herself alone in England during the war.

At the same time, there is a strong atmosphere in these remarks of someone steeling himself to face the disagreeable but inevitable fact. That Katherine finds her present loneliness harder to bear than she concedes is evidenced not only in her nostalgia for the pre-war summer, when she was surrounded by the Fennels, but also in her decision to re-establish contact with the family. Her overtures to them sit uneasily with her rejection of "other people." Moreover, the chief tension in the narrative as a

whole rests on the question of her relationship to this family, and whether her interest in them will be reciprocated.

In their common loneliness and alienation, then, both characters evidently share a great deal with their own author--or, rather, with the character of "the poet"--as he is presented in poems like "Mr Bleaney." However, this kind of parallel is less important than the question of how far present reality is unpalatable, and whether hopes should be entertained of improving matters. Poems like "Wires" and "Next, Please" (written in 1950 and 1951 respectively, not long after the novels themselves) advance the conviction that to hope at all is to court disillusion. This is not a conviction, however, to which either John or Katherine instinctively subscribes.

iii. John's determination to escape from himself.

The point is that whatever causes Katherine's loneliness--whether it is the result of her character, or the war, or her status as a foreigner, or her recent arrival in this town, or some combination of these four--it does not satisfy her, and she writes to the Fennels. Even so, she seems to suffer less from her loneliness than John. She has more modest expectations of friendship, and is willing to risk less to get it, and prepared to accept fewer humiliations in taking the risk. If Katherine seems a sadder but wiser character than John, it is worth bearing in mind that her story was composed later than his. As Larkin

himself comments:

The central character, Katherine, picks up where John left off and carries the story out into the frozen wastes. [4]

Larkin might almost be talking about one single story-- indeed, he might almost be talking about a single character. But Katherine is older and wiser than John, and has more modest expectations of life.

John and Katherine express their unhappiness in two ways, each of which seems to hold out the promise of a release from the lonely present into a happier future. First, both are in love, a predictable reaction to the loneliness and foreignness they both feel. But it is a measure of the store they set by love, and of the immodest expectations they have of its power to change lives, that each loves a man whose sense of belonging four-square in his own environment is deep-seated, and who in his own life (by contrast with themselves) is effortlessly at ease.

Love may be too strong a word for what John feels for Christopher, or Katherine for Robin. John's initial feeling for Christopher may be nothing more high-minded than the desire to imitate him. By contrast with John, Christopher feels immediately at home and at ease in their shared rooms, throwing a tea-party on the first afternoon of term for his friends from London, then decorating the walls with pictures of his family and old school:

"That makes the place look more like home" [said Christopher]. "I say, I'm sorry, you haven't anything,

have you?"

"No, no, that's quite all right." [p. 35]

In short, this is Christopher's "home," not John's. But John "had already begun to admire Christopher" by the second day of their shared residence [p. 46], and within a week or so, he finds himself "trembling with pleasure at having done Christopher a service" [p. 60]. His relationship with Christopher throughout the novel is nakedly emotional, in that it is characterised by unpredictable, vacillating waves of fulfilment and resentment. When Christopher addresses him by his Christian name, for example, the effect on John is likened to a musical crescendo. Christopher's gesture presumably suggests to John that he has been accepted as one of the group, and this leaves him

repeating again and again to himself that Christopher had called him by his first name. When he turned round he could hardly keep from smiling. [p. 55]

For once John belongs with those who belong, and he feels a kind of release. By contrast, when Christopher bullies him into writing an essay for him, he is overcome with bitterness: "Tears pricked his eyes because he had no means of retaliation" [p. 129]. Just as often Christopher makes a fool of John without his even being aware of it. But for all the grief, anxiety, humiliation and exploitation John suffers at the hands of his room-mate, making friends with Christopher and his coterie (that is, belonging with those who belong, and ceasing to belong nowhere) remains "the only thing he wanted to do" [p. 155].

In the process, John prostrates his dignity, endures numerous insults, lives on his nerves, and (incidentally) wastes a lot of money. But this is a price he is willing to pay to obtain Christopher's respect and belong with the group which, in his eyes, best symbolises his new environment and promises an end to alienation and loneliness. But for all his efforts, Christopher's group never accepts him, and as if to emphasise John's unimportance to him, Christopher never pays back the pound in full. John's reaction to this oversight is striking. It arouses in him an "unconquerable sense of isolation":

Christopher was his closest friend. And this money business was creating a gaping hole of uncertainty in his mind [p. 86]

John now sets out to conquer his sense of isolation by a different route.

It is a measure of the "sense of isolation"--and indeed, rejection--that John feels that he now pursues the two women to whom Christopher is closest. Echoes of John's apparent competitiveness with Christopher over women may seem to occur in a book published almost a decade later, and dedicated to Larkin. In Kingsley Amis' Lucky Jim, Jim Dixon competes with Bertrand for Christine, Bertrand's girlfriend, and wins the day. [5] But any such echoes are apparent only. To begin with, John's campaign is half-hearted, and does not bear fruit in any case. Moreover, John moves not in a spirit of competition with Christopher, but of imitation. He develops his attachments to Mrs Warner and Elizabeth not

because he wants to defeat Christopher, but because he would like to be him--or at any rate, be like him.

John's interest in Mrs Warner is almost spiritual. There is no sexual impulse in it. It is true that when they first meet at the railway station, John "looked admiringly at her easy stride, her breasts and youthfulness," and that a little later he must stifle "an impulse to take her hand" [pp. 90-91]. But when he reviews his interest in her, "the effect is psychological:

There was something about her that he had never met before, something that made him feel at once both happy and excited, something that made him want to see her again, to live where she lived. She affected him like an invigorating climate. [p. 96]

John is looking for someone to mother him, perhaps, someone to surround him like a "climate." Essentially he is looking for protection from present reality. At all events, John's Lawrentian enthusiasm is exposed by events. His interest in Mrs Warner belongs to the morning. In the afternoon he buys a bow-tie, which Elizabeth ties for him. By the evening he is aware of a new compulsion:

The soft fumbling of her hands under his chin had aroused a fugitive excitement in him. When could he see her again, as he wanted to? [p. 100]

The answer to this question, as it happens, is the following afternoon. Elizabeth arrives to have tea with Christopher, but Christopher is out. She offers to tie his tie again, and he accepts. And while she does so, he feels a "flaring theoretical lust" [p. 109]. But the lust remains

"theoretical," and this is as well for John, not only because Christopher returns soon afterwards, but also because, as John leaves him alone with Elizabeth, he hears them swap a catalogue of insults that destroys all his hopes of being other than alone in Oxford. Christopher tells Elizabeth: "Mother said he looked stuffed." "Stuffed!" she exclaims. "That's just the word!" [p. 111] This exchange, which involves the one man and the two women by whom he wants to be respected, drives John from a longing to belong to his environment into a determination to escape from it.

The failure of these three attachments raises the question of what exactly they signify, what purpose they serve. Perhaps the simplest way to answer this question is to examine the other side of the coin, which is John's relationship to Whitbread. Larkin's poems are much given to comparison, as has been mentioned, and much the same atmosphere of contrast hangs over the place of Warner and Whitbread in the novel as underwrites the comparisons of the mature poems.

From the sociological angle, John and Whitbread have much in common. Both are outsiders in college and at home. As a child Whitbread's attempts to "better himself" were resented by his family. His brothers "said he was a drag on the family, and was trying to get above himself" [p. 207], and his father "was always saying that if I got to college I'd have no friends, everyone'd look down on me." Whitbread feels this common ground, and refers to it:

But I used to tell him [says Whitbread to John] I knew

I'd find some decent fellows--like yourself, now--fellows in similar circumstances who'd be prepared to be friendly. [p. 206]

Whitbread's scholarship has propelled him from a working-class world to a fastness of upper-middle-class English life. He protests that in Oxford "there's a place for everyone," but his origins clearly mark him out as an exception and an outsider there. John sees this in Whitbread, and senses the atmosphere of alienation that hangs over the group of scholarship boys when they invite him to tea. They gather, he observes, "like members of some persecuted sect, as if alien to the life around them" [p. 124].

The observation is John's, not the narrator's. It is delivered with a certain self-satisfaction, but in one sense it is a statement of self-delusion. John separates himself from the group because of the atmosphere of alienation that surrounds them. In putting this criticism into John's mouth, the author reveals John's motives in clinging to Christopher. In Whitbread's group, there is something too much of himself. John, like Larkin, has a compulsion for the different, and Whitbread's group is too narrow, closeted, uneasy and furtive to appeal to one who, like John, seeks release from the past and from his old self. This desire from release is revealed in John's behaviour towards Whitbread. When John smothers Whitbread's clothes and books with jam, he does so because disorder and waste are what this old life lacks. He chooses Whitbread as his victim because his old schoolmaster, Crouch, has just

delivered a speech about "getting on" in the cynical tones John associates with Whitbread.

At all events, it is when Whitbread pairs himself with John--"like yourself, now"--that he has least chance of making himself liked [p. 206]. John is not primarily interested in solidarity or fellow-feeling with those who, like Whitbread, remind him of what he is himself. Whitbread feels that their similar backgrounds are the best basis for a friendship, whereas, for John, it is this similarity that precludes it. His sympathy, curiosity and fascination lie exclusively with those who are different from himself, and offer him, not a retrenchment in his real situation and life but release from it. It is this desire that fuels his fantasies of Jill.

iv. Katherine's longing to belong "Elsewhere."

Katherine, like John, knows somebody who belongs, and somebody who does not. It is to the insider that she is attracted, and from the outsider that she recoils. So as in Jill, two quite different types of character are projected onto the margins of the novel, and the central character is placed between them.

Anstey resembles Whitbread both in the escape he has made from his own background, and in his reaction to it. When Whitbread makes his soulless speeches explaining how well he fits in at Oxford, he reveals, among other things, his doubts about his own position. John does not need to

have such doubts explained to him, because he feels them more than anybody. Katherine's position in relation to Anstey is slightly different. It is true that, like Whitbread, Anstey is insecure about his position, and is similarly inclined to reveal this insecurity whenever he tries to explain it away:

It is not my policy, Miss Lind, to take cognisance of what members of my staff do when they leave this building after their working hours. [p. 209]

This kind of wearying self-importance is meant to show that he is a library administrator to the bone, perfectly attuned to his work.

But Katherine is not on terms of equality with Anstey as John is with Whitbread, and she only finds out about Anstey's professional insecurities after she has crossed swords with him. Up to that point, his power has seemed as monolithic as his self-righteousness. Miss Holloway, one of Katherine's colleagues, tells her that Anstey has only been promoted "because of the war"

and he's deadly afraid that afterwards he'll be stood down again. That makes him suspicious of everything and everybody. And he longs to be efficient, but he just isn't a big enough man for the job. [p. 222]

Anstey's self-serving speeches are undermined by these facts. But monologues that bluster about "my policy" and "my staff" suggest that Miss Holloway is not alone in feeling that Anstey is out of his depth. Anstey himself seems to share her doubts.

Katherine and Anstey have almost nothing in common

other than their status as outsiders. In Jill, John rejects Whitbread and vandalises his rooms because he is too similar to him. Katherine does nothing of this kind to Anstey. It is true that she fantasises acts of violence she would like to perform on him:

Katherine looked at him as if he were an insect she would relish treading on. [p. 19]

But she does not resent Anstey because he is an outsider. Her motive is simply that he exploits her, and treats her as a factotum [p. 25].

The contrast between Anstey and Robin--the Robin she remembers--is very emphatic. In the first place, whereas Anstey is an arriviste, even in the small pool of the library, Robin belongs quite naturally to the world he inhabits. That, at any rate, is how she remembers him. This is the second point of contrast between Anstey and Robin. Whereas Anstey is an excellent representative figure for the present--narrow, costive, inelegant and cold as it seems--Robin, by contrast, symbolises a past which was leisurely and gentle.

This contrast between past and present raises the question of what Katherine remembers. As a pen-friend, Robin was a figure of fun. But when they first meet, she is immediately intrigued and attracted to him. The background to this attraction is a combination of her own sense of dislocation on one side and her sense of the ease with which Robin belongs to his own society on the other, the

effortlessness with which, like Warner in Jill, he fits into his environment. This combination--her dislocation, his ease--is explicit:

Thinking how lonely she was, she suddenly found herself near crying: she looked unbelievably at Robin. It was impossible to imagine what he was thinking: he seemed perfectly adjusted to all his surroundings--including her--and able to withdraw his real personality elsewhere. [p. 77]

Katherine finds herself engaged in a kind of quest for this personality. At times she finds Robin infuriatingly well-adjusted: "in some respects," she jokes, "he resembled the perfect butler" [p. 101]. But the reverse side of the coin is his self-control, his apparent suppression of common human hungers. This intrigues and attracts her, yet puzzles and even irritates her:

Oh, but he was hopelessly muddled in her mind, for as he gave a bound up the steps towards her, ... she herself felt like a servant. [p. 101]

But in retrospect, the adolescent Katherine identifies Robin with England:

he was so very English--how English she never realised till she met more English people. [p. 180]

Her compulsion for Robin expresses two desires: to fall in love with someone at home in an environment strange to her, and to fall in love with that environment, and be accepted by it in return.

In other words, it is natural in alien surroundings, as John discovers in Jill, to fall in love, a principle that

Katherine herself explains to Jane later in the novel. This attitude provokes Katherine's reaction when she senses that Robin has rejected her: "she hated England and everybody in it" [p. 142]. Her resentment is displaced from Robin to what he represents, but in practice the two are never easy to separate, even several years later:

she knew what he meant to her. He 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. [p. 216]

Her present situation is certainly very different. Robin represents the chance to escape from a frustrating reality which offers, as things stand, little more than loneliness.

The day described by the novel is dominated by thoughts of Robin and the letter she expects from him, which will show her how far his family is willing to accept her [p. 53]. Robin's letter symbolises his family's attitude to her, which in turn is synonymous with England's, for the Fennels are "nothing if not English" [p. 22]. In the immediate future, then, there is the prospect of release from loneliness. Later there will be the prospect of being accepted in her new environment by people who belong in it and in some sense represent it. In the longer term, there may well be a kind of official acceptance too, for Katherine hopes that love will come equipped with a residence permit: if Robin will not have her, then she hopes to meet

at least some male friend of the family who would eventually hold out to her love, security, happiness and a British passport. [p. 212]

The order of priorities here suggests that amor omnia vincit. But the last item on this list confirms that among Robin's chief attractions--if only metaphorically--is his Britishness because the passport gives her the chance to naturalise herself. But clearly her chief motives are psychological rather than bureaucratic.

The reason for this is that Katherine, like John, has high expectations of love. She too believes, at least until the closing pages of A Girl in Winter, that love provides a release from present reality. As an adolescent she has been convinced that love changes lives. When Jane, Robin's sister, complains that her life is futile, Katherine suggests that she marries. Jane is not in a position to marry because she knows nobody suitable. So she asks Katherine (rhetorically, certainly) whom she is to marry, and Katherine replies not with a name, but with a type:

"Oh, a foreigner," said Katherine, stretching her legs.
"To take you away. Someone opposite to you."

In short, love is the opposite of reality. It is a kind of foreign country: one can almost live there. Jane wonders if Katherine is serious. "Of course I am," she replies. [p. 154-155] It seems unlikely that Jane will follow Katherine's advice, but then she meets her foreigner, or "foreigner," Jack Stormalong, who is stationed in India, and accordingly plays for "the world" in the back-garden tennis match. He takes Jane to India, where she becomes pregnant, returning to England to be delivered (with a joyless

symbolism) of a stillborn child. It is difficult not to see in this outcome the author's own commentary on Katherine's high hopes of love's transforming qualities. The question the closing pages of the novel answer is how far Katherine still believes that love, or Robin, can end her isolation and alienation: how far, that is, this particular foreigner can "take her away."

But despite the stillborn child, it is fair to say that Larkin's own instincts in the matter of love are not very different from Katherine's at this early stage in his writing. He too believes that in love at least, opposites (or foreigners) attract. "Success Story" suggests that

To be ambitious is to fall in love
With a particular life you haven't got [CP, 88]

Or to put it another way, as "Success Story" does, "love picks your opposite." The idea that love is an escape route best attempted with an "opposite" haunts Larkin's poetry. It is right to add that the mature poet has severe doubts about how effective an escape love can provide in hard reality. This question, which begins to form in Katherine's mind as the novel progresses, but which never occurs to John, signals the point where A Girl in Winter and Jill part company.

v. John: the gap between reality and fantasy.

This chapter has aimed to establish the incentives John and Katherine have, or feel they have, to escape the

situations they are in. For John the need arises because it is clear, after overhearing the exchange of insults, that he cannot belong where he is. Katherine is also fated to a foreign status at work and then loneliness at home, so that in the end she decides to resign her job [p. 210]. She makes this decision after she hears from Anstey that Robin has decided not to come--the timing is eloquent of the store she sets by his visit and the hopes she has of it: one way or the other, she means to escape. When he finally arrives, the prospect of release briefly reappears. John, by contrast, discovers his own escape-rout largely by chance.

On the question of what purpose is served by John's fantasy of Jill, the imagined sister, critics have disagreed. Bayley feels the fantasy is self-protective and defensive: "For comfort and protection against the dauntingly upper-class life around him," he argues, John "invents a fantasy-girl called Jill." [6] In this analysis, John's impulse is basically social: feeling inferior in this middle-class (or "upper-class") world, and excluded from it, he tries to join it by association. So John's invention has less to do with escaping from the real than with adjusting to it.

Both John Gindin and Alan Brownjohn take the argument one stage further, however, developing the social argument that centres on class into an analysis of isolation and creativity. But they differ on the question of cause and effect. Brownjohn argues that the novel examines

the connection between desperate loneliness and the

impulse to create. [7]

In other words, when John realises that he has no friends in the world apart from Whitbread, he creates an otherworld which releases him from reality. Gindin sees the argument from the other side, describing the invention of Jill as a

retreat into an impossible fantasy that intensifies his loneliness [8]

In this view, present reality substantially deteriorates only after John begins to seek release from it. This argument seems more difficult to substantiate. John's invention and pursuit of Jill / Gillian seem to come as the direct result of the privations and unhappiness of his life in Oxford. This can be seen by looking at the three stages of the fantasy.

