

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Philip Larkin**

**- poems -**

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## **A Study of Reading Habits**

When getting my nose in a book  
Cured most things short of school,  
It was worth ruining my eyes  
To know I could still keep cool,  
And deal out the old right hook  
To dirty dogs twice my size.

Later, with inch-thick specs,  
Evil was just my lark:  
Me and my coat and fangs  
Had ripping times in the dark.  
The women I clubbed with sex!  
I broke them up like meringues.

Don't read much now: the dude  
Who lets the girl down before  
The hero arrives, the chap  
Who's yellow and keeps the store  
Seem far too familiar. Get stewed:  
Books are a load of crap.

Philip Larkin

## Ambulances

Closed like confessionals, they thread  
Loud noons of cities, giving back  
None of the glances they absorb.  
Light glossy grey, arms on a plaque,  
They come to rest at any kerb:  
All streets in time are visited.

Then children strewn on steps or road,  
Or women coming from the shops  
Past smells of different dinners, see  
A wild white face that overtops  
Red stretcher-blankets momentarily  
As it is carried in and stowed,

And sense the solving emptiness  
That lies just under all we do,  
And for a second get it whole,  
So permanent and blank and true.  
The fastened doors recede. Poor soul,  
They whisper at their own distress;

For borne away in deadened air  
May go the sudden shut of loss  
Round something nearly at an end,  
And what cohered in it across  
The years, the unique random blend  
Of families and fashions, there

At last begin to loosen. Far  
From the exchange of love to lie  
Unreachable insided a room  
The traffic parts to let go by  
Brings closer what is left to come,  
And dulls to distance all we are.

Philip Larkin

## **An Arundel Tomb**

Side by side, their faces blurred,  
The earl and countess lie in stone,  
Their proper habits vaguely shown  
As jointed armour, stiffened pleat,  
And that faint hint of the absurd -  
The little dogs under their feet.

Such plainness of the pre-baroque  
Hardly involves the eye, until  
It meets his left-hand gauntlet, still  
Clasped empty in the other; and  
One sees, with a sharp tender shock,  
His hand withdrawn, holding her hand.

They would not think to lie so long.  
Such faithfulness in effigy  
Was just a detail friends would see:  
A sculptor's sweet commissioned grace  
Thrown off in helping to prolong  
The Latin names around the base.

They would no guess how early in  
Their supine stationary voyage  
The air would change to soundless damage,  
Turn the old tenantry away;  
How soon succeeding eyes begin  
To look, not read. Rigidly they

Persisted, linked, through lengths and breadths  
Of time. Snow fell, undated. Light  
Each summer thronged the grass. A bright  
Litter of birdcalls strewed the same  
Bone-littered ground. And up the paths  
The endless altered people came,

Washing at their identity.  
Now, helpless in the hollow of  
An unarmorial age, a trough  
Of smoke in slow suspended skeins  
Above their scrap of history,  
Only an attitude remains:

Time has transfigures them into  
Untruth. The stone fidelity  
They hardly meant has come to be  
Their final blazon, and to prove  
Our almost-instinct almost true:  
What will survive of us is love.

Philip Larkin

## **Annus Mirabilis**

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.

Up to then there'd only been  
A sort of bargaining,  
A wrangle for the ring,  
A shame that started at sixteen  
And spread to everything.

Then all at once the quarrel sank:  
Everyone felt the same,  
And every life became  
A brilliant breaking of the bank,  
A quite unlosable game.

So life was never better than  
In nineteen sixty-three  
(Though just too late for me) -  
Between the end of the Chatterley ban  
And the Beatles' first LP.

Philip Larkin

## Arrival

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;  
And the windows flock open  
And the curtains fly out like doves  
And a past dries in a wind.

Now let me lie down, under  
A wide-branched indifference,  
Shovel-faces like pennies  
Down the back of the mind,  
Find voices coined to  
An argot of motor-horns,  
And let the cluttered-up houses  
Keep their thick lives to themselves.

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-  
Slow-falling; grey-veil-hung; a theft,  
A style of dying only.