The first stage is John's invention of Jill. This consists of a very rudimentary description of her to Christopher combined with some details about their relationship, a letter from Jill to himself, which he hopes Christopher will find and read, and a letter from himself to Jill which is little more than a favourable re-writing of some Oxford incidents that have gone against him.

The purpose of this stage of the fantasy is to glamorize his social status in Christopher's eyes by persuading him that his parents are wealthy enough to educate Jill privately, and that his family (far from being proletarian backwoodsmen) are familiar with London, its theatres and tourist sites. The purpose of the first stage

is less to escape from present reality than to change it. This is the stage to which Bayley's analysis chiefly refers: the attempt to adjust reality.

In this attempt, the fantasy is unsuccessful, because Christopher is not captivated. The narrative says that these fictions have "thrown a temporary net around even Christopher," but it has already conceded that Christopher "seemed to be following a private train of thought," and accepts soon afterwards that he converses "uninterestedly" [pp. 119, 118, 120]. This is not surprising because Christopher, after all, was educated privately himself and seems to live in London. So he knows that neither of these things is particularly exotic.

John's release at this stage, then, is limited in the extreme. The existence of a sister in the first place is not a fantasy, after all. Her existence in the real world is only too evident from the avalanche of letters with which she badgers him. Besides, basing his fantasy on his own relationship with Jill prevents John making the escape for which he hungers, which is from himself and his situation. This introduces the fantasy's second stage--to which Brownjohn's remarks refer--because by the end of the long letter in which he re-writes the events of the term, the nature and purpose of the fantasy have fundamentally altered.

In the second stage, John stops trying to amend reality, and tries instead to escape it. From pages 136 to 149, John himself is not mentioned, and the narrative

focuses entirely on Jill. This change is underwritten by the reflection that "all this had to be kept from Christopher"--it was for Christopher, of course, that the original fantasy was devised. [p. 133] By now, though, Christopher and John have disappeared:

Suddenly it was she who was important, she who was interesting, she whom he longed to write about; beside her, he and his life seemed dusty and tedious. [p. 135]

In the sixteen pages that follow, John does escape from himself and the frustrations of his life. By writing and re-writing Jill's name and address, practising her handwriting, visualising her face and describing the minutiae of her day, John begins to become "different from" himself. [9] Physically she is clearly an idealised figure [p. 135], and spiritually she is far from commonplace: "She was a hallucination of innocence"--a description of Jill given at least twice more in the course of the novel. But in writing himself out of the story, John briefly succeeds in escaping from himself and Oxford--a combination that has proved so trying.

But with the appearance of Gillian, John's fantasy has reached its third stage. As fantasy begins to be seriously menaced by reality--represented by the appearance of a real Jill--John's fantasies become, if anything, still less accountable to the truth: in the third stage, Jill's wilful manner has disappeared, and she has become passive, submissive and dependent. John imagines himself throwing a party for her to which "Everyone came":

Christopher hung his pork-pie hat on a stag's antler, cracking jokes; John punched Eddy in the ribs and raced him through the first pint; danced with Elizabeth and felt her breasts pushed against him And the dancers became fewer, one by one they dropped out, till in the end only Jill stood where she had stood all evening, dressed in white [p. 189]

In short, John's original hopes of adjusting reality--to which Bayley refers--have been overtaken by his intention of overturning it wholesale. To this end, John is by now active and commanding while everyone else is passive: a straightforward inversion of the truth.

It is more accurate to say, however, that John's intention is less to overturn reality than to escape it. His "theoretical lust" for Elizabeth--and indeed his interest in Mrs Warner--seem to offer him the chance to exchange a lonely life for one in which he belongs. But when this hope is demolished, he aims to use Gillian to escape from his life in Oxford altogether:

He must push her back into her own life, where he himself could follow. Never must she be allowed to go outside her own life. And then through her he might enter this life, this other innocent life she led. [p. 170]

John has not actually spoken to her at this stage, and does not know whether she is innocent. When he does, he will find that what he hopes for is impossible because she already knows Christopher. But John's instinct is that love is a kind of fantasy, an anti-reality, a chance to escape from the life he leads now. To fall in love is to abandon one life, and start another. But the dilemma facing him--

though he does not yet know it--is whether the gap between fantasy and reality can be bridged. The gap is now very wide. This problem arises because having fantasised his various versions (or inversions) of the truth, he sets out to meet Gillian to invite her to his rooms. Fantasy and reality are about to meet head-on.

John trusts that his fantasy world can be realised. He has no idea how he will achieve this, but when the secret escapes that he admires Gillian, he resolves to tell her the story of his fantasy of her (or "her"). That is, he aims to cross the gap between fantasy and reality. Again he makes this decision without questioning what purpose is served. Realistically, it may well look sinister, even menacing, but John is not very concerned with reality. Instead he trusts to luck, so robust is his optimism, his own "innocence."

John's invitation to Gillian to visit him receives a variety of reactions. Among Christopher's friends, it is treated as a joke meant to irritate Elizabeth, who is looking after Gillian during her stay in Oxford [p. 202]. Elizabeth treats the invitation as a threat to her authority, which she reasserts [p. 201]. Christopher's reaction falls somewhere between the two:

"I mean, it would have been a damned good joke. Eddy wanted to try it himself. As long as you weren't serious--" [p. 210]

"Lord, no," John tells him. "No, it was only a passing thought," and this puts Christopher's doubts at rest.

Gillian's reaction is to turn the invitation down flat [p. 225]. But in general, John's invitation to Gillian commands a variety of reactions. Nobody but John, however, regards the invitation as realistic.

Elizabeth upholds the gap between fantasy and reality, briefly representing the reality principle. It falls to her to explain to John that any designs he has on Gillian are unrealistic: it was Gillian herself who spurned the invitation (or so Elizabeth says), and besides she is only fifteen anyway. [p. 225] Then on the last night of term, Christopher volunteers to police the border between fantasy and reality by punching John for his impertinence in stealing a kiss from Gillian. So violence can be added to the variety of reactions John's fantasies has excited.

John remains unclear to the last how unrealistic his fantasy is. He pursues Gillian to the party because he sees himself not as something of a nuisance but as a gallant knight, a maiden's saviour:

Somewhere in that vast ramble of buildings was Jill, unattended, most likely bored, waiting to be rescued and taken away. [p. 233]

Even after he has been hospitalised, John still dreams of lying with Jill in his arms. To say that the fantasy is persistent is to emphasise how isolated he is from others, given their unanimous reaction to the whole affair, but above all how unresponsive John remains to the real.

John's last fantasy serves as a concise summary of the story as a whole. John dreams of himself lying with Jill in

a cottage near the sea.

He got up and crossed to the window with his hands in his pockets, staring moodily up the garden that was hung with trees. And there he saw Christopher ... poking about the bushes for something. An unreasoning terror seized him: he knew that Christopher must not see Jill or he would come in and take her away. [p. 241]

Jill / Gillian remains a figure of fantasy, such that the real girl is not distinguished here from the invented. In John's mind, the room represents, not reality--as it does for the author of the poems--but fantasy, containing the girl, the fantasy trophy. Outside the window and beyond the glass lurks Christopher, personification of the reality principle and representative of the way of life to which the individual must adjust. It is, of course, when John is rejected by Christopher that his fantasies begin. Significantly, fantasy fears reality, because reality triumphs in the end.

This distinction between fantasy and reality underwrites the contrast drawn between John and Christopher at the end of the novel. While John lies isolated and ill, about to be reclaimed by his parents, Christopher has wrung from Elizabeth the promise to become his mistress [p. 247]. So while Christopher marches off into the future, John waits to be reclaimed by the past. Moreover, while Christopher heads for the spontaneity and freedom of London, John is marooned in a room where the final fantasies emerge. If the author's intention is to equate the room with fantasy and the outside world with reality, then this is a further

expression of the distance he feels from his central character. More likely, however, Larkin simply aims to equate fantasy with childhood and reality with maturity. Thus John, the fantasist, waits for his parents, while Christopher, the realist, and representative of the reality principle, marches off with Elizabeth to enjoy one of the compensations of adult life.

At all events, it is clearly the author's intention to contrast reality with fantasy through his most familiar technique, the contrast between two lives. In doing so, he advances the view that fantasy fits ill with reality, but that in any case reality cannot be evaded: it wins in the end. Looking back to Jill over a period of thirty-five years, Larkin tells Paris Review:

I seem to recall that Jill was based on the idea that running away from life, John's fantasy about an imaginary sister, might lead you straight into it--meeting the real Jill, I mean. With disastrous results. [10]

This is the theme of many poems. One thinks of "Breadfruit." John's fate might be compared to the fate of the "boys" in that poem. They too dream of fantasy women:

Boys dream of native girls who bring breadfruit,
Whatever they are,
As brides to teach them how to execute
Sixteen sexual positions on the sand. [CP, 141]

The boys meet the same fate as John: they too learn that fantasy leads straight to reality, and that reality cannot be evaded. Here the poet describes fantasies of women as "uncorrected visions": once again he distances himself from

those who "dream" of love. "Elsewhere" exists, but only in the imagination. To attempt to live there is to court the kind of disillusion John faces when, in the closing pages of the novel, his parents head for his bed-side.

vi. Katherine: the inevitability of "Here."

Katherine, like John, also feels she has every motive to escape from present reality. Moreover, in her memories of the pre-war summer with the Fennels, she has the temptation, and in her forthcoming meeting with Robin, it seems she will have the means. Again, then, the possibility of love seduces her into believing that she can exchange the winter of the present for the warm rains of the pre-war summer: she wants to believe this because although in certain respects, the past was much like the present--in England again, "a stranger and afraid"--the atmosphere is close to the opposite. Katherine clutches her memories of Robin and his family, and hopes they offer the prospect of escape.

One way of examining this contrast between past and present, and so observing the appeal of the past for Katherine, is by comparing the paragraphs that introduce the present in A Girl in Winter with the past that haunts her throughout the single day the novel describes. Present reality for Katherine, as for John, is a barren time:

There had been no more snow during the night, but because the frost continued . . . , people told each other there was more to come. And when it grew lighter, it

seemed that they were right, for there was no sun
[p. 11]

Terms like "frozen" and "cold" are not metonymic only. The contrast with the past could not be emphatic or, indeed, precise:

The morning when she came to England for the first time had been still and hot The sky was deep blue as if made richer by the endless recession of past summers: the sea smooth, and when a wave lifted the sun shone through it [p. 67]

In the past, the sun shone, but now "there was no sun." Furthermore, whereas sun shone endlessly, now it is the snow that seems set in for good. Finally, the freezing of water in the present into snow, ice and frost, compares with a past in which it leapt--sportively, almost--to catch the sun.

The second contrast between past and present is expressed in the metaphor of water. In his poem "Water," composed in the early 'fifties, Larkin imagines that a newly-invented religion could involve a fording of water to an island

Where any-angled light
Would congregate endlessly. [CP, 93]

This is the journey Katherine makes in her first visit to England. This England, over the water, is suffused with light, and like the island in "Water," it seems otherworldly. This is explicit. Katherine's suitcase

contained all her best clothes, freshly cleaned, washed or pressed, as if she were passing into another life

and were concerned that only her finest things should go with her. [p. 72]

It is not only that England is foreign nor, indeed, that Katherine is a foreigner, though clearly both these are factors; rather that England seemed once to be an otherworld, a fantasy island.

By now, though, familiarity has dulled the excitement, and England has become merely worldly in her eyes. Therefore, although she remains alien in England, England is no longer alien for her. Instead it has become another element of her mundane reality:

Truly she had done more than come to England; in these past eighteen months she had broken ground she had never dreamed existed, so that at first it had seemed an unreality. Now it had shrunken slightly into the truth. [p. 217]

The fantasy-land of pre-war England, an island of leaping water, rivers and warm summer rain, has stiffened into a rigid present tense of snow which shows no sign of thawing.

But for all its elusiveness, that memory of a fantasy-land exerts some pressure on Katherine because taken together with her belief that love can change lives, it promises freedom from the present through its representative figures, Robin in particular and the Fennels. "Where did the Fennels come in all this?" the narrative asks. One aspect of their appeal, as she admits, is simply that "she was lonely" [p. 185]. But more importantly,

It was the only period of her life that had not been spoiled by later events, and she found that she could draw upon it hearteningly, remembering when she had

been happy It was as if she hoped they would warm back to life a part of her that had been frozen [p. 185]

In short Katherine is tempted to try to exchange the present for something close to the past by giving herself to the man who best represents it. Like John she aims to bridge the divide between present reality and things otherworldly by falling in love with someone who, for her, belongs on the other side of the gap.

Robin's visit to Katherine, like Gillian's visit to John, seems to promise an end to loneliness and the beginning of a kind of fantasy life, characterised by extreme ambitions. Katherine hopes Robin will "warm back to life a part of her that had been frozen" [p. 185]. Her dependence on others to efface an individual sense of sterility recalls John's dependence on Gillian to dilute his own frustrations and loneliness. But, as has been mentioned, A Girl in Winter was composed in the year after Jill, and it might almost seem at the end of the novel that Katherine has been disillusioned by John's failure.

Even before Robin's visit, it is fair to say that Katherine doubts whether any other person can save her from her fate:

In the past she thought she had found happiness through the interplay of herself and other people Now this brought happiness no longer [And] since people seemed not to affect her, they could not help her [pp. 183-184]

When Katherine asks herself what role she sees for the Fennels in her life, her first response is that they will

end her loneliness. But in the closing pages of the novel, she begins to believe that others cannot be expected to do this. In the event, this is demonstrated by Robin's visit, and her reactions to it.

These reactions confront her at once. As soon as she sees him, she feels he is "a stranger to her" [p. 227]. This strangeness--though one might have expected it to appeal to her--is unattractive. But anyway, when she reflects on his visit she realises his presence

made no impression at all on her. What she had felt about him had long since worked itself out, and left nothing but blankness [p. 228]

What has survived of the pre-war summer, it seems, is something other than love. Katherine's indifference towards him now is a counterpoint not only to that summer but also to her invitation to Robin to visit her, and her hopes that he would come. Now that he has arrived, she finds her isolation from him is so pronounced as to be insurmountable: "his sudden appearance might have moved her," she reflects, but in the event "it failed to connect":

There were, she knew, things she should feel, things she should say; but whether through his fault or hers she had no command of them. [p. 230]

There is an icy atmosphere in her flat which the past cannot melt. Her disappointment in Robin's condition--he is wilder, less self-contained, more impulsive than he was--is certainly a factor in this. It shows her graphically how remote and unavailable her otherworld has become. But it is

not the whole cause of the formal detachment and cold politeness with which she speaks to him: "you're about as friendly as a blasted block of ice," Robin tells her, and it is not denied. Instead she tells herself "He could say what he liked" [pp. 238-239]. Her resolve to depend on herself to the exclusion of others has triumphed. Naturally it is aided by her disappointment in Robin. Even so, she "wanted nothing of him," as the narrator says--a state of self-containment even the adolescent Robin would have admired.

Her detachment is perhaps best expressed in the contrast between her own reaction to Robin on one side and, on the other, John's reaction to Gillian at the end of Jill. Whereas John is drunk, Katherine could hardly be more sober. Whereas he is passionate and wildly inventive (in going to Gillian's "rescue," for example), Katherine is self-controlled. And whereas John behaves as if his life depends on success, Katherine is perfectly at ease with failure. And as to whether Robin stays the night,

Truly she did not care one way or the other. [p. 243]

It is a final striking irony that Katherine, now so self-contained and at last resigned to isolation, should agree to share her bed with Robin whereas John, so passionate and devoted to Gillian (or Jill), should be marooned for days in a lonely bed in an infirmary that is otherwise deserted in a college that has been vacated for the holidays: a chinese box of loneliness.

Katherine's resolve to depend solely on herself is perhaps no more than the force of habit, the result of too long a period alone in a garret, in a town and country in which she is alien. It may also be the result of visiting Miss Parbury, who has resolved not to accept the invitation she has received to marry Anstey. Perhaps Katherine's new mood is simply a response to Robin's wildness. At all events, in deciding not to pursue a fantasy of the past with that past's representative, she assumes a self-containment which, like the poet's own, prides itself on realism and a "less deceived" asceticism.

The poet himself may periodically share his room with others--that is, he may occasionally dilute his isolation--but he rarely shares more than this. A case in point is "Talking in Bed," in which physical proximity does not betoken psychological intimacy, and words "unkind" may rise to the poet's lips to entrench the barrier between himself and his lover. Katherine, like the poet himself, agrees to share her bed, but by now, it appears, she too is resolved to share little else. In "Talking in Bed," the poet focuses his attention on the "horizon," a physical "Elsewhere," where "dark towns heap up." In the same way, at the end of A Girl in Winter, Katherine's thoughts turn to a vision of "a lightless channel of water" [p. 248]. The idea of "Elsewhere" differs from poet to character, but for both, "Elsewhere," is no longer merely a matter of love.

Nor, indeed, is it merely a matter of accessibility. The gap between fantasy and reality which John strives so

hard to cross in Jill has become unbridgeable by the time of A Girl in Winter. Katherine does not finally attempt to cross it--indeed, she positively recoils from doing so--and in this, as in much else, she anticipates the poet himself. Larkin explains in an interview undertaken some three decades after the publication of these two novels that he spent "about five years" trying to write a third, but was unable to complete it. [11] Not the least reason for this failure may be the fact that, for all their similarities, the poet finds in Katherine the answers to those questions--about isolation, fantasy and love--that he asks of John.

CHAPTER FIVE: LOVE AND DESIRE IN LARKIN'S POEMS.

i. The otherworldliness of love in the poems.

Larkin's poems in general are much possessed with love. Around forty of his mature works address this theme. Moreover, because the canon as a whole is underwritten by the tension between the real and the ideal, or between the self and the other, and because love is a resonant case of just this dilemma, Larkin's love poems may justly be seen as representative of his poetry as a whole and of the questions it explores. "It is love, more than anything else," Falck says of Larkin's poems, "which seems to concentrate our dreams of another and better life." [1] The significance of love in this context is well expressed by the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky in an analysis of his compatriot, Anna Akhmatova:

It is the finite's nostalgia for the infinite that accounts for the recurrence of the love theme in Akhmatova's verse, not the actual entanglements. [2]

To one who, like Larkin, is nostalgic for the infinite, yet still remains tempted to settle for the reassuring limits of the real, love presses an urgent--and indeed, a representative--dilemma.

Thus, love might be described as the primus inter pares of Larkin's various versions of "Elsewhere." Seen from the outside, love and lovers seem to belong to a different world. When the question arises in the poems, the descriptions love commands seem to place it, in one way or another, at a distance from reality. "High Windows," with its references to dreaming and paradise, is an example of this otherworldly atmosphere surrounding love:

When I see a couple of kids
And guess he's fucking her and she's
Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm,
I know this is paradise

Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives ...
And everyone going down the long slide

To happiness, endlessly. [CP, 165]

The essence of paradise, it seems, is the happiness it offers. Moreover, this happiness, being a property of "Elsewhere," is without limits and endless: an expression of the infinity which is characteristic of "Elsewhere." Happiness is also the promise extended by love in "Reasons for Attendance." Here the poet watches--again, from a distance--a group of dancers

Shifting intently, face to flushed face,
Solemnly on the beat of happiness. [CP, 80]

The poet's physical distance from love here, which is established, characteristically, by the pane of glass--he exists in the real world, they in some otherworld--is a topographical metaphor for his psychological distance from them and what they share. This is familiar territory. In

"Breadfruit," the topography is again emblematic, in that the theme of the opening lines of the poem is the "dream" of paradise love encourages:

Boys dream of native girls who bring breadfruit,
Whatever they are,
As brides to teach them how to execute
Sixteen sexual positions on the sand [CP, 141]

In poems like "Here," of course, the beach symbolises desire, the moment when hunger promises to be satisfied. But in "Breadfruit" there is also something of the atmosphere of the treasure island or tropical retreat--at any rate, some otherworld that serves as an objective correlative for the endless escapist happiness of love.

If poems like these suggest versions of paradise, poems like "Letter to a Friend about Girls" move the argument from the exotic to the erotic. But the erotic, too, belongs "Elsewhere." This poem contains a description of what the poet evidently sees as a real love-life (which is to say, an ideal love-life) spent with the kind of women

who beckon from that world
Described on Sundays only ...
A world where all the nonsense
is annulled [CP, 122]

In other words, a real love-life has little to do with things ordinary and everyday. It is this kind of erotic otherworld, one divorced from the real and mundane, that interests the poet in "Annus Mirabilis": after 1963, he imagines,

every life became
A brilliant breaking of the bank,
A quite unlosable game. [CP, 167]

Brilliance is also a feature of love in "Love Songs in Age."
There it is "that much-mentioned brilliance, love," and
again it has otherworldly connotations. Indeed, in placing
love above our heads, the poet returns to his typical
formula for "Elsewhere," described in the second chapter:

The glare of that much-mentioned brilliance, love,
Broke out, to show
Its bright incipience sailing above,
Still promising to solve, and satisfy,
And set unchangeably in order. [CP, 113]

Love promises "brilliance," and "happiness" comes
"endlessly," "unchangeably": the exotic and the erotic
coincide in a world in which there are no limits and no
losers. In short, love constitutes a different world from
the real--an analysis which, in "The Large Cool Store," the
poet confirms: the supermarket displays are a reminder of

How separate and unearthly love is,
Or women are, or what they do [CP, 135]

Love, then, as Falck observes, is the essence of the
otherworldly in Larkin's poems, apparently his most
available and enduring "Elsewhere." Moreover, this
impression of love's otherworldliness is reinforced in an
otherwise peculiar simile advanced in the short poem,
"Love"--a work in which the poet characteristically
distances himself from the subject under discussion:

The difficult part of love

Is being selfish enough ...
To upset an existence
Just for your own sake

And then the unselfish side--
How can you be satisfied,
Putting someone else first ... ?
My life is for me.
As well ignore gravity. [CP, 150]

In presenting this curious simile, the poet returns the reader to his conventional terms for love: it exists away from us and above our heads, somewhere among the sun and moon, the wind and the rain. To seek it is to "ignore gravity." Love is unearthly.

This impression of love's otherworldliness can be demonstrated intrinsically, then, merely by examining the deictics that accompany the poet's picture of the erotic: it belongs on beaches, for example, or "on Sundays only." Alternatively, given that the self is synonymous with reality in these poems, love's otherworldliness can be demonstrated simply by observing the distance the poet often puts between himself and love. This second method produces an equally graphic impression of love's otherworldliness.

In poems like "High Windows" and "Reasons for Attendance," lovers are watched from a distance. Moreover, because the poet himself is single and the lovers are observed in couples, the distance is again psychological as well as simply physical. In "High Windows," because of this distance, the poet has to venture a "guess" about the lovers, then attempt a comparison between himself and them. This comparison, because it is intended to close the

distance between the lovers and himself, seems if anything to underline the distance he feels. In "Reasons for Attendance," this typical distance between himself and the lovers is underlined by his rejection of sex and love. So, again, it is a psychological distance:

Surely, to think the lion's share
Of happiness is found by couples--sheer

Inaccuracy, as far as I'm concerned. [CP, 80]

And this view is of course symbolised by the pane of "lighted glass" that separates himself from them.

A further basis on which the poet is distinguished from lovers in these two poems is age. In "High Windows," the lovers are "a couple of kids," and in "Reasons for Attendance," the poet makes it clear that the dancers are "all under twenty-five." The same factor distinguishes the poet from the lovers in "Annus Mirabilis." In that poem, the rueful feeling that love became available "just too late for me" is stated and re-stated. In poems like "Sad Steps," of course, precisely the same argument is advanced: love is otherworldly because youth is "Elsewhere" for the poet.

The argument that love belongs "Elsewhere" from the poet and the life he leads underwrites "Letter to a Friend about Girls." There the poet is at pains to show how

Everything proves
we play in separate leagues. [CP, 122]

The idea of separation from love, then, is stressed in a wide variety of ways: because the poet is too old, because

he stands at a distance from lovers, because he is divided from them by a pane of glass, because he is unlucky, because he meets the wrong kind of women, and so on. Ultimately, though, everything goes to show that, for the poet at least, love is, indeed, both "separate" and "unearthly."

But the poet's attitude to the otherworldliness of love is not always as resigned as might appear from this analysis. Admittedly, in poems like "Love Songs in Age" and "Breadfruit," in which he appears only as a narrator, describing a case and delivering an argument, his attitude to the otherworldliness of love is one of resignation. He adopts an omniscient tone of voice, to demonstrate that those who dream of naturalising love "Here" will only be disappointed in the end. In poems like "High Windows" and "Reasons for Attendance," however, though the poet adopts a similar tone of omniscience, it cannot quite disguise an atmosphere of longing, even jealousy. It is almost as if he wishes he too could believe in love and the possibility of making it work "Here." And though such dreams are elusive, some suggestion of the poet's ambivalence is expressed in the closing line of "Reasons for Attendance," which questions whether, in painstakingly separating himself from love, he may not have "misjudged himself. Or lied" [CP, 80]. Finally, in poems like "Letter to a Friend" and "Annus Mirabilis," the poet is more willing to concede his envy for those lucky enough to take part in the "unlosable game." These suggestions of jealousy and longing once again raise the question of whether "Elsewhere" is available.

But before examining the question of whether love's apparent inaccessibility can be overcome, or even compromised, it is worth making a brief comparison between Larkin's stance and that of a number of his literary forebears, if only to establish a context for his treatment of the theme. Only rarely in Larkin's poems is there anything to match Marvell's enthusiasm for love, his determination to break down barriers and bring love "Here":

Had we but World enough and Time,
This coyneſſe Lady were no crime [3]

The "coyneſſe" in Larkin's work, by contrast, is mainly with the poet, not with the woman propositioned. Neither is there anything of Auden's determination, once barriers have at last been broken down, to reinforce physical proximity with psychological intimacy:

Lay your ſleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithleſſe arm [4]

Poems of this kind, post-coital and confidential, in which the outside world is shut out, are alien to Larkin's instincts as a poet. The outside world, even when doors are locked and curtains closed, can never be forgotten, so this spirit of complete intimacy can never be roused. The point is fortuitously clinched by Donne. The lover whose voice is dramatised in "The Good-Morrow" sets his face determinedly against otherworlds and elsewhere--and with good reason, as it transpires:

And now good morrow to our waking soules,
Which watch not one another out of feare;
For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little roome, an every where. [5]

There is, as the introduction showed, plenty of watching in Larkin's poems. In the context of the metaphor outlined in the second chapter, it is symbolised by the window. But along with desire, part of the poet's motive in watching so intently is certainly "feare." Moreover, though there is, of course, many a "little roome" in Larkin's work, such rooms are rarely shared. Besides, the room is "Here" only: notions of "every where," indivisible and all-embracing, simply do not arise. Indeed, the divisions on which Larkin's poems thrive are most emphatic, it seems, on the theme of love. The second section analyses how far such divisions are negotiable.

ii. The unsatisfactory nature of satisfaction.

The dismissive tone adopted in poems like "High Windows" and "Reasons for Attendance," in which the poet distances himself from those who seek "paradise" through love, suggests that, so far from believing love to be an "unlosable game," he feels that in practice it is probably unwinnable. The couples under discussion in these poems are generalised cases of love, whom the poet does not pause to identify or describe in any detail. But the impression that love is an unwinnable game is reinforced by those poems in which a particular case of love is described in detail. Poems of this type include "Love Songs in Age," which

concentrates attention on a widow, "Self's the Man," which presents a case-study of Arnold, "Breadfruit," in which a generation of young men is observed from adolescence to old age, and "Deceptions," in which a rape is described, together with its aftermath.

All the characters described in these poems set out to discover the satisfactions and rewards of love, whether physical or psychological, and in one sense it is fair to say that all achieve their goals: Arnold, the widow and the "boys" of "Breadfruit" all succeed in finding themselves married, and, of course, the rapist in "Deceptions" achieves his own kind of "fulfilment" in his own way [CP, 32]. Yet despite the trappings of satisfaction--marriage, love, co-habitation, sex, fulfilment--all are ultimately disillusioned, compromised, even humiliated, by the real effects of love.

That is to say, each has decided to "follow the printed directions of sex" and love to the letter [CP, 42]--yet each has been disappointed by the reality. The rapist has followed these directions to the exclusion of any emotional understanding, of course, and his fate at the moment of fulfilment is to find himself

stumbling up the breathless stair
To burst into fulfilment's desolate attic. [CP, 32]

No doubt he deserves his desolation. But the poet is not making any kind of moral point here. This can be seen by comparing the fate of the rapist with the fate of the widow.

She could hardly be more blameless, it seems, but her fate is similarly unwelcome. As the rapist is abruptly confronted with desolation, against his expectations, the widow's fate is to end in tears: she hopes that love will ease the burdens of present reality, but

It had not done so then, and could not now. [CP, 113]

The "boys" in "Breadfruit" must similarly face the disillusion which, in Larkin's view, succeeds to hope. Their dreams of exotic and otherworldly rewards simply

end in church . . . :
A mortgaged semi- with a silver birch;
Nippers, the widowed mum [CP, 141]

It is rather an anti-climax, to say the least. The emotional fate of Arnold in "Self's the Man" can only be guessed at, but he too has followed "the printed directions" of love (if not specifically sex), and he too seems to have been punished for his temerity:

He married a woman to stop her getting away
Now she's there all day,

And the money he gets for wasting his life on work
She takes as her perk
To pay for the kiddies' clobber and the drier
And the electric fire [CP, 117]

In each of these cases, then, high hopes were invested in love, in the expectation (perhaps) that it was an unlosable game. And initially these high hopes appear to have been satisfied. But satisfaction in Larkin's poems is often much less than satisfying, and unlosable games have a habit of

ending in loss.

The general theme of these poems is the view that when, in this fallen world, an individual sets out to achieve a particular goal, (s)he may well succeed in the superficial sense--but the results will prove unsatisfactory, "falling short" of what was hoped [CP, 174]. The conclusion to be drawn is that much human striving and effort is futile, even counterproductive, and that it is often more sensible to settle for second best. The particular theme of these poems is that when one strives to amend present reality through love, or to escape it altogether, the result will most likely be a reality still more burdensome, oppressive and imprisoning than ever.

Arnold and the widow had the former objective, it seems: the desire to alter reality. Arnold was "out for his own ends" in marrying his wife, and "did it for his own sake." Much he regrets it now, no doubt. The widow harboured very specific hopes of love: namely, that it would

solve, and satisfy,
And set unchangeably in order. [CP, 113]

In other words, present reality would be different in degree (if not in kind) when illuminated by love. The widow's tears constitute a response to that hope. Both the rapist and the "boys" in "Breadfruit" aim to change reality in kind: that is, to exchange one reality for quite another. They seek release from the here-and-now. This is why the boys dream of native women, beaches and exotic fruits. But such hopes of release are particularly unlikely to succeed.

The rapist ends in a "desolate" frame of mind, while the boys have only death to look forward to.

This sense of imprisonment in a reality which cannot be changed for the better no matter what steps one takes is symbolised in each of these poems by a purely physical sense of incarceration. The widow remains inside, it seems, obliged to look up and out from her present imprisonment to the distant place where love still extends its promises; the boys in "Breadfruit" remain trapped in the prison love has brought them:

A mortgaged semi- with a silver birch; [CP, 141]

the domination of Arnold's life by his wife is symbolised by her domination of their house, and underlined by the slavish role he must play there; and the rapist's fate in finding himself marooned in the "desolate attic" need hardly be elaborated.

As a general rule, then, hope leads to satisfaction, satisfaction to disappointment, and disappointment to a sense of imprisonment in the present. And this, by an unhappy irony, is where hope begins. Meanwhile, "Elsewhere" stays elsewhere. Of course, the thinking behind these poems merely underlines the series of relatively early poems, composed before the publication of The Less Deceived in 1955, in which the desire to alter present reality is condemned as unrealistic. Such poems include "Next, Please" and "Dry-Point." These were discussed in the third section of the first chapter. Their pre-eminent theme is conveyed

from the psychological angle in "Continuing to Live," in which the poet describes the individual life as subject to severe limits:

Anything else must not, for you, be thought
To exist, [CP, 94]

and from the philosophical angle in "Wires," in which the poet counsels against the hunger for

Not here but anywhere. [CP, 48]

"Anything else" and "anywhere" else: these two places or states of mind--early versions of "Elsewhere," of course--are out of bounds in the poet's view, because to seek them is simply to court the "muscle-shredding violence" of disillusion (as "Wires" has it) when the attempt to find release from the prison of the self collapses in failure. This disillusioning diagnosis the widow, the rapist and the rest have had to learn. When they learn it, they respond with tears to mark the gap between incarceration and release, the world as it is and the world as it might have been. This is why the poet distances himself from lovers of the kind he glimpses in "High Windows" and "Reasons for Attendance":

to think the lion's share
Of happiness is found by couples--sheer

Inaccuracy, as far as I'm concerned. [CP, 80]

This is what the rapist, the widow and the rest have had to learn.

It would be an understatement to say that the poet has many reservations about love. In poems about particular individuals as in poems about general principles, he advances a largely hostile analysis, one which underwrites the personal conclusion reached in "Love" that "My life is for me" [CP, 150]. Love, in short, will be denied a place there, and the self will keep its distance from it. At the same time, however, love is among the most prominent themes of the poems in general: no matter how hard the character of the poet may strive to keep it from his life, then, the author is apparently perfectly willing to bring love into the centre of his art.

Because of this ambiguity, the reader may demand to know why so few of the poems appear to address the subject of love from the angle of the first-person rather than the third. On the face of it, the analysis made by Brodsky of Akhmatova, that "the actual entanglements" are of less significance than love's infinite promise, might justly be made of Larkin. The reader may feel, to put it baldly, that love's evidently "separate" status from the poet's own finite existence does not well qualify him to discuss the subject in this detail.

However, this view would be inaccurate. In practice there is a large number of poems, largely composed in the relatively early years of Larkin's career, in which the subject is examined from the angle of the first-person singular. Given the detachment with which the poet observes the young lovers in poems like "High Windows" and "Reasons

for Attendance" and with which he delivers his many reservations about their activities, there is something almost incongruous in a poem as gentle and intimate as "Latest Face":

Latest face, so effortless
Your great arrival at my eyes,
No one standing near could guess
Your beauty had no home till then;
Precious vagrant, recognise
My look, and do not turn again. [CP, 53]

The tone of voice is almost vulnerable--a striking contrast with the remote and dismissive omniscience of the later works. And despite the poet's doubts about his own actions in "Waiting for breakfast," there are similarly intimate moments in that poem:

Turning, I kissed her,
Easily for sheer joy
tipping the balance to love. [CP, 20]

Though the moment of "sheer joy" is isolated, even in the context of this poem, the spontaneous gesture described here is itself evidence that the poet is not so alien to the realities of love as he later seems. There is further evidence of personal experience in other relatively early poems like "The Spirit Wooed," in which the poet recalls how

Once I believed in you,
And then you came,
Unquestionably new, as fame
Had said you were. [CP, 46]

The poet ("the poet") is not perhaps the speaker in a further relatively early piece like "To My Wife." But this

poem brings the various romances, real or imagined, to their logical conclusion in the speaker's acknowledgement here that

for your face I have exchanged all faces--[CP, 54]

a permanent arrangement of a kind to give even Arnold pause for thought. But the clear impression left on the reader of the poems composed in the late 'forties and early 'fifties is that in the matter of love, the poet knows whereof he speaks--and that, furthermore, he likes whereof he knows.