Philip Larkin

## At Grass

The eye can hardly pick them out  
From the cold shade they shelter in,  
Till wind distresses tail and mane;  
Then one crops grass, and moves about  
- The other seeming to look on -  
And stands anonymous again

Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps  
Two dozen distances sufficed  
To fable them : faint afternoons  
Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps,  
Whereby their names were artified  
To inlay faded, classic Junes -

Silks at the start : against the sky  
Numbers and parasols : outside,  
Squadrons of empty cars, and heat,  
And littered grass : then the long cry  
Hanging unhushed till it subside  
To stop-press columns on the street.

Do memories plague their ears like flies?  
They shake their heads. Dusk brims the shadows.  
Summer by summer all stole away,  
The starting-gates, the crowd and cries -  
All but the unmolested meadows.  
Almanacked, their names live; they

Have slipped their names, and stand at ease,  
Or gallop for what must be joy,  
And not a fieldglass sees them home,  
Or curious stop-watch prophesies :  
Only the grooms, and the groom's boy,  
With bridles in the evening come.

Philip Larkin

## Aubade

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.  
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.  
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.  
Till then I see what's really always there:  
Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,  
Making all thought impossible but how  
And where and when I shall myself die.  
Arid interrogation: yet the dread  
Of dying, and being dead,  
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.  
The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse  
- The good not done, the love not given, time  
Torn off unused - nor wretchedly because  
An only life can take so long to climb  
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;  
But at the total emptiness for ever,  
The sure extinction that we travel to  
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,  
Not to be anywhere,  
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

This is a special way of being afraid  
No trick dispels. Religion used to try,  
That vast, moth-eaten musical brocade  
Created to pretend we never die,  
And specious stuff that says No rational being  
Can fear a thing it will not feel, not seeing  
That this is what we fear - no sight, no sound,  
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,  
Nothing to love or link with,  
The anasthetic from which none come round.

And so it stays just on the edge of vision,  
A small, unfocused blur, a standing chill  
That slows each impulse down to indecision.  
Most things may never happen: this one will,  
And realisation of it rages out  
In furnace-fear when we are caught without  
People or drink. Courage is no good:  
It means not scaring others. Being brave  
Lets no one off the grave.  
Death is no different whined at than withstood.

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. One side will have to go.  
Meanwhile telephones crouch, getting ready to ring  
In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring  
Intricate rented world begins to rouse.  
The sky is white as clay, with no sun.  
Work has to be done.



Postmen like doctors go from house to house.

Philip Larkin

## **Autobiography at an Air-Station**

Delay, well, travellers must expect  
Delay. For how long? No one seems to know.  
With all the luggage weighed, the tickets checked,  
It can't be long... We amble too and fro,  
Sit in steel chairs, buy cigarettes and sweets  
And tea, unfold the papers. Ought we to smile,  
Perhaps make friends? No: in the race for seats  
You're best alone. Friendship is not worth while.

Six hours pass: if I'd gone by boat last night  
I'd be there now. Well, it's too late for that.  
The kiosk girl is yawning. I fell stale,  
Stupified, by inaction - and, as light  
Begins to ebb outside, by fear, I set  
So much on this Assumption. Now it's failed.

Philip Larkin

## Best Society

When I was a child, I thought,  
Casually, that solitude  
Never needed to be sought.  
Something everybody had,  
Like nakedness, it lay at hand,  
Not specially right or specially wrong,  
A plentiful and obvious thing  
Not at all hard to understand.

Then, after twenty, it became  
At once more difficult to get  
And more desired - though all the same  
More undesirable; for what  
You are alone has, to achieve  
The rank of fact, to be expressed  
In terms of others, or it's just  
A compensating make-believe.

Much better stay in company!  
To love you must have someone else,  
Giving requires a legatee,  
Good neighbours need whole parishfuls  
Of folk to do it on - in short,  
Our virtues are all social; if,  
Deprived of solitude, you chafe,  
It's clear you're not the virtuous sort.

Viciously, then, I lock my door.  
The gas-fire breathes. The wind outside  
Ushers in evening rain. Once more  
Uncontradicting solitude  
Supports me on its giant palm;  
And like a sea-anemone  
Or simple snail, there cautiously  
Unfolds, emerges, what I am.

Philip Larkin

## **Breadfruit**

Boys dream of native girls who bring breadfruit,  
Whatever they are,  
As bribes to teach them how to execute  
Sixteen sexual positions on the sand;  
This makes them join (the boys) the tennis club,  
Jive at the Mecca, use deodorants, and  
On Saturdays squire ex-schoolgirls to the pub  
By private car.

Such uncorrected visions end in church  
Or registrar:  
A mortgaged semi- with a silver birch;  
Nippers; the widowed mum; having to scheme  
With money; illness; age. So absolute  
Maturity falls, when old men sit and dream  
Of naked native girls who bring breadfruit  
Whatever they are.

Philip Larkin

## Church Going

Once I am sure there's nothing going on  
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.  
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,  
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut  
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff  
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;  
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,  
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off  
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

Move forward, run my hand around the font.  
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new-  
Cleaned or restored? Someone would know: I don't.  
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.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,  
And always end much at a loss like this,  
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,  
When churches fall completely out of use  
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep  
A few cathedrals chronically on show,  
Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,  
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.  
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come  
To make their children touch a particular stone;  
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some  
Advised night see walking a dead one?  
Power of some sort or other will go on  
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;  
But superstition, like belief, must die,  
And what remains when disbelief has gone?  
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognizable each week,  
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who  
Will be the last, the very last, to seek  
This place for what it was; one of the crew  
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?  
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,  
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff  
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?  
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt  
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground

Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt  
So long and equably what since is found  
Only in separation - marriage, and birth,  
And death, and thoughts of these - for whom was built  
This special shell? For, though I've no idea  
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,  
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 surprising  
A hunger in himself to be more serious,  
And gravitating with it to this ground,  
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,  
If only that so many dead lie round.

Philip Larkin

## Continuing to Live

Continuing to live -- that is, repeat  
A habit formed to get necessities --  
Is nearly always losing, or going without.  
It varies.

This loss of interest, hair, and enterprise --  
Ah, if the game were poker, yes,  
You might discard them, draw a full house!  
But it's chess.

And 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.

And what's the profit? Only that, in time,  
We half-identify the blind impress  
All our behaviors bear, may trace it home.  
But to confess,

On that green evening when our death begins,  
Just what it was, is hardly satisfying,  
Since it applied only to one man once,  
And that one dying.

Philip Larkin

## **Cut Grass**

Cut grass lies frail:  
Brief is the breath  
Mown stalks exhale.  
Long, long the death

It dies in the white hours  
Of young-leafed June  
With chestnut flowers,  
With hedges snowlike strewn,

White lilac bowed,  
Lost lanes of Queen Anne's lace,  
And that high-builed cloud  
Moving at summer's pace.

Philip Larkin



## **Days**

What are days for?  
Days are where we live.  
They come, they wake us  
Time and time over.  
They are to be happy in:  
Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question  
Brings the priest and the doctor  
In their long coats  
Running over the fields.

Philip Larkin

## Deceptions

"Of course I was drugged, and so heavily I did not regain consciousness until the next morning. I was horrified to discover that I had been ruined, and for some days I was inconsolable, and cried like a child to be killed or sent back to my aunt."

--Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor

Even so distant, I can taste the grief,  
Bitter and sharp with stalks, he made you gulp.  
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. All the unhurried day,  
Your mind lay open like a drawer of knives.

Slums, years, have buried you. I would not dare  
Console you if I could. What can be said,  
Except that suffering is exact, but where  
Desire takes charge, readings will grow erratic?  
For you would hardly care  
That you were less deceived, out on that bed,  
Than he was, stumbling up the breathless stair  
To burst into fulfillment's desolate attic.