In an interview published some three decades later, however, Larkin recalls that around the time these poems were composed, his "personal life was rather harassing." [6] If one were to take a purely autobiographical view of the poems composed in the late 'forties and early 'fifties, one might argue on the strength of works like "No Road," "Since the majority of me" and "He Hears that his Beloved has become Engaged" that this harassment was merely a personal matter, the result of his own bad luck or bad judgement in failing to find and keep a lover.

But in "Latest Face" and "To My Wife" in particular, there are the seeds of a more detached analysis. Hopes in these poems have been satisfied: it seems that courtship has succeeded in "Latest Face," that "sheer joy" has been experienced in "Waiting for breakfast," that the lover has come ("unquestionably new") in "The Spirit Wooed," and that marriage beckons in "To My Wife." Yet in many of these cases, and in others besides, the speakers remain

disappointed with their lot. In "Latest Face," admittedly, disappointment belongs to the future--but disappointment is still what the speaker expects, despite his gentle tone now:

to move
Into real untidy air
Brings no lasting attribute--
Bargains, suffering, and love,
Not this always-planned salute. [CP, 53]

"Suffering" does certainly seem to be what the future holds, in the young poet's view. In "Waiting for breakfast," the moment of "sheer joy" is merely, as it turns out, a prelude to further doubts. Such doubts reach their apogee in "To My Wife." Here, the speaker declares to his lover:

Now you become my boredom and my failure,
Another way of suffering [CP, 54]

It is familiar ground. The enticing new realities of courtship and marriage have begun to subside into the flat "boredom" of a kind experienced by such as the boys in "Breadfruit" and Arnold in "Self's the Man": a new "way of suffering," superficially a release from the old realities, but fundamentally a life unchanged, a move which brings "no lasting attribute." In "Who called love conquering?" the poet asks:

Who called love conquering,
When its sweet flower
So easily dries among the sour
Lanes of the living? [CP, 45]

This is the experience of the boys, Arnold and the widow. Even the rapist finds desire turning fast to despair. For

all these characters, things "sweet" by reputation turn "sour" in the event, which is the moment when they move from "Elsewhere" to the "Lanes of the living." The experience the poet ascribes to characters like these is perhaps more intimate, more personal, than it first seems: the failure of "satisfaction" to satisfy.

None of this would matter, perhaps, were it not for the underlying theme and impulse of the poems: the desire to find release from the burden of the self, to sample the beauty of somewhere you're not. Woman and love seem to suggest that release is possible because woman is different and new--"unquestionably new" [CP, 46]--and because love "Picks your opposite" [CP, 88] and promises to overcome the "Entire alternative in man and woman" [CP, 36]: in short, it seems that borders can be crossed, and new lives lived. Versions of "Elsewhere" can come within reach. Through woman, release from the self can be achieved, and freedom from "Here" can be won through love. But in the event, love and fulfilment supply little more than "boredom" and "failure." Reality is not so easy to escape, and "Elsewhere" is less accessible than it seemed.

At the heart of this dilemma is the nature of satisfaction itself. It is primarily satisfaction that refuses to allow release from the self. On the contrary, satisfaction entrenches the individual in the self, overwhelming him either with complacency or claustrophobia. It is the latter--the sense of being unavoidably trapped--that the rapist experiences in "fulfilment's attic,"

burdened as he is now with his own "boredom" and "failure." Furthermore, in sating the appetites of the individual, satisfaction eases one's hunger for things outside or beyond oneself. For this reason, the satisfied individual is the one least likely to feel desire. Satisfaction removes desire for things other, and undermines the need to look elsewhere.

Perhaps this is to overstate the disappointments of satisfaction. But for a poet like Larkin, in whom appetite, curiosity, hunger, guessing, desire and the simple, centrifugal act of looking are fundamental, satisfaction is self-defeating. This is particularly true in the matter of love. For the mind preoccupied with the other, love's promises of oppositeness, variety, difference, novelty and, above all, release, have obvious attractions. But to be satisfied in love is to remove the grounds for difference, and to undermine the need to look elsewhere. The opening lines of "To My Wife" clarify this paradox:

Choice of you shuts up that peacock-fan
The future was, in which temptingly spread
All that elaborative nature can, [CP, 54]

the speaker tells his lover: "Elsewhere," in short, becomes nowhere, a victim of the speaker's satisfied desires.

Perhaps this paradox is best demonstrated by reference to one of the earliest works of Larkin's maturity. In the "Two Guitar Pieces," composed in 1946, the poet gives early evidence of his burgeoning interest in the themes of "Here" and "Elsewhere" with which this thesis has been concerned.

The first of the pieces composes a picture of blues singers on a Southern-States plantation, a still-life vignette of a way of life in which any hint of hunger for things other and different is alien. This is expressed in the closing lines:

Though the tracks
Burn to steel cities, they are taking
No one from these parts. Anyone could tell
Not even the wagon aims to go anywhere. [CP, 8]

It is a picture, in short, of that cast of mind to which the poet himself aspires in the poems composed before the publication of The Less Deceived.

The second of the "Two Guitar Pieces" comes closer to home. It is set in a room in which familiar deictics are in place:

I roll a cigarette, and light
A spill at the stove. With a lungful of smoke
I join you at the window that has no curtain;
There we lean on the frame
 And we stare at the dusk,
Sharing the cigarette. [CP, 8]

The poem is addressed to a woman, it seems. It is not clear that the woman is the poet's lover, though the intimate act of sharing a cigarette does at least suggest familiarity. These two are accompanied in the room by a third character, a guitar-player, and his performance, which is described most effusively as "Nothing but harmony," constitutes a further intrusion into the poet's territory by two phenomena--woman and music--whose place in the later poems is emphatically otherworldly and "Elsewhere."

Yet despite the intimacy and "harmony," and although

the music seems to rise to something of a climax, the poet himself remains unsatisfied and discontented: so the poem ends with the music rejected as being "unable to bring rain." It satisfies, but, like much that satisfies in these poems, it disappoints. Moreover, this combination of simultaneous satisfaction and hunger is experienced by the poet himself: he feels, he declares,

Empty again, like hunger after a meal. [CP, 9]

This is the paradox of satisfaction in Larkin's poems, experienced in particular by those who are satisfied in their desires for sex, marriage and love. They seek "Elsewhere," and find a version of it, but it disappoints--and in the process, disappears from sight. They are fed but remain hungry.

The second of the "Two Guitar Pieces" dramatises the poet in the act of searching for the source of his own hunger: the music "builds within this room a second room," he comments, and yet

the accustomed harnessing of grief
Tightens, because together or alone
We cannot trace that room [CP, 9]

In the search for an "Elsewhere" that releases--rather than one that entrenches--the poet's impulse here is (as it were) centripetal and implosive, in that he searches for the real "Elsewhere"--the kind that releases--within the confines of the room.

It is worth comparing the centripetal impulse here with

the actions of the widow in "Love Songs in Age," a poem written some eleven years later. Her instinct is to take the opposite course. When she searches for the real "Elsewhere," she searches not inwards but upwards and outwards to the place where the "glare of ... love / Broke out ..." [CP, 113]. Real love (which is to say, ideal love) is symbolised, it seems, by the moon: or so the reference to "incipience" implies. Love exists not here, of course, but elsewhere.

"Love Songs in Age" comes a great deal closer than the second of the "Two Guitar Pieces" to Larkin's definitive picture of love in particular and "Elsewhere" in general. In placing ideal love above our heads, away from the self, and separated from the real by the pane of glass, "Love Songs in Age" paints a representative picture of the otherworldliness of things otherworldly of a type to which later works like "High Windows" return. In particular, though, "Love Songs in Age" offers two types of "Elsewhere": the social kind, which can satisfy, but not release, and the transcendent kind, which can release but not satisfy. In this respect, too, the comparison with "High Windows" is instructive.

The social type of love, which is the type the "couple of kids" in "High Windows" will experience, cannot satisfy, it seems: this is why, in that late work, the poet turns his back on the young couple, and gazes upwards and outwards in familiar fashion. The social type of love is also the type experienced by the widow, the rapist, Arnold, the "boys" in

"Breadfruit," the dancers in "Reasons for Attendance," and a wide variety of other characters described in these poems, including the poet himself. All are disappointed by it.

By contrast, the transcendent type of love remains "out of reach." Yet it captures within its magnetic field those who hunger for the "paradise" of real freedom, which is chiefly freedom from the self, described in "High Windows." In the end, the transcendent type of love may well be guilty of casting shadows over the experience of characters like the widow. Equally, though, by being distant, and remaining out of reach, the transcendent "Elsewhere" seems still more desirable. Moreover, bitter experience suggests that it is only the transcendent type that permits the kind of release by which these poems set such store. At all events, contact with the social "Elsewhere," necessarily "falling short" and failing to release--indeed, succeeding only in entrenching--must fail to satisfy [CP, 174].

iii. The liberating nature of desire.

Though poems like "Wires" may counsel against desire, the poems in general are built around the poet's hungers. If, in early works like "Wires," a personal battle is being fought against the instinct to yearn for things other than the self, then over the course of the poems as a whole, this battle is lost. Though the poet's desires are not invariably sexual or erotic, they are endemic in the poems.

One thinks of "High Windows":

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
The sun-comprehending glass,
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless. [CP, 165]

These lines disclose a hunger that the poet alone cannot satisfy: but such hungers for things other (and often otherworldly) are a mainstay of the poems in general.

The last section illustrated the threat to desire that satisfaction poses. Satisfaction is of course the end of desire, its objective. But it constitutes the end of desire in a quite different sense, because it eliminates it too. The satisfied individual is the individual without desire. One cannot, for example, own a blue car and simultaneously sustain a desire to own a blue car. For the individual bent solely on acquiring, this may not matter, because two blue cars are better than one. But for the man who, like Larkin, shuns satisfaction because of the sense of claustrophobia and disappointment it induces, this antagonism between desire and satisfaction is of the essence.

Typically the target of the poet's desire in the poems is woman. This is because of woman's antithetical relationship to the poet himself. She is the essence of not-self. But because satisfaction undermines this antithesis, and re-creates woman as no more than "my boredom and my failure," the poet must eschew satisfaction to sustain desire. This is best achieved through distance. In "The Large Cool Store" the poet describes women as "separate," then adds the rider that "separate" is only how

women seem to be "in our young unreal wishes" [CP, 135]. The otherworldliness of love and women certainly seems to be the poet's wish, as poems like "Self's the Man" indicate. As a general rule it might be said that in Larkin's poems, the more available the woman, the less desirable she seems. By contrast, the less accessible she is, the less danger there is of satisfaction, and the freer the poet feels to exercise his instincts for desire.

The first half of this principle has been substantially demonstrated in the second section: that when women or love break the bounds of "Elsewhere" and trespass "Here," they satisfy and disappoint, leaving the poet (or the "boys" or, indeed, the rapist) disillusioned with "boredom" and, like the speaker in the the second of the "Two Guitar Pieces,"

Empty again, like hunger after a meal. [CP, 9]

By contrast, the woman located at a distance stirs the poet's "hunger" with the untarnished images of an "Elsewhere" she evokes.

This distinction can be observed in that series of poems throughout the canon in which two women--one known and undesirable, the other unknown and much admired--are compared with one another. "Letter to a Friend about Girls" is a poem of this type. The chief purpose of this poem may very well be, as the opening line suggests, that of "comparing lives with you" [CP, 122]. But the poet does not miss the chance to compare women too. On one side is the type distant but desirable:

The wife whose husband watched away matches
While she behaved so badly in the bath,
And all the rest

On the other side, the poet details the women with whom he is familiar in his own daily life, and doomed, apparently, to pass his days:

They have their world, not much compared with yours,
But where they work, and age, and put off men
By being unattractive, or too shy,
Or having morals

The type known (though not necessarily in any intimate way) are not the type to arouse desire. In comparing these two types of women, significantly, the poet also compares two types of "world": one is the world desirable--a "world where all the nonsense is annulled"--the other the world rigid and hidebound, dreary and unromantic. This is the poet's world, and very dissatisfied he is with it. There is, of course, no question here of sexual intimacy, but the women with whom he shares this highly subtopianised world become, in a sense, his boredom and his failure. At any rate, it is the distant woman that seems desirable .

"Wild Oats" presents a similar comparison between an undesirable intimacy and a delightful inaccessibility. Here the poet recalls how,

About twenty years ago
Two girls came in where I worked--
A bosomy English rose
And her friend in specs I could talk to.
Faces in those days sparked
The whole shooting match off, and I doubt
If ever one had like hers:

But it was the friend I took out CP, 143]

The poem proceeds to describe the poet's relationship with the woman whom, "twenty years" later, he now describes in dismissive terms. He has met her repeatedly, it seems, to a point where she has become a constituent almost of "Here." She has become his boredom and failure. Once again, then, satisfaction has failed to satisfy, so that throughout the poem, references to the other woman, distant but desired, repeatedly rise to the surface. Along with her "bosomy" appeal (mentioned twice), she is described as "beautiful," and it is photographs of her that the poet keeps. Moreover, "bosomy rose" appears to have formed a habit of laughing at the poet--a habit which, in reinforcing the distance between herself and him, no doubt contributes to the glowing testimony she receives in this poem.

But perhaps the best way of observing the effect under discussion here is through a comparison of two poems: in one of these the poet finds himself alone with a woman and puts distance between himself and her. In the other, by contrast, the poet finds himself at a distance from the woman, and proceeds to express his desire for her without reserve.

The title of "Talking in Bed," like the titles of a great many of those poems by Larkin concerned with love ("Wild Oats," "Love," "Love Again" and so on), is ironical, because the theme of the poem is silence in bed. This silence expresses the reluctance of the poet to reduce the distance between two people when that distance is already

under threat. The poet professes that he is puzzled as to why this silence should dominate in so intimate an atmosphere:

Nothing shows why
At this unique distance from isolation

It becomes still more difficult to find
Words at once true and kind,
Or not untrue and not unkind--

and, indeed, it is not easy to disagree with him [CP, 129]. Nothing does explain why words "unkind" should rise to his lips except, perhaps, the poet's own doubts about how close he is willing to move to a representative of things other than himself. The purpose of the unkind words would be to establish that distance between himself and her with which he feels most easy.

But though the poet's unease with intimacy dominates this poem, his instinct to desire is also given its freedom in a familiar way:

Outside, the wind's incomplete unrest
Builds and disperses clouds about the sky,

And dark towns heap up on the horizon.
None of this cares for us.

The poet turns away from things intimate, and focuses his eyes on things distant, the better to express his preference for desire over satisfaction and the remote over the close: in short, his preference for the gap rather than the bridge. In the process he turns away from love when it is at its most available: indeed, the process described in this

chapter suggests that this is the most natural impulse for him to follow.

"Broadcast" represents the other side of the coin. Here the poet keeps his own company, abandoned (as it seems) alone at home. But as in "Talking in Bed," "Elsewhere" remains within sight, if not within reach. Specifically, the poem presents two versions of "Elsewhere": one is simply the "outline of the still and withering / Leaves on half-emptied trees" on the far side of his window [CP, 140]. Far more substantial, however, is that version of "Elsewhere" symbolised by the "glowing wavebands" of the radio as it broadcasts a concert the poet's lover is attending. So, by contrast with the second of the "Two Guitar Pieces," woman and music are now both "Elsewhere."

The poet has no immediate hope of fulfilling his desire for his lover, given her distance from him now. He has no immediate hope of crossing the gap between himself and her. Perversely, perhaps, this factor only serves to increase his longing:

Behind

The glowing wavebands, rabid storms of chording
By being distant overpower my mind
All the more shamelessly, their cut-off shout
Leaving me desperate

It is a highly candid confession. Whereas the poet's proximity to his lover in "Talking in Bed" is the cause (as it seems) of his silence and distance there, here the poet yearns for his lover simply (as he admits) because she is "distant." Remote from his lover, the poet's overwhelming

feeling, as the poem concedes, is desperation for her.

"Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" offers a further example of the poet's claustrophobia, and of his response in the mature poems to the prospect of sharing the enclosed space with a woman. Moreover, this poem also presents the poet's own analysis of the preference, which this chapter ascribes to him, for distance over intimacy, and desire over the fulfilment, the end, of desire.

As in "Talking in Bed," this distance is achieved somewhat unconvincingly. Initially there is no question here of distance between poet and woman. In the first place, he has access to the young lady--indeed, the poem is addressed to her, so that the reader must overhear it. And in the second, this access is newly-gained, as the opening lines of the poem make clear: "At last" the girl has agreed to show him the photographs of her life. Finally, poet and woman share the same territory, the same room, so there is no window, glass or other barrier between them.

Yet in centring his attention on the photographs rather than the woman herself, and on their suggestion of

a past that no one now can share,
No matter whose your future, [CP, 71]

the poet decides to stress, not a sense of present identity and familiarity with the woman, but, rather, the distance the past necessarily interposes between them. In isolation, the poet's priorities seem hard to explain. But the poem ventures an explanation: "we cry," it seems,

Not only at exclusion, but because
It leaves us free to cry. We know what was
Won't call on us to justify
Our grief, however hard we yowl across

The gap from eye to page. So I am left
To mourn (without a chance of consequence) ...

... a past that no one now can share [CP, 72]

Once again, the parenthesis is revealing, but the whole passage, a genuine and disinterested attempt to explain nostalgia and desire, serves as an exceptionally candid account of Larkin's attitude to love in particular and the other in general: we yearn--when we are free to do so--not least because of that freedom, that lack of "consequence," knowing all along (to paraphrase the argument of the poem) that the other, being distant, will not "call on us to justify" our desire. It will not encroach. It is almost as if the poet is invited to choose between the real woman--who is close at hand--and the photographs of someone chronologically distant from himself. His emotions are moved principally by the photographs because, as he says here, these leave him free to yearn. To one who, like the poet, has a weakness for yearning per se, the appeal of distance is clear. Unlike satisfaction, it offers the freedom to desire.

So the poet may safely express his "desperate" need for his lover in "Broadcast," knowing that there is no imminent danger of satisfaction and the desolation--or merely "boredom"--that accompanies it. He concedes the point in that poem. As a general principle, a woman may be desired because it is safe to desire her, because she is elsewhere.

Conversely, on those infrequent occasions on which she is closer to hand, and satisfaction threatens (as happens in poems like "Talking in Bed"), then a barrier will often be erected between the self and the woman, and the poet's eyes will focus on "Elsewhere" if such a place is available--or, rather, unavailable. In this way, threats of satisfaction and entrenchment in the self are forestalled, and the poet's bias for desire and fantasy over satisfaction and fulfilment can be indulged.

It is chiefly on the basis of distance, then, that the poet desires. But desire must not be allowed to be satisfied, lest dissatisfaction replace the poet's hunger. Some arrest has to be attempted between desire and fulfilment, the means and the end. Desire, indeed, is an end in itself. This may suggest a self-defeating purpose in Larkin's poems, a determination only to aspire to what cannot be gained, and that in turn raises the question of the poet's sincerity. It is, perhaps, an old-fashioned question, but it is worth asking because in a commentary on Hardy's love poetry, in which Larkin himself argues that distance is a basic ingredient of desire, the poet raises this question himself:

Not till his first wife had died could Hardy's love poetry for her be written, and then it was mixed with a flood of regret and remorse for what he had lost. This kind of paradox is inseparable from poetic creation, and indeed from life altogether. At times it almost appears a sort of basic insincerity in human affection. At others it seems a flaw built deeply into the working of the emotions, creating an inevitable bias in life towards unhappiness. [7]

Separation and distance, then, are the parents of desire: in Larkin's view, this paradox is "inseparable from poetic creation." Larkin's account of this paradox has a most authoritative and resourceful ring to it, as he explores the question from a variety of angles. So it might do: on the matter of Hardy's attitude to love, Larkin may well be speaking from experience.

iv. "Here, where no love is": Larkin's juvenilia.

Larkin clearly cannot be regarded as a "love poet" in the sense that this term might be used of Auden, perhaps, or Donne. At the same time, no theme dominates his mature poems to the same extent as love and the promise of freedom it extends. Larkin's juvenilia are similarly dominated by the theme. It is probably the central subject of those poems composed between 1938 and 1945, before the publication of his first collection, The North Ship. By contrast, an event as apparently intrusive as the Second World War hardly merits a reference.

Criticism is divided, as the second chapter showed, on the question of how far the seeds of Larkin's mature work were sown in these early years. The significance to the poet of the theme of love is one area in which no development appears to have occurred: the theme was always paramount. More striking, however, is the extent to which the deictics familiar to the reader of the mature works--the room, the window and the outside world--appear in these

early poems, even if the use to which this metaphor is put in the later works, which is chiefly to indicate difference, is not always followed here. Moreover, there is widespread evidence, even in the early poems, of love's unsatisfactory satisfactions. Perhaps most striking is that in the juvenilia, as in the mature works, desire is built on the foundation of distance.

The device on which a great deal of this thesis has focused attention, in which an inside world is distinguished from the world beyond the glass, is very widely used in these early works. In "Dawn," for example--a poem strikingly similar to "Sad Steps" in many ways, though composed some twenty-five years earlier--the poet places himself ("himself") in a most familiar position:

To wake, and hear a cock
Out of the distance crying,
To pull the curtains back
And see the clouds flying [CP, 284]

The poet looks out, then up. What he sees when he does so, however, and the conclusion to be drawn from it, indicate that the real potential of the device he uses here--which is difference and contrast--has not yet been thought through:

To pull the curtains back
And see the clouds flying--
How strange it is
For the heart to be loveless, and as cold as these.

Outside world and inside world are most often contrasted with one another in the mature poems--a comparison, indeed, which the device seems to invite. Here the opportunity to

draw a contrast is not taken. The inside world is as "cold" and "loveless" as the world outside. The failure to take full advantage of the device appears to have been recognised here: it is, after all, "strange" for the two worlds to coincide.

In "The horns of the morning," similarly, two worlds are described, and, just as in "Dawn," these two worlds ultimately share the same mood. But for a time in this poem, some element of difference--indeed, antithesis--does certainly underwrite the contrast between worlds. The world beyond the glass is a natural scene, suffused with richness and ripeness. It is an early version of "Elsewhere." This picture of an otherworld of joy and plenty is contrasted with "Here":

Here, where no love is,
All that was hopeless
And kept me from sleeping
Is frail and unsure [CP, 275]

It is "frail and unsure" because the two worlds--hitherto quite different from one another in mood--are about to coincide: the inside world is about to take its lead from the world beyond the poet himself:

For never so brilliant,
Neither so silent
Nor so unearthly, has
Earth grown before.

Mention of things "brilliant" and "unearthly" recalls the terms in which, in the mature poems, love is frequently described. Significantly, though, the poem closes on this

note, before the real is invaded wholly by the otherworldly. But, equally, there remains the poet's doubts as to exactly how he means to employ the device of the two worlds.

Perhaps this doubt signifies, not unease with the deictic itself, but with its spiritual or psychological ramifications. That is, the poet is unclear whether things "unearthly" must always keep their distance. But in a third early poem, "Ugly Sister," there are no such doubts. Accordingly, the division between worlds is absolute and clear-cut. Once again, "Here" is lonely and frustrated, a place "where no love is." "Elsewhere," by contrast, is an exotic otherworld of love. Yet despite the frustrations "Here," the speaker seems resigned to a life without love:

I will climb thirty steps to my room,
Lay on my bed;
Let the music, the violin, cornet and drum
Drowse from my head. [CP, 292]

Except that the speaker does not have recourse to cotton-wool here, this poem most closely resembles "Mr Bleaney." Here, though--by contrast with a poem like "Dawn"--the two worlds are clearly distinguished one from the other. Music belongs "Elsewhere" (a familiar position in the later poems), but in practice the chief theme of "Ugly Sister" is the otherworldliness not of music but of love:

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.

All the familiar deictics are in place: the room, the window

(if only by implication) and the outside world: a dimension-free otherworld of love and music, trees and winds. The contrast between worlds does not need further elaboration. But "Ugly Sister" takes the matter a stage further, because "Elsewhere" in this poem has two quite distinct expressions. The social "Elsewhere," which consists of music and love, is abandoned, and the natural or transcendent "Elsewhere" takes priority. The speaker acts here as the poet himself would like to act in poems like "Vers de Societe." There, too, distinctions between inside and outside worlds are very clear-cut.

Among other things, this poem--which anticipates so accurately not only the deictics of the mature poet, but also the use to which he puts them--is a treatise on the otherworldliness of love. This, too, is a common theme of the juvenilia, as a poem like "The horns of the morning" confirms. The early poems are no more likely than the mature to address a lover intimately, as Auden might, or effusively, in the manner of Donne, as a token of the presence of love "Here." Rather, the event they are most inclined to dramatise is the parting of ways between lovers. Love, evidently, has failed to redeem its promises:

Love, we must part now: do not let it be
Calamitous and bitter
Never has sun more boldly paced the sky,
Never were hearts more eager to be free [CP, 280]

The poet puts into words here thoughts which in "Talking in Bed" (one may feel) are left unsaid. But the lure of the horizon and the prospect of freedom away from love seem too

entrancing here. It is fair to add that there is no elaborate exploration of love's unsatisfactory satisfactions in the early poems. But the emphasis placed on the parting of ways in these poems suggests that fulfilment, in the event, is less than fulfilling.

Perhaps the best exploration of this theme appears in "The bottle is drunk out by one." Here the unsatisfactory character of love (in the poet's eyes) is expressed in the perfunctory tone of his description of the act:

The bottle is drunk out by one;
At two, the book is shut;
At three, the lovers lie apart
Love and its commerce done [CP, 277]

To speak of "commerce" is to supply a metaphor which, though striking, hardly expresses spontaneity or joy. The poet's failure to find release here is underwritten, first, by his inability to sleep, and second by the path taken by his thoughts as they stray (like the poet's thoughts in "Talking in Bed") in the direction of "Elsewhere":

I lie and wait for morning, and the birds,
The first steps going down the windswept streets,
Voices of girls with scarves around their heads.

Love is present "Here," but the poet's thoughts still drift to the world beyond the glass: a habit which further underlines the contrast between Larkin and Donne. In Larkin's early poems as in his late, there is no question of an "every where"--even in love: indeed, in general, the poet's chief hunger in the presence of love in the juvenilia

is to seek not an "every where" but an "Elsewhere."

No elaborate analysis is attempted in these poems of the mechanics of desire and satisfaction of a kind found in poems like "Wires" and "Next, Please"--nor indeed is such a philosophy implied. But the young poet's instincts are restless enough. A surprising number of "actual entanglements" are described in the juvenilia--more, certainly, than in the mature works. But the young poet's instinctive reaction to intimacy, it seems, is to look for distance.

Conversely, as "Like the train's beat" suggests, the young poet's reaction to distance is to look for intimacy. The deictics of this poem are again familiar to the reader of the mature poems. Set in a railway carriage on the move, "Like the train's beat" recalls later works like "I Remember, I Remember," "The Whitsun Weddings" and "Dockery and Son." The two central characters here are the girl herself and the poet, though a third character is also present because the girl is speaking in Polish. Behind the girl's head, the poet cannot help noticing the passing English landscape:

gestures like these English oaks
Flash past the windows of her foreign talk.

The train runs on through wilderness
Of cities. Still the hammered miles
Diversify behind her face. [CP, 288]

The two types of "Elsewhere" present in this poem--the first social or sexual, the second natural or transcendent--are a further reminder of the consistency of the poet's

deictics throughout his career. At the same time, the presence of the woman inside the railway carriage--which is a most unusual procedure--is a reminder of how flexible the furniture can be.

In general the presence of a woman within the poet's own enclosed space drives him to thoughts of "Elsewhere": from "The bottle is drunk out by one" to "Talking in Bed," it seems that intimacy must always be diluted by distance. Here, too, the poet's thoughts stray beyond the glass of the carriage window, as has been seen. But as the poem proceeds, the poet's desire for distance wanes, and his curiosity in the woman herself increases. This is partly a question of her physical appearance, but it is largely a matter of her voice--a voice which, as the poem suggests, is "Watering a stony place." It is very unclear which place this is--perhaps, in some sense, it is the poet himself. At any rate, the appeal of the voice is less a matter of what it says than of what it suggests: her conversation, the poet feels, comes

issuing meaningless
Through written skies

Seen symbolically, this description of the woman's voice is a reminder that the essential character of "Elsewhere" does not alter: it is invariably unformed, beyond dimensions, shapeless, incapable of being tied down, in some sense free of meaning. Moreover, it is most often above our heads. Seen semantically, however, it seems that it is chiefly the

impenetrability of the woman's conversation that rouses in the poet this interest in her. His interest is inspired by the distance and difference between himself and her.

In a number of significant ways, then, Larkin's juvenilia anticipate his mature work: in their concentration on love; in their conviction that love belongs "Elsewhere"; in their repeated use of the most characteristic of Larkin's mature metaphors to express this; in their dissatisfaction with intimacy, expressed in the distance the poet puts between himself and his lover; and finally in their curiosity--to put the matter no more strongly--in the distant. In particular, however, the juvenilia anticipate the central paradox of the mature poet's work: that the closer the self comes to the other, the more impulsively the self recoils; by contrast, the greater the distance between the self and other, the greater the self's desire.

v. Conclusion: distance and desire in the love poems.

The thinking behind this paradox is that whereas satisfaction entrenches, desire liberates. To yearn for something is necessarily to set that thing at a distance, then to aim to close the gap. It is to identify with a thing different and other than oneself, then to efface the factors that make it distant. By contrast with satisfaction, desire implies movement away from the self towards the other, the thing desired. In poems like "Talking in Bed," in which the poet's desires drift towards the "horizon," this imagined movement away from the self is

a direct response to the intimacy of the moment, removing as it does both the threat and the burden of the self, the sense of self-imprisonment. In "Broadcast," too, though the situation is very different, there is just the same drift away from self to other.

The logical conclusion of this process is, of course, satisfaction. And it is here that liberation from the self becomes entrenchment there. In poems like "Broadcast," however, there is an atmosphere of equilibrium and arrest at the close, before desire can be fulfilled. The poem closes with the poet

desperate to pick out
Your hands, tiny in all that air, applauding. [CP, 140]

This kind of fantasy of arrest (so to say) before satisfaction can turn to disillusion--a poise in which the present participle which closes the poem plays a significant role--is not confined to the poems on the theme of love. It is there, after all, at the close of "Here," in which the unreachable place is momentarily reached. But it is a necessary precondition if desire is to be preserved: it is a kind of poised desire, outside of time.

The escape from time is of the essence, and part of the essential beauty of desire. Desire is first a declaration of intent. It anticipates that present conditions are about to change, though they have not done so yet. The purpose of time, it has been said, is to distinguish one event from another--to stop everything happening simultaneously. Thus,

because it ignores the distinctions of which time is made, desire enables disparate worlds to co-exist. Isolation, frustration and lovelessness become--in theory at least--temporary phenomena, real enough in themselves but also preparing for the moment when they are relieved. Desire gives hope which disillusion will not have the chance to sour.

This is especially significant because of the apparent probability that desire will lead to something like satisfaction. Outside time, however, desire offers the best of both the worlds--"Here" and "Elsewhere"--that underwrite these poems because it encompasses the paradoxes that underwrite the poet's attitude to things otherworldly. Desire requires isolation, but it extends the promise of companionship. It is founded on the self, but it looks outwards, and towards the other. It promises freedom from the self whilst simultaneously protecting the self and the territory by which it is defined. Above all, desire has its roots in the present, but it promises to flower in a future so distant and notional that it may never arrive, and so need not be feared.

Desire is also, perhaps, a disguise for fear. How far the poet's unease in personal poems like "Talking in Bed" and "Lines" is rooted in fear may be gauged from the personal edge that underwrites poems like "Self's the Man" and "Deceptions." The fear of giving oneself away and of abandoning oneself to love--the "central dread of satisfaction" which Thurley ascribes to Larkin--may easily

be disguised as the desire to do so at some unspecified time in the future. [8] It is as if Larkin sets out to invert St. Augustine's prayer: make me licentious, Lord--but not yet. The fear of loneliness, expressed in the closing verses of "Self's the Man," is never able in these poems to supersede the fear of being dissatisfied with satisfaction, entrenched in the self, the prisoner of "fulfilment's attic" and a stranger to the "beauty of somewhere you're not."

In James Fenton's view, however, the distinction being drawn here between desire and fear is superfluous:

Every fear is a desire. Every desire is fear. [9]

The close relationship between these two emotions is clinched, in Larkin's verse, by their common symbol here, which is the window. Linking yet separating worlds, and exposing yet protecting the poet from "Elsewhere," the window serves as an invitation to the other whilst defining the self and defending it against satisfaction.

Thus, if the room is a symbol for the human being and the life he finds himself living, as this thesis argues, then the window is the poet's eyes, continually alert to things beyond his own experience, and anxious to accomplish that most Larkinian effect: to

Think of being them! [or]

To compare his life and mine [CP, 147, 117]

Moreover, the window symbolises the emotions that underscore this impulse to measure self against other: doubt, fear,

curiosity, yearning, unease, indecision, a determination to avoid commitment, and a resolution to live vicariously somewhere between two worlds. This is the fate and privilege of the voyeur. In his perpetual state of uncertainty which world or way of life best serves his interests, Larkin, like Tiresias, is "throbbing between two lives." [10] "Here" and "Elsewhere" comprise the poet's dilemma: the window, neither one world nor the other, is as much the poet's symbol as the room itself.

For this reason, that archetypal image of the poet, outlined in the second chapter, of a face at a window--by conviction the citizen of one world, by desire the subject of quite another--serves as a succinct expression not only of the questions these poems raise but also of the answer they give. The point is neatly (if unintentionally) summarised in the late poem, "Aubade":

Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape.
It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,
Have always known, know that we can't escape,
Yet can't accept.CP, 208]

The poet's subject here is death. But on the strength of the syntax, it is the room that is both unacceptable yet inescapable. The poet's most powerful sense of self is paradoxically what spurs him to yearn for freedom, the beauty of somewhere he isn't. Yet it is the same strong sense of self which ultimately stands in his way. It is himself, perhaps, that he can't accept, yet can't escape. The beauty of desire and its metaphor, the window, is that--

albeit momentarily--it obviates the need to do the former,
yet allows the latter.

CHAPTER SIX: THE ROMANTIC ELEMENT IN LARKIN'S POEMS.

i. From Donne to Larkin: four angles on "Elsewhere."

This thesis has examined a dichotomy central to Larkin's work, one which has many expressions: the infinite is contrasted with the finite, the unknown with the familiar, the organic with the man-made, the ideal with the real, things imagined with things experienced. Above all, perhaps, desire is contrasted with satisfaction--that condition which promises nothing more than "boredom" and "failure" (as "To My Wife" has it), and further incarceration in the self [CP, 54].

The terms "Here" and "Elsewhere" have been used to denote the various expressions of the central dichotomy. It might be said that "Here" is what is true whereas "Elsewhere" is what is beautiful. At any rate, "Here" constitutes what (in general) a man must learn to live with whereas "Elsewhere" can only be observed from a distance. Again, the chief ingredient of "Here" is the poet himself, whereas the main beauty of "Elsewhere," as Larkin says, is the beauty of "somewhere you're not."

This dichotomy is expressed both semantically and metaphorically. Many of the poems portray the poet himself

in the act of looking at others, comparing, guessing and imagining the nature of lives other than his own. In this way, the poems build tenuous bridges between self and not-self. More fundamentally--though just the same principle obtains--the poet repeatedly pictures himself in the act of gazing "beyond" the confines of present reality into a distance that seems to extend the promise of a life different ^{from} and perhaps better than that lived now. So, again, bridges are built between the two worlds of the poems.

The poet's chief metaphor for this dichotomy is, of course, the room, the window and the outside world. This is not his only symbol for it: land and sea are often contrasted, as are reality and the advertisement. But among Larkin's symbols, the room is much the most common. Moreover, because the chief tenor of the vehicle of the room is the poet himself, the contrast between the room and the outside world enables the poems to probe their central concern, which is the place of the self in relation to others, to love, to freedom and, above all, to the self's own absence.