Philip Larkin

## Dockery and Son

'Dockery was junior to you,  
Wasn't he?' said the Dean. 'His son's here now.'  
Death-suited, visitant, I nod. 'And do  
You keep in touch with-' Or remember how  
Black-gowned, unbreakfasted, and still half-tight  
We used to stand before that desk, to give  
'Our version' of 'these incidents last night'?  
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.  
Canal and clouds and colleges subside  
Slowly from view. But Dockery, good Lord,  
Anyone up today must have been born  
In '43, when I was twenty-one.  
If he was younger, did he get this son  
At nineteen, twenty? Was he that withdrawn

High-collared public-schoolboy, sharing rooms  
With Cartwright who was killed? Well, it just shows  
How much . . . How little . . . Yawning, I suppose  
I fell asleep, waking at the fumes  
And furnace-glazes of Sheffield, where I changed,  
And ate an awful pie, and walked along  
The platform to its end to see the ranged  
Joining and parting lines reflect a strong

Unhindered moon. To have no son, no wife,  
No house or land still seemed quite natural.  
Only a numbness registered the shock  
Of finding out how much had gone of life,  
How widely from the others. Dockery, now:  
Only nineteen, he must have taken stock  
Of what he wanted, and been capable  
Of . . . No, that's not the difference: rather, how

Convinced he was he should be added to!  
Why did he think adding meant increase?  
To me it was dilution. Where do these  
Innate assumptions come from? Not from what  
We think truest, or most want to do:  
Those warp tight-shut, like doors. They're more a style  
Our lives bring with them: habit for a while,  
Suddenly they harden into all we've got

And how we got it; looked back on, they rear  
Like sand-clouds, thick and close, embodying  
For Dockery a son, for me nothing,  
Nothing with all a son's harsh patronage.  
Life is first boredom, then fear.  
Whether or not we use it, it goes,  
And leaves what something hidden from us chose,

And age, and then the only end of age.

Philip Larkin

## **Dublineseque**

Down stucco sidestreets,  
Where light is pewter  
And afternoon mist  
Brings lights on in shops  
Above race-guides and rosaries,  
A funeral passes.

The hearse is ahead,  
But after there follows  
A troop of streetwalkers  
In wide flowered hats,  
Leg-of-mutton sleeves,  
And ankle-length dresses.

There is an air of great friendliness,  
As if they were honouring  
One they were fond of;  
Some caper a few steps,  
Skirts held skilfully  
(Someone claps time),

And of great sadness also.  
As they wend away  
A voice is heard singing  
Of Kitty, or Katy,  
As if the name meant once  
All love, all beauty.

Philip Larkin

## Essential Beauty

In frames as large as rooms that face all ways  
And block the ends of streets with giant loaves,  
Screen graves with custard, cover slums with praise  
Of motor-oil and cuts of salmon, shine  
Perpetually these sharply-pictured groves  
Of how life should be. High above the gutter  
A silver knife sinks into golden butter,  
A glass of milk stands in a meadow, and  
Well-balanced families, in fine  
Midsummer weather, owe their smiles, their cars,  
Even their youth, to that small cube each hand  
Stretches towards. These, and the deep armchairs  
Aligned to cups at bedtime, radiant bars  
(Gas or electric), quarter-profile cats  
By slippers on warm mats,  
Reflect none of the rained-on streets and squares

They dominate outdoors. Rather, they rise  
Serenely to proclaim pure crust, pure foam,  
Pure coldness to our live imperfect eyes  
That stare beyond this world, where nothing's made  
As new or washed quite clean, seeking the home  
All such inhabit. There, dark rafted pubs  
Are filled with white-clothed ones from tennis-clubs,  
And the boy puking his heart out in the Gents  
Just missed them, as the pensioner paid  
A halfpenny more for Granny Graveclothes' Tea  
To taste old age, and dying smokers sense  
Walking towards them through some dappled park  
As if on water that unfocused she  
No match lit up, nor drag ever brought near,  
Who now stands newly clear,  
Smiling, and recognising, and going dark.

Philip Larkin

## Faith Healing

Slowly the women file to where he stands  
Upright in rimless glasses, silver hair,  
Dark suit, white collar. Stewards tirelessly  
Persuade them onwards to his voice and hands,  
Within whose warm spring rain of loving care  
Each dwells some twenty seconds. Now, dear child,  
What's wrong, the deep American voice demands,  
And, scarcely pausing, goes into a prayer  
Directing God about this eye, that knee.  
Their heads are clasped abruptly; then, exiled

Like losing thoughts, they go in silence; some  
Sheepishly stray, not back into their lives  
Just yet; but some stay stiff, twitching and loud  
With deep hoarse tears