It must be said, however, that the ^{disjunction or the uncertainty the poet experiences} between ^{the claims of} "Here" and "Elsewhere" is not Larkin's patent. On the contrary: this dichotomy lies at the heart of Western civilisation in general. Faith in the idea of a better life "Elsewhere" is, of course, the bedrock of the Judaeo-Christian spiritual tradition. Moreover, from Spartacus to Marx, the essence of political reform has been not only

dissatisfaction with "Here" but also hunger for an "Elsewhere" in which "things" (in Larkin's phrase) will at last be as they "ought to be" [CP, 119].

At the same time, because "Elsewhere" is normally located in Larkin's poems "out of reach" and emphatically "beyond the stretch" [CP, 192] of "Here," the poet's approach to the question is--in the broad cultural context--somewhat unusual. Spiritual and political texts direct the attention of their readers to the promised lands of "Elsewhere" on the basis that such places exist, can be reached, and are waiting to be entered. Larkin's poems repeatedly point in the direction of some kind of "paradise" [CP, 165], but most often they do so mainly to point out the inaccessibility of "Elsewhere," its unavailability.

Like religion and politics, English poetry has been highly conscious of the two worlds, or states, or casts of mind. But as Larkin's poems suggest, the literary relationship between these two worlds has proved neither as simple nor as consistent as the spiritual relationship or the political. That is, English poets, though conscious of otherworlds, do not invariably yearn for them. Moreover, even among those poets who do express some hunger for "Elsewhere," two questions remain to be answered: first, what exactly does "Elsewhere" consist of, and second, can the desire for things otherworldly ever, in this world, be satisfied?

Donne's "The Sunne Rising" is a case of a poem in which, though a version of "Elsewhere" is described in some

detail, it excites no desire whatever. Indeed, the invasion of "Here" by "Elsewhere," which is what the opening lines of the poem describe, is vehemently resented:

Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us? [1]

The room is contrasted with the outside world. At first the poet resents the intrusion of the world beyond the glass because it is irrelevant to his present needs: it is a world of "schoole boyes," "sowre prentices," "Court-huntsmen" and the rest. So that world is remote from his own world of love and its metaphor, the room. Over the course of the poem, this sense of the outside world's irrelevance is replaced by an impression of its falsehood, even fiction. By comparison with "Here," the world beyond the glass is the home of false values and worthless rewards: "compar'd to this," says the poet of the room and what it symbolises, "All honor's mimique; All wealth alchimie." Reality for Donne--as, indeed, for Larkin--is "Here." But in Donne's poem, there is no desire for the outside world, for "Elsewhere": just the reverse.

"The Sunne Rising" first presents the sun itself as a symbol of the world beyond the glass. So, initially, the sun too is resented. As the poem progresses, however, the sun ceases to play the vehicle to the tenor of the outside world, and stands (as it were) in its own light. By the poem's close, the poet's position has mellowed towards the sun. As a symbol of "Elsewhere," it is resented. It is

accepted at the end because it illuminates what happens "Here." This development in the role of the sun--it gradually ceases to symbolise "Elsewhere"--is expressed in the gradual "disappearance" of the outside world from the poem. Slowly the poem moves from thoughts of "schoole boyes" and "prentices" to the room itself, and the lover with whom the poet shares it: here the poem ends. It moves from outside inwards, then, with a centripetal motion, and closes on the "center." In the closing lines, which concentrate on the room, "here" becomes "every where":

Shine here to us, and thou art every where;
This bed thy center is, these walls thy sphere.

It is instructive to contrast the centripetal motion of "The Sunne Rising" with the centrifugal progress of the great majority of Larkin's poems. The failure of the centre to hold in Larkin's work, as the poet's attention drifts from "Here" in the direction of "Elsewhere," is reversed in "The Sunne Rising," a poem in which the "center" is ultimately no less than "every where."

Donne's antipathy towards "Elsewhere" has one central cause. "Here" is exotic and exciting, the home of love. The presence of the woman is the root of this excitement, and very exotically is she described: she is "both the 'India's of spice and Myne." So in "The Sunne Rising," present reality is not something to be escaped. On the contrary, it is something to be relished and protected. The contrast between Donne's room, richly exotic and entrancing, and the rooms of Larkin's poems, meagre and isolating, need

not be laboured. For Larkin, present reality is most often harsh and deprived; for Donne it is enchanting, desirable and fulfilling.

The poet's room in "The Sunne Rising," then, is a haven, not a prison. It is fair to say that in more recent times, so positive a perception of "Here" is unusual. Emptiness rather than joy, isolation rather than love, and distance rather than proximity have dominated English poetry in the last two centuries. The result has been that English poets, though much given to locate and define some aspect of "Elsewhere," have proved less adept at closing the gap between the place experienced on one side and, on the other, the place desired.

Coleridge's "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" takes a quite different view from "The Sunne Rising" on the respective merits of "Here" and "Elsewhere." In the first place, "Here" is explicitly a restraint, a "prison":

here I must remain,
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
Had dimm'd mine eyes to blindness! [2]

"Here," then, is isolated and cut off, a place of loss. To this the poet reacts, not with Donne's mood of exuberance, but in a spirit of remorse and self-pity at finding himself isolated from "Elsewhere." "Elsewhere" comprises what "Here" is not. It is joyous and comradely:

They, meanwhile,
Friends, whom I never more may meet again,

On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,
Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,
To that still roaring dell

The glad wandering of friends among natural scenes, then, constitutes an "Elsewhere" which the poet distinguishes explicitly from "Here," the lonely prison. The poet is excluded, then, from a social "Elsewhere," it seems. But the account of "Elsewhere" Coleridge gives has strong spiritual implications too. It is "Less gross than bodily," and is coloured by

such hues

As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive his presence.

The poem comes close to presenting a contrast, then, not merely between "Here" and "Elsewhere," but, indeed, between Earth ("gross," "bodily") and Heaven--a place of community in Nature. Except that the poet is absent from it, such a place is less an "Elsewhere" than an "every where." But, of course, the poet's absence is pivotal to the poem.

His sense of isolation and incarceration "Here" is underlined, if only by extension, in the contrast he draws between himself and Charles Lamb, to whom the poem is addressed. Typically it is "My gentle-hearted Charles" who is trapped and isolated:

for thou hast pined
And hunger'd after Nature, many a year,
In the great City pent

So deep-seated is the poet's sense of the divide between "Here" and "Elsewhere," then, that he ascribes the same

impulse to the person the poem addresses. But the scene the poet describes will satisfy his friend's hunger for communion with Nature, he imagines. Between "Here" and "Elsewhere," then, it seems certain that bridges can be built, and gaps effaced.

It is by the poet's own act of imagination that he is liberated from the "prison," from "Here." In describing himself as "glad"--a word used three times hitherto to describe his friends--as if "I myself were there," he does indeed seem to liberate himself from "Here." That is, he is freed when his attention drifts from the prison of the self to thoughts of friends among scenes of freedom. Moreover, this connection between "Here" and "Elsewhere," which is founded on the imagination, is lent a physical dimension in the form of a bird:

My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook
Beat its straight path along the dusky air
Homewards, I blest it! deeming its black wing ...
Had cross'd the mighty Orb's dilated glory,
While thou stood gazing

The poet, though incarcerated, has become a kind of Ancient Mariner, journeying in his imagination from the lonely territory "Here" to exotic climes "Elsewhere," only to return transformed by the sense of companionship and unity through Nature. In blessing the bird, he acts towards it as the mariner acts towards the water-snakes. His liberation from the prison "Here" is symbolised by the poem's double-motion: at first it is centrifugal as the poet's attention drifts "Elsewhere." But the returning "rook," underlined by

the blessing, introduces a centripetal motion, a metaphor for his new-found sense of wellbeing, his transformation.

To argue that these two poems, "The Sunne Rising" and "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," are representative of their respective eras would be an extravagant assertion. But some kind of representative process is discernible here: one in which the author no longer places his central character among others, but locates him alone; in which the result of this alone-ness is the desire for others elsewhere; and in which, at the heart of "Elsewhere," lie comradeship and union of a kind more than merely secular. The poet is transformed in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" because he connects with "Elsewhere" through the perception that self and other are linked in Nature.

In many respects, Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" follows Coleridge's lead. Once again, the poem proposes a distinction between "Here" and "Elsewhere." Again, "Here" is the poet's arena, a place of privation that must be escaped. And again, "Elsewhere" briefly comes within reach through an imagined escape from "Here." Keats presents a concise picture of "Here":

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs [3]

But the nightingale and the poet's imagination seem to conspire to enable the poet to escape not only from present privation but, indeed, from the tyranny of time also and the

general decay of the present:

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth

In the process the poet gives every impression of escaping not only from "Here" but also, indeed, from the bonds of time and space which--in this poem as in much of Larkin--are among the most characteristic ingredients of "Here." Moreover, as Chapter Three observed, in his use of cross-phenomenalization in this poem, the poet escapes even the conventions of language.

The poet's own reaction to the appearance of the nightingale, the emblem of "Elsewhere," recalls the example of Coleridge, rather than Donne: he yearns for it, and determines to connect. Moreover, like Coleridge, his means of doing so is the imagination, the "fancy." Hitherto, then, "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and "Ode to a Nightingale" share a great deal of common ground. Yet this poem closes, not with Coleridge's effusive satisfaction, but on notes of hunger unsatisfied, ambiguity, even disillusion:

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fabled to do, deceiving elf.

By contrast with Coleridge, "Elsewhere" seduces but it fails to satisfy, and the poet's "forlorn" and abandoned condition at the close of the poem expresses the gap that has opened up between "Here" and "Elsewhere"--a gap which can clearly

be bridged, though not (it seems) indefinitely.

The explanation the poet gives for this failure to cross the gap is the inability of "the fancy" or imagination to release him from himself and "Here." How convincing this explanation appears might be questioned: the imagination, after all, has already released the poet from himself and from the dimensions characteristic of "Here." The real difference between "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and "Ode to a Nightingale" lies in the objectives the respective poets set themselves in reaching for the place out of reach and in the demands they make of "Elsewhere," the expectations they have of it. Through contact with "Elsewhere," Coleridge finds his mood transformed, and his sense of wellbeing at journey's end accordingly enhanced. But Keats is more ambitious. He aims not to amend reality--to improve it--but to escape it altogether. He aspires to "leave the world unseen,"

And with thee fade away into the forest dim--

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known

Keats's aim, then, is not transformation but release from "Here," from life and the lonely self. It is, of course, on the note of failure to achieve this goal that the poem ends: that is, the return "from thee to my sole self!"

That "Elsewhere" is more closely connected to "Here" in "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison" than in "Ode to a Nightingale" is best expressed in the contrast between the

respective birds these poems describe. Coleridge's "last rook" flies from "Elsewhere" in the direction of "Here" as an emblem of the connection the imagination has formed between the two worlds, the fording of the gap between "Here" and "Elsewhere." Keats's nightingale, however, a far more elusive creature, takes the opposite course, flying to a point more distant still from "Here,"

Past the near meadows, over the still stream
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades

Thus whereas Coleridge's poem reverses its own centrifugal motion as its conclusion nears, Keats's poem underlines and reinforces the motion, so that the reader feels at the close of the poem that the poet himself has been deserted and abandoned. The attempt to escape the self results only in a return to "my sole self": an incarceration in the self still more intense.

The question arises of how far these three attitudes to "Elsewhere" shed light on Larkin's practice. Between Donne and Larkin there is little evidence of common ground beyond the shared deictics: for both poets, "Here" is symbolised by a room, and "Elsewhere" lingers beyond the glass. But no purpose is served by labouring the differences between the presence of love and its absence, or between the indifference towards "Elsewhere" of one poet, the preoccupation with it of another.

Between Coleridge and Larkin the contrast is less sharp, less defined. By now "Elsewhere" has come into

focus, the object of the poet's desire. That much is common ground. But several distinctions remain to be drawn. First, Coleridge's "Elsewhere" is not Larkin's: though elements of the natural, the organic and the spiritual may be among Larkin's objectives, Coleridge's aspiration to companionship with others is largely absent from Larkin's poetry. Furthermore, though there are poems in Larkin's canon in which the gap between "Here" and "Elsewhere" is almost closed--one thinks of "Here," which comes close to the place "out of reach," and of "The Whitsun Weddings," which momentarily glimpses the place "out of sight"--the chief theme of Larkin's work is the other-ness of things other and the general inviolability of the gap between worlds. Finally, Larkin's objective, like Keats's, is not transformation of the character but release from it. Like Keats, Larkin hungers to "fade far away." He hungers for "the beauty of somewhere you're not."

This degree of absolutism--and in general, the extent of the poet's failure--seem at first to link Larkin most closely to Keats. But in practice it is only in the relatively early poems, composed before the publication of The Less Deceived, that Larkin's poems resemble the "Ode to a Nightingale." It is right to say that at the end of the ode, the poet is "forlorn" but ambivalent, uncertain whether "Elsewhere" is real or "deceiving." A poem like "Deceptions" (1950) supplies the answer: the rapist was indeed "deceived"--his victim, of course, was "less deceived"--and his punishment in seeking release from the

self is to find himself hopelessly incarcerated there, trapped and "desolate" [CP, 32]. Larkin's instinctive answer to Keats's question is categorical: "Elsewhere" is not real.

Larkin's mature poems are a development on this position. On one side stand the more optimistic works ("Here" and "The Whitsun Weddings," perhaps, "Broadcast" and "The Explosion") which experiment with ideas of arrest and suspension before disillusion seizes the chance to settle. Then there are the less optimistic (and on the whole later) poems--one thinks of "High Windows" and "Aubade," "Vers de Societe" and "Sad Steps"--which establish the unambiguous view that "Elsewhere" remains elsewhere, not to be reached: by contrast with Keats, then, what these poems dramatise is not disillusion but distance. And at the third point of the triangle are those works like "Show Saturday" and "To the Sea," in which thoughts of "Elsewhere" are banished altogether, and the poet simply takes pleasure in the compensations of "Here."

The second type is the most characteristic. The poet's position in poems of this type is neatly, if briefly, summarised in the late work, "The Building." The world of life and freedom beyond the glass, this poem accepts, lies

beyond the stretch
Of any hand from here [CP, 191]

In their general preoccupation with the two worlds "Here" and "Elsewhere," then, Larkin's poems take their place in a tradition in English poetry--indeed, in English thinking in

general. But in their general conviction that "Elsewhere" lies "beyond the stretch" of those incarcerated "Here," and firmly "out of reach," they part company even with Keats, and extend the tradition to a point which must, logically, seem its final destination.

ii. Towards a model of Romanticism.

This tradition of two worlds--or two casts of mind or states of being--lies at the heart of Romanticism, which investigates it most fully and in the end most sceptically. Romanticism issues chiefly in a state of robust disaffection with things as they are here and now: it is founded on a state of rebellion against present reality, an antagonism towards the present tense, or the present place, or the present condition. And conversely, the Romantic mind hungers for places, tenses and conditions other than this. At the heart of Romanticism, then, is a spirit of hostility to the way things are "Here," together with a willingness to believe that "Elsewhere"--geographically, chronologically, existentially, emotionally--they may be better.

Romantic individualism and isolation of a kind observed both in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and in "Ode to a Nightingale" are central expressions of this disaffection. Out of the Romantic's unease with the ways of the world arises a sense of division between the isolated self and things other. Critical accounts of Romanticism generally accord individualism and isolation the pivotal role. Graham

Hough's account is particularly concise: with the dawn of Romanticism the "emphasis shifts," he argues,

from social man to the individual man, when he is alone with his own heart or alone with nature. [4]

In her analysis of this shift of emphasis, Lilian Furst makes considerable claims for its significance, both literary and sociological:

The affirmation of the overriding importance of the individual represents indeed the crucial turning-point in the history of society as well as of literature. [5]

Thurley's analysis moves from the same premise as Furst's, and reaches the same conclusion. In his account, too, the significance of Romantic individualism is historical as much as it is literary:

The subjectivity characteristic of Romantic art bears a deep sociological significance. It expresses the new condition in which man felt himself to exist. [6]

Isolation, individualism, subjectivity: man's isolated status becomes a given. Two attitudes towards this "new condition" have been examined already in this chapter. The earlier of the two poems ("This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison") rebels against isolation directly, and succeeds in effacing its worst effects. The later of the two also rebels against loneliness--the poet at the close is thrown back on "my sole self"--but this rebellion is only an aspect of a wider insurrection against the terms on which life in general is offered. But whichever reaction isolation elicits, it lies at the heart of the Romantic condition, a child of the

conviction that reality is not as it should be.

Furst's explanation for this break-down--indeed, this gap--between self and other focuses on the individual's "inability to adapt the ego to the demands of the outer environment," and in particular on the Romantic's

awareness of dissatisfaction that stems from the individual's mis-relationship to his surroundings. [7]

Something of this can be seen in Keats's ode. Bayley develops Furst's analysis, stressing the inevitable results of this "mis-relationship": the essence of Romanticism, he argues, is

the relationship between the poet's mind and the world which it contemplates: at this point his consciousness recoils again and again on itself. [8]

The sociological break-down between self and other described by Thurley is, of course, mirrored in the literary break-down, as Bayley explains:

The premises on which any Romantic poem is written are an acute consciousness of the isolated creating self on the one hand, and of a world unrelated, and possibly uninterested and hostile, on the other. [9]

Thus whereas Furst speaks of a "mis-relationship" between artist and world, Bayley refers to a positive hostility: Romanticism is less a matter of the incongruity of self and other, perhaps, than of their mutual antagonism. At all events, Thurley's account of the results of the shift of emphasis, or break-down, follows the example of his analysis of its causes, and once again widens the argument to include

the sociological and political angles: the Romantic, he argues, is "a man set apart" and isolated

both from his fellow-men and from the possibility of political involvement with the power-structure This is alienation. [10]

The roots of alienation, as Frank Kermode argues, lie in the soil of disaffection, the conviction that the connections between self and other cannot be sustained:

The alienation of the artist and this despair at the decay of the world are two side of the same coin [11]

Alienation, then, serves as a reminder of the guiding impulse of Romanticism: the artist's despair, of a kind graphically described in Keats's ode, at the world's decay.

Alienation of the order observed in "Ode to a Nightingale" constitutes a deepening and hardening of the Romantic's instinctive isolation. Against this isolation the first generation of Romantic poets set their collective face, and certainly there are poems from the early years of Romanticism in which connections are sought and forged between self and other. One thinks of Wordsworth's recollections in The Prelude:

I was only then
Contented, when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still ...;
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air [12]

It is, of course, to just this creed of Nature's unity and

one-ness, the antidote to isolation, that "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" refers. In blessing the rook there, the poet acts in accordance with this creed.

But the ability to surmount barriers and bridge gaps with the conviction and exuberance of the early Romantics falls into progressive and inexorable decline. The hostility between self and other to which Bayley refers above may be observed in a poem like Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," in which a vignette is presented, not of benign order, but of almost surreal chaos and cataclysm: "the world," says the poet,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night. [13]

If this is truly the world's condition, then the question of whether borders can be crossed and connections established between self and other may in the end carry less weight than the conviction that such gaps are not worth bridging.

The new Romantic emphasis on the individual and his isolation presupposes the development of new styles of writing, new ways of thinking, new indices of knowledge, and new bases for understanding and interpreting experience. In the first place, says Thurley,

certain ranges of feeling and perception themselves became objective. [14]

That is, individual responses to individual incidents and situations themselves convey information, in the process

beginning to undermine established collective values like objectivity and rationality. The point is neatly summarised by Furst:

the calculating reason of rationalism came to be replaced by the reasons of the heart. [15]

The "reasons of the heart" correspond to what Kermode describes as the "image-making powers of the mind." These play the same antagonistic role in relation to rationalist modes of thinking: Kermode draws attention to

the high valuation placed during this period upon the image-making powers of the mind at the expense of its rational powers. [16]

The "rook" and the "nightingale" exemplify the high valuation placed by Romanticism on birds as images of freedom from dimensions. Moreover, this image expresses the poet's disaffection with the world in the formal sense too, a case of the Romantic poet's willingness to re-shape existence to his own imaginative ends. As Furst explains:

the poetic imagination brings into being an entirely new kingdom, distinct from the outer physical realm. [17]

Here again, then, the separation of the individual from the world and the gap between the self and the other constitute the foundation on which a new poetry is built. It is the poet's conviction that the "world" (in Wordsworth's phrase) is "too much with us" that propels the Romantic mind into its characteristic stance of rebellion against it, expressed

as an isolation in which the language of the individual (of symbols, the imagination and "the heart") gains ground over the language of society and collectivity, the language of "reason." [18]

In this state of isolation in the present and of antagonism towards it, the Romantic develops a desire for things remote by way of compensation: he makes a straightforward "rejection of present reality" (as Furst argues) "in favour of the distant." [19] Or, as Bayley comments, Romanticism is suffused with "nostalgia for the innocent, the remote, the mysterious." [20] Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" is a case in point. Here the poet recalls the significance to him of his distant memories of Nature when he found himself trapped (like Charles Lamb) amid the "din / Of towns and cities." Of Nature's "beauteous forms," he says:

I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration [21]

Here the poet's "nostalgia" is, of course, satisfied: an unusual result, one more common among the earlier writers in the Romantic tradition. But the poet's impulse here--which is to enact a straight exchange of the immediate for the remote and innocent--is characteristic of Romanticism in general. The known is forfeited for the distant, the familiar for the mysterious, the empirical for the enigmatic, and so on.

One element in this rebellion against the immediate, this desire for the remote, is nostalgia. Thurley's account is especially given to stress Romantic desire for times past, arguing that the "thematic nucleus" of Romanticism is "the theme of absent or lost experience," and adding that as Romanticism develops,

the image or idea of the lost paradise gains ground in the poet's world ... and the image of exclusion and abandonment receives definition. [22]

The present refuses to satisfy--yet the past refuses to compensate. Specifically Thurley describes this lost paradise as "the old organic, quasi-familial society," but although one might tie this reference down to a poem like Wordsworth's "Michael," it seems unnecessary to be so specific. Later in the century, Hardy's tone in a poem like "At Castle Boterel" resonates with the nostalgia of the Romantic tradition, yet the poem has few social implications. On the contrary, it presents a further case of Romantic individualism. Recalling a visit made by himself and his late wife in their youth, the poet remembers:

It filled but a minute. But was there ever
A time of such quality, since or before,
In that hill's story? To one mind never,
Though it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore,
By thousands more. [23]

There is no social aspect here. On the contrary, the poet distances himself from those "thousands" of others who have climbed the same hill. But the aspiration to escape from

present reality, even in the direction of a past that cannot be recovered, is profoundly attractive to the poet who, like Hardy, is an heir to the Romantic appetite for things distant.

Even so, the significant factor here is the artist's antagonism towards the present, rather than any a priori hunger for the past per se. Nostalgia is not an end in itself, but a means to the central end of Romanticism in general: the expression of dissatisfaction with things immediate together with the hunger for times, conditions, places or states of mind other than this. So objectives other than the past would seem to serve equally well to express this disaffection. Again, "Ode to a Nightingale" offers an excellent example. Nevertheless, in focusing attention on the Romantic's particular nostalgia for the medieval past, and on his search for "various forms of liberation" there, Hough describes an incentive to escape which, in the context of this thesis, is most familiar. The Romantic poet, he argues, sought in medievalism

liberation from the conscious ego that education, convention and society had built up. [24]

And, indeed, in a culture in which the ego is so intensely isolated, such an escape is not, perhaps, incomprehensible.

But a desire for the distant is, of course, as inherently incapable of being satisfied--one thinks of Keats--as a desire for the past: one thinks of Hardy. Thurley's account of the history of Romanticism might be summarised in one phrase:

Heroic despair turns eventually to comfort-hugging regret. [25]

Thurley's analysis is angled largely towards late-Victorian Romanticism. His account dwells less on the ambitious attempts to escape from present reality made by early Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge than on the self-defeating attempts to recover the past in the work of writers like Proust. The result of this quest for times past, as Thurley argues, is the "Romantic acquaintance with defeat." [26] Poems like Hardy's "At Castle Boterel"--indeed, Hardy's "Poems of 1912-13" in general--illustrate both the hunger for times past and the self-defeating character of such a hunger, its futility. Release is attempted, but of course release of this order must fail.

Furst's account takes the same view. The straight exchange described by her as "the rejection of present reality in favour of the distant" is ultimately impossible to achieve, leaving only "the inevitable disappointment of the Romantic" in its wake. [27] This desire for the distant together with its inevitable result is well expressed in Edward Thomas' "Old Man"--a poem which also draws on the Romantic inheritance of disillusion and defeat:

As for myself,
Where first I met the bitter scent is lost.
I, too, often shrivel the grey shreds,
Sniff them and think and sniff again and try
Once more to think what it is I am remembering,
Always in vain. [28]

The last line summarises the dominant mood of the tradition

under discussion here. Kermode is equally forthright in stressing the element of despair in Romanticism, emphasising what he calls "the necessity of melancholy in artists." [29] More generally, it is this acquaintance with defeat which becomes, in Thurley's phrase, no less than an "ideological instrument." [30] That is to say that though present reality delivers no satisfaction, things remote are no better able to redeem promises of fulfilment. This is especially a late-Romantic dilemma. Alienated from the immediate, such poets find themselves excluded from the distant too. Casual acquaintance with failure and defeat turns to familiarity.

Criticism is widely conscious of this final development in the history of Romanticism: that is, the coalescence of desire with disillusion. To aspire to freedom is only--and immediately--to be reminded that freedom is "out of reach." In Thurley's analysis, the popular view of the Romantic is one who

longs for the unrealisable, chases dreams or prefers the ideal to the real, even when he knows the ideal can never be gained. [31]

Such hopes must inevitably be disappointed. Disillusion must inevitably become (as Bayley suggests) "a working part of the dream." [32] Yet the aspiration remains as central to Romanticism as the disillusion. This, for Bayley, is "the romantic premise":

the romantic premise of simultaneous expectancy and disillusion. [33]

Opposite emotions coalesce. Expectation goes hand-in-hand with disillusion, and hope becomes inseparable from despair. Aspiration is unavoidable--yet unavoidably doomed.

This picture of simultaneous desire and despair is an account of Romanticism's maturity: perhaps, indeed, in its self-defeating way, it is an account of Romanticism's decadence. At the heart of this model of the Romantic mind--necessarily brief as it has been--remains that fundamental disaffection with the way of things regardless of any antidotes the poet may advance, together with the knowledge that though release is desirable, it will very likely prove impossible to effect.

It is worth adding a footnote to this analysis of Romantic disaffection, aspiration, failure and defeat. The major difference between the contemporary critical overview addressed here and the analysis of Romanticism advanced by T.E. Hulme lies principally in the terms used: whereas modern criticism speaks in terms of dissatisfaction, aspiration and disillusion (as has been seen), Hulme's analysis is preoccupied with notions of the finite and the infinite as a means of distinguishing the Romantic tradition from the Classical--which is his prime aim. Yet in spite of these differences, Hulme's conclusions largely reinforce those summarised in this section.

The essence of Romanticism in Hulme's analysis is the conviction that limits can be ignored or overcome. In his view, the Romantic conceives of man as an inherently

limit-free creature:

Here is the root of all romanticism: that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities [34]

This is the Romantic view of man as Hulme observes it. The Classical picture is, as he accepts, "the exact opposite to this":

Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. [35]

At this stage in his argument, Hulme's analysis is largely political: he suggests that to the Romantic mind, society is oppressive because it refuses to accommodate man's infinite possibilities; to the Classical mind, however, society is an enabling mechanism, ordering and channelling man's otherwise inchoate hungers and energies. In the Romantic view, man should destroy society; in the Classical, he should be grateful to it.

Hulme proceeds from this account of the two views of society to an illustration of the two types of man. The romantic, Hulme believes,

because he thinks man infinite, must always be talking about the infinite; and as there is always the bitter contrast between what you think you ought to be able to do and what man actually can, it always tends, in its later stages at any rate, to be gloomy. [36]

The Romantic mind, as has been seen, is impatient with gaps, borders, definitions, boundaries, and even, perhaps, with distinctions of the kind advanced in Hulme's analysis, necessarily limiting as they are. On the other hand,

Hulme's own bias against the Romantic view is on show in this particular passage.

At the same time, though, Hulme is saying no more here than has been said by critics like Bayley and Thurley: desire and disillusion go hand-in-hand, and the end result of ambition is often gloom. Unbridled desire, by contrast, is not a Classical emotion in Hulme's view: by "the classical" he means

That even in the most imaginative flights, there is always a holding back, a reservation. The classical poet never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man. He remembers always that he is mixed up with earth. He may jump, but he always returns back; he never flies away into the circumambient gas. [37]

Two views of man and his possibilities are revealed, then, in two kinds of literature. These, though, are also two types of ideology, one beating against limits--and being beaten back by them in the end--the other largely ignorant of limits, being at ease with present reality. The life unlived, in short, holds no attractions to the Classical mind, as it does for the Romantic. For this reason, as Hulme proceeds to explain, Classical poetry is preoccupied, not with things-as-they-might-be, but with things-as-they-are:

In the classic it is always the light of ordinary day, never the light that never was on land or sea. It is always perfectly human and never exaggerated [38]

The human scale of man (in Classical eyes) is accepted, even praised. By contrast, the Romantic mind must always chaff

at such limits, and seek to transcend them.

In a variety of ways, Hulme's analysis is underwritten by a personal hostility towards Romanticism. His most effective tactic is to balance the aspirations of the earlier writers in the tradition, which were ambitious, against the experiences of the later writers, which (as has been seen) were less exalted. Even so, between this analysis and the modern critical consensus outlined above, there is much common ground. Complacency, dispassionate inquiry, ease, analysis, praise^{of what is "Here"}--indeed, any human activity which broadly accepts the world as it is--cannot be regarded as a Romantic act. On the contrary, at the heart of Romanticism there lies this aversion to the human scale and limits of materialist society, together with the determination to transcend them. Both analyses recognise the Romantic's unease with the dimension-bound, the empirical and rational, the tangible, the immediate and (in fact) the real. And both concede that the Romantic's eyes are cast towards the remote and free-ranging, the distant and elusive, the imagined, the exotic and the enigmatic--in short, towards things "out of reach" or "out of sight"--as an expression of this foundational disaffection.

In the general sense, it need hardly be said that the device of the room, the window and the outside world is tailor-made for addressing this dilemma. On this side of the glass is the real and tangible, the known world, which has to be accepted. The room represents the here-and-now: that which oppresses and alienates, and would be escaped,

were escape only possible. On the far side, by contrast, is a world of unfamiliar and insubstantial beauty, freedom and (by definition) irresponsibility. At the risk of oversimplifying, one might almost say that the Classical principle--the commonplace, the real, the tangible--exists this side of the glass, and that the far side of the glass--free, amorphous, unformed, unfenced--is the home of things Romantic.

Given the disaffection with present reality to which Larkin confesses in his work, the sense of incarceration that attends him, and the incentive to aspire to things unformed, unfenced, and in some sense free, the question arises how far it is legitimate to think of him as a poet writing in the Romantic tradition--and, if this is legitimate, whether his loyalties belong with the early writers in this tradition, for whom release of a kind is possible, or with the later poets, for whom desire is inseparable from disillusion.

iii. Literary criticism and Larkin's Romanticism.

Literary criticism has been divided on the question of how far Larkin breathes new life into the Classical tradition, and how far he extends the Romantic. As a poet of The Movement generation, he might be expected to adhere to austere Augustan principles of the kind championed in Purity of Diction in English Verse, a volume described by its author as The Movement's "manifesto." [39] This was the view taken by Bateson as early as 1957:

After Dryden (and Rochester), Pope (and Gay); after Auden (and Empson), Larkin (and Davie). [40]

Larkin's Augustan manner (or manners) have been widely acknowledged since. D.J. Enright comments on Larkin's "verbal fastidiousness" and his "severe beauty of rhythm," while Davie draws attention to Larkin's "level-toned acceptance" of what he sees. [41] To such typically Augustan virtues as modesty, restraint and even-handedness, Jones adds another: Larkin's poems, he suggests,

reflect a world in which feeling and intelligence are actively engaged but in the manner of eighteenth century scepticism. [42]

In the sensibility they reveal and the objectives they set themselves, then, Larkin's poems appear on this evidence to subscribe to Augustan or Classical virtues most emphatically. Moreover, in Larkin's self-restraint, his elegance, his modesty, his austerity, his formal control and his empirical level eye, there is more than a suggestion that limits of a kind advocated by Hulme are being respected.

But though many critics have drawn attention to Larkin's Classical inheritance, they are nevertheless still in the minority. There is a rather more widespread (if unfocused) agreement that powerful Romantic instincts underwrite the poems. Christopher Ricks offers an economical account of the consensus:

Larkin combines what in less good poets prove

incompatible: the understandings both of classicism and of romanticism. [43]

Moreover, he advances a persuasive analysis of the relationship between the two traditions in Larkin's work:

though Larkin's convictions are classical, his impulses are romantic. [44]

The general analysis that Larkin owes a great deal to both traditions seems relatively easy to accept. But the particular view that Larkin makes the two traditions compatible with one another, that he "combines" them without prejudice, is not unanimously agreed among critics. On this question--the relationship in the poems between the Classical element and the Romantic--critics might be said to be divided, like Gaul, into three parts.

The first of these schools takes the view that the opposed principles inherent in Larkin's poems work in harmony with one another. As Ricks himself says, the poet "combines" the Classical principle with the Romantic. Whalen speaks not of Classicism but of scepticism: Larkin, he argues,

is a very sceptical poet, but his scepticism does not erase a more romantic impulse in his poetry, a thirst for a mystical dimension to experience [45]

The scepticism, in Whalen's analysis, has the upper hand, but in general scepticism and the "mystical dimension" make room for one another. Guido Latre develops the analysis. In his view, the "realistic" is inherently implicated in the "romantic," the two principles co-habiting (as it were) in

"harmony":

the harmony ... between our realistic knowledge of necessity and our romantic dream of an 'Elsewhere' without restrictions. [46]

Reality is implicitly contrasted with Romanticism, but in the view of the first school, the two impulses are not divided from each other. Rather they complement one another--or that is their purpose. In Latre's view,

Larkin seems constantly in search of the symbolic moment in which mimesis of reality and creative transformation intersect. [47]

To speak of intersections, combinations and harmony, as this school does, is to suggest that the two principles overlap with one another: that the mystical inheres in the real, and the exotic in the commonplace. Bayley takes the analysis of the first school to its logical conclusion: in Larkin's poems, he believes,

romanticism is the most intense aspect of a common reality, an elsewhere conjured up by soberly precise insistence on the here and now. [48]

The real is again contrasted with the Romantic. But the contrast is effaced, in the view of this school, by the ease with which the poet integrates the two principles, one with the other. Bayley argues:

there is no gap for him between romantic vision, 'ever eager-eyed,' and boring bleak reality. [49]

So far from working in separation from one another, then--

or, indeed, in conflict with one another--the two principles co-habit (as it were) not merely together but within one another: the ideal is one feature among others in the empirical world of the poems, these critics argue, for there is, as Bayley remarks, "no gap."

This school of thought is distinctly in the minority. The second school, which might be described as a school of conflict, occupies what is perhaps the most popular ground. The conviction that the two opposed principles of Larkin's poems are antagonistic to one another is the guiding idea that underwrites this school. This sense of an antagonism in the poems may be deduced from the terms in which the third school discusses the issue: there is an "unsettled quarrel" here, or an "unresting conflict," a series of "continual transitions," a "struggle."

Everett's analysis seems at first to share the view of the first school, and to advance the argument for harmony and inherence: the realism and "formal excellence" of the poems, she comments, constitute,

paradoxically, a conditioning law and element of their intense if individual romanticism, their idealism. [50]

The positive inheres in the negative, it seems, and realism is an "element" in the poems' "romanticism." Yet the two principles, as she goes on to show, are in fact "quite opposed," and the two impulses do battle:

Larkin's poems seem to contain equal measures of quite opposed qualities: a strong, highly 'literal' realism, and an idealism the more intense for its bodilessness. The continual transitions between the two and the

unresting conflict between them gave his verse a strength and energy sometimes hidden by the temperate calm of its surface. But the dynamic movement is always there, one term necessitating the other [51]

To speak of "continual transitions" and "unresting conflict" is to move the argument away from thoughts of harmony, inherence and combination. But this kind of endemic instability, this restlessness, is the essence of the second school's approach. Morrison characterises this kind of antagonism as a "debate" which takes place

between two voices: one voice sober and responsible, the other adventurous and romantic. [52]

More specifically, as he proceeds to show, Larkin's poems are underwritten by a "conflict" which cannot be solved:

the conflict between a disappointed resignation in the face of what life is, and a continuing awareness of what it 'should' or 'might' or 'could' or 'ought' to have been. [53]

Realism, restraint, responsibility and resignation are engaged, it seems, in a constant (and alliterative) conflict with the Romantic in Larkin's work. The second school, then, places its emphasis on a permanent instability, an unsettled dispute. In Seamus Heaney's view, Larkin

cannot resist the romantic poet in himself who must respond with pleasure and alacrity. [54]

This impulse, says Heaney, animates what he sees as the

unsettled quarrel conducted all through the mature poetry between vision and experience. [55]

Vision and experience: according to the first school of thought, the vision is inherent in the experience, and the remote and desirable constitute merely one aspect of the real. In the analysis of the second school, the appearance of harmony is deceptive, and the two impulses find themselves in permanent conflict with one another for the poet's confidence.

The third school might be called the school of incompatibility. This school argues that the real cannot co-exist with the Romantic. Where the two principles are placed side-by-side, the Romantic merely illuminates what the real lacks, souring the everyday world the poems describe with tempting but unavailable images of how things should be: almost an anti-Romanticism. In his review of The Whitsun Weddings, Falck argues that Larkin's poems have attempted

a kind of steady exorcising of romantic illusions, an ever-deepening acceptance of the ordinariness of things as they are And yet at the same time the unreal wishes have continued to haunt this ordinary world and to make everything in it seem stale and impoverished.
[56]

Thurley's analysis of Larkin's stance sees Romanticism not as a matter of "illusions" but of "grace." Yet essentially he argues, as Falck does, that the distance which he believes the Romantic elects to keep ultimately serves only to sour the everyday:

The Romantic grace that heightened and lifted so many passages in The Less Deceived has evaporated for good, revealing the crabbed, ugly world of suburban work he

had all along known was awaiting him. [57]

The chief objective of the third school, then, is to draw attention to the extent to which "Elsewhere" belittles "Here"--as happens in "Ode to a Nightingale," perhaps--simply by keeping its distance. The terms in which such critics describe the world of the poems tells its own story: it is "mundane" and "cold," "crabbed" and "ugly," "stale" and "impoverished." This poverty arises from the gap between worlds (as these critics see it), the permanent incompatibility of the ideal with the real, which serves merely to corrode our esteem for the world we inhabit. The relationship between the two principles, then, is not one of co-existence and harmony, nor indeed of conflict, but rather one of contrast and distance: the "desolate distance," as Alan Brownjohn puts it,

the gap between human hope and cold reality [58]

Thus whereas the first school believes that there is "no gap" between the opposed principles, and the second speaks of "continual transitions" between them, the third argues emphatically for the existence of "the gap"--and, more generally, for the corrosive effect of the gap on the everyday world of the poems.

iv. The place of "the gap" in Larkin's poems.

This thesis has acknowledged that in a small number of poems in Larkin's canon--perhaps no more than half a dozen--

the gap between "Here" and "Elsewhere" is closed, so that a poise or balance is momentarily achieved in which things "out of reach" are reached and things "out of sight" seen. Moreover, there is a further small group of poems in which no gap exists because no "Elsewhere" exists: that is, life as it is lived pleases and gratifies the poet to a point where thoughts of worlds other than this are momentarily banished. Poems of this kind include "To the Sea," "The Trees," "First Sight," "Cut Grass" and "Show Saturday." In poems like these, although "Here" is no doubt occasionally guilty of "falling short" [CP, 174], it satisfies nevertheless--with all the atmosphere of compromise that word invokes.

In Larkin's poems in general, however, present reality for the poet himself is often the very soul of frustration. Poems like "The Dance" serve as a reminder of the incidental frustrations and failures that dog the existence charted in these poems. Works like "Toads" are a reminder of the poet's consistent doubts about the course of the life described here. On a more fundamental level, the poet is no better blessed. The life the poems describe is one of deep-seated frustration, even dislocation. Poems like "Mr Bleaney" are a reminder of this. And works like "High Windows" supply the poet's representative metaphor for this frustration.

The poet's sense of his own exclusion from the satisfactions of this world--such as they are--is the best incentive for his preoccupation with worlds other than this.

As a general rule, however, such otherworlds fail to compensate because they refuse to come within reach. This is especially true of love. The poet's preoccupation with this emotion arises from the hope it inspires that dimension-free otherworlds can be discovered and enjoyed, in the manner of Donne. The failure to hold love to its promises serves only to reinforce the poet's sense of exclusion.

This sense of being isolated and cut off from the various manifestations of "Elsewhere," especially in the late poems, is emphatically underlined by the place of the window in the poems. In poems like "High Windows" and "Sad Steps," "Vers de Societe" and "The Building," "Talking in Bed" and "Aubade," present reality is largely joyless and frustrating. Indeed, in "Aubade," present reality is summarised as little better than an unhappy life that leads straight to death. In poems like these, the poet has every reason to entertain hopes of a life other than this. Yet hopes of such a life prove impossible to fulfil. In each poem, of course, the window serves as a metaphor not only for the temptation to desire, which is very strong, but also for the impossibility of being satisfied. It serves, in short, as a symbol of the gap between "Here" and "Elsewhere."

On the question of whether, in general, a gap exists between the real and the ideal in these poems, then, it is difficult--other than in the case of the small number of poems already mentioned, like "To the Sea" or "Here"--to see

room for valid debate. "Elsewhere," in general, stays elsewhere, and, as the fifth chapter aimed to show, the poet ultimately seems happier thus in many ways. This kind of analysis might be called a psychological analysis, because it aims to examine the dilemma of a single mind confronted with the choice between desire and satisfaction. The analysis advanced in the fifth chapter, to put it bluntly, is that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive.

But it is equally valid to advance a philosophical or metaphysical analysis of the process by which--on those few occasions when the gap closes--satisfaction disappoints. That is to say, it is equally valid to concentrate not on the mind "satisfied," but on the thing gained and the mind's reactions to it. Before the object of desire is won, its possibilities seem endless and its properties infinite. This is especially true with love--or, rather, desire--because it attaches itself to so unpredictable and diverse an object as a human being. Once the thing desired has been gained, however, and begins to become familiar, part of present reality, it loses its lustre, its potential boundlessness, and its infinite possibility. It becomes disappointingly real. Characters like Arnold, and "the boys" in "Breadfruit", become familiar with this source of disillusion.

In a more general sense, this is well demonstrated in a relatively early poem, "Arrival." Larkin's poems are not (as was said) overwhelmingly the record of hopes satisfied--though it is true that some desires are met. But in

"Arrival," the poet looks forward to seeing his hopes bear fruit. At first this poem is a record of the pleasure the poet takes in travelling to a new town--the novelty is crucial--and finding it to his liking:

Morning, a glass door, flashes
Gold names off the new city,
Whose white shelves and domes travel
The slow sky all day.
I land to stay here [CP, 51]

The thing desired has been newly-gained, and the poet's pleasure is self-evident. Only one factor clouds the future. Gradually the ideal will become real:

For this ignorance of me
Seems a kind of innocence.
Fast enough I shall wound it:
Let me breathe till then
Its milk-aired Eden,
Till my own life impound it

To "impound" a phenomenon is to bring it in from outside. It is to site it at a distance, then to make it immediate, to deprive it of its other-ness, even its otherworldliness, and to reduce it to the ranks of the merely real. In short, it is to deprive it of its essential beauty, to destroy the very basis on which it was desired. To a poet like Larkin galvanised by things other, such a prospect is counter-productive. As a general rule, Larkin is willing to let "Elsewhere" stay elsewhere. In this way, it can continue to extend its promise.

This is a general rule, one which admits of a number of exceptions, as this thesis has acknowledged. Perhaps the best account of the possibility of closing on "Elsewhere" in

Larkin's poems is the ironically-titled "Here." At its conclusion, this poem's momentum sweeps the reader out to a point where light and water, images of "Elsewhere," meet with the self in a poised arrest. This double-life or ambiguity is underwritten by the ambiguity of the poet's own role in the piece: obtrusively directing the reader's vision yet simultaneously absent, the poet wears the self lightly and comes close in this poem to the beauty of somewhere he isn't. At the close there is no impounding, no satisfaction and no fulfilment, but a magnetism and a desire poised and suspended.

But in general, the gap between "Here" and "Elsewhere" is inviolable. This can best be seen by reviewing those works in which the characteristic centrifugal motion of the poems in general applies not to a principle of desiring and acquiring but to one of imagining and becoming. Poems of this kind include "Afternoons," "Self's the Man" and "Toads Revisited," in which the poet explicitly looks out from self to not-self, in order to build the bridge that briefly releases him from the prison of the self and enables him to sample the beauty of somewhere he isn't.

But in these poems, too, there is ultimately no question of the gap between "Here" and "Elsewhere" closing. The poet selects those who are least like himself--women, married men, the unemployed, and so on--and though he constructs a bridge between himself and them, the reader is perpetually aware, not of similarity but of the contrast. The poet's imaginative identification with the young mothers

in "Afternoons," for example, can only be temporary. An atmosphere of complete contrast, ^{which cannot be broken down} hangs over poems like these, ~~which cannot be broken down~~. And this becomes clear when one reads a relatively early poem like "Toads," in which the poet accepts that a life of freedom, different from his own, is simply beyond him, and out of his reach.

In short, though the poet is much given to the building of bridges between worlds, these are bridges that he remains very much disinclined to cross. To build and to cross are, of course, two quite different activities: the separation of them in Larkin's poems is equivalent to the separation of desire from love in the love poems, or, more generally, of hope from satisfaction, or of imagining from becoming. The building of the bridge is a declaration of intent, but the intent is only rarely put into practice because the poet only rarely crosses to sample the beauty of somewhere he isn't. "Think of being them," says the poet of the tramps in "Toads Revisited"--and certainly, throughout the poems, to think of being other than himself is what he does. But, ultimately, it is all he does [CP, 147].

The same might be said of the poems as art. When Larkin speaks of the desire to write poems unlike his own, poems which might be by other poets, he returns in interview to a subject he examines in poetry: crossing the bridge from self to other. There is some evidence that he succeeds in doing so: from poems like "How Distant," "Solar" and "The Explosion," the poet himself as an identifiable voice and character is largely absent. Poems like these might indeed

be by other, different poets. At the same time, they constitute a tiny percentage of his finished work. Moreover, in very late poems like "Aubade" and "Love Again," the familiar dramatic and character-centred style returns. Significantly, both these late poems are set in an enclosed space, a room: in both, the poet is isolated alone "Here," but thinking of "Elsewhere," building a bridge which he will not cross. It is, of course, "Aubade" that describes death as a phenomenon that "we can't escape, / Yet can't accept" [CP, 208]. But the same might be said of the life the poet describes.

In his interview with the Observer, Larkin is asked by Miriam Gross whether a sinecure position as a University poet-in-residence might not suit him as he begins to age. He replies without hesitation that it wouldn't do: "I don't want to go around," he explains, "pretending to be me." [59] It is a very valid answer. In the first place, as the first chapter of the thesis indicated, the poet ("the poet") who answers to the first-person in these poems is not Larkin the man, the historical figure, any more than John, the central character of Jill, is Larkin the adolescent. In particular, though, in declaring in this interview his impatience with the character he presents as himself in the poems, Larkin articulates what is, perhaps, the poems' chief theme, which subsequent chapters of this thesis have aimed to address: the reluctance "to be me" (or "'me'"), and the concomitant desire to be other than the self, to find release from "Here" and to sample the beauty of somewhere he isn't--

together with a sense of frustration and impatience that, in the end, the gap between worlds refuses to narrow, the obstacles that separate these worlds from one another refuse to give, and the general burden of the self, of being "me," proves impossible to put down.

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8. James Gordin, Postwar British Fiction (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 99.
9. A phrase Larkin uses to describe the aim of his later poems. See Grevel Lindop, "Being Different from Yourself," p. 51.
10. Larkin, "An Interview with Paris Review," in Required Writing, p. 63.
11. Larkin, "An Interview with the Observer," in Required Writing, p. 49.

Chapter Five: Love and Desire in Larkin's Poems.

1. Falck, "Essential Beauty," p. 4.
2. Joseph Brodsky, "The Keening Muse," in his Less Than One (1986; rpt. London: Penguin, 1987), p. 45.
3. Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," in the Collected Poems, ed. H.M. Margoliouth, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 27.
4. Auden, "Lay your sleeping head, my love," in The English Auden, p. 207.
5. John Donne, "The Good-Morrow," in his Collected Poems, ed. Herbert Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), p. 7.
6. Larkin, "An Interview with Paris Review," in Required Writing, p. 68.
7. Larkin, "Mrs Hardy's Memories," in Required Writing, p. 147.
8. Thurley, The Ironic Harvest, p. 145.
9. James Fenton, "A Staffordshire Murderer," in the Penguin Book of Modern British Poetry, eds. Andrew Motion and Blake Morrison (1982; rpt. London: Penguin, 1984), p. 112.
10. Eliot, Complete Poems and Plays, p. 68.

Chapter Six: the Romantic Element in Larkin's Poems.

1. Donne, "The Sunne Rising," in his Collected Poems, p. 11.
2. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," in his Poetical Works, ed. E.H. Coleridge (1912; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 178.
3. John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," in his Poetical Works, p. 257.
4. Graham Hough, The Romantic Poets (1953; rpt. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1957), p. 8.
5. Lilian R. Furst, Romanticism in Perspective (1969;

- rpt. London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 55.
6. Thurley, The Romantic Predicament, p. 95.
 7. Furst, Romanticism in Perspective, p. 98.
 8. John Bayley, The Romantic Survival (1957; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), p. 41.
 9. Bayley, The Romantic Survival, pp. 9 - 10.
 10. Thurley, The Romantic Predicament, p. 99.
 11. Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 7.
 12. William Wordsworth, The Prelude, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926), p. 63.
 13. Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach," in his Poems, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: Longman, 1965), p. 239.
 14. Thurley, The Romantic Predicament, p. 43.
 15. Furst, Romanticism in Perspective, p. 214.
 16. Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 43.
 17. Furst, Romanticism in Perspective, p. 131.
 18. Wordsworth, "The world is too much with us," in his Poetical Works, vol. 3, ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), p. 18.
 19. Furst, Romanticism in Perspective, p. 245.
 20. Bayley, The Romantic Survival, p. 81.
 21. Wordsworth, "Lines," in his Poetical Works, vol. 2, ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon, 1944), p. 259.
 22. Thurley, The Romantic Predicament, p. 173.
 23. Thomas Hardy, "At Castle Boterel," in his Collected Poems (1930; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 330.
 24. Hough, The Romantic Poets, p. 8.
 25. Thurley, The Romantic Predicament, p. 164.
 26. Thurley, The Romantic Predicament, p. 186.
 27. Furst, Romanticism in Perspective, pp. 245 and 100 respectively.
 28. Edward Thomas, "Old Man," in his Collected Poems, ed. R. George Thomas (1978; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), p. 19.
 29. Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 8.
 30. Thurley, The Romantic Predicament, p. 186.
 31. Thurley, The Romantic Predicament, p. 182.
 32. John Bayley, "The Last Romantic," in the London Review of Books, 5, No. 8 (5 - 18 May 1983), 11.
 33. Bayley, "The Last Romantic," p. 12.
 34. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," p. 116.
 35. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," p. 116.
 36. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," p. 119.
 37. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," p. 119.
 38. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," p. 127.
 39. Davie, Purity of Diction in English Verse, p. 197.
 40. F.W. Bateson, "Auden's (and Empson's) Heirs," in Essays in Criticism, No. 7 (January 1957), p. 76.
 41. D. J. Enright, "Down Cemetery Road," in Conspirators and Poets (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 145; Davie, "Landscapes of Larkin," p. 66.
 42. Jones, "The Poetry of Philip Larkin," p. 143.
 43. Christopher Ricks, "Like Something Almost Being Said," in Larkin at Sixty, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London:

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44. Ricks, "Like Something Almost Being Said," p. 123.
 45. Terry Whalen, "Philip Larkin's Imagist Bias," in Critical Quarterly, 23, No. 2 (1981), 42.
 46. Latre, "Realist or Romantic? Philip Larkin's Modes of Writing," p. 199.
 47. Latre, "Realist or Romantic? Philip Larkin's Modes of Writing," p. 198.
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 49. Bayley, "The Last Romantic," p. 11.
 50. Everett, "Larkin's Edens," p. 250.
 51. Everett, "Larkin's Edens," p. 248.
 52. Morrison, The Movement, p. 105.
 53. Morrison, The Movement, p. 189.
 54. Seamus Heaney, "The Main of Light," in Larkin at Sixty, p. 136.
 55. Heaney, "The Main of Light," p. 132.
 56. Falck, "Essential Beauty," p. 3.
 57. Thurley, The Ironic Harvest, p. 146.
 58. Alan Brownjohn, Philip Larkin (London: Longman, 1975), p. 3.
 59. Larkin, "An Interview with the Observer," in Required Writing, p. 51.

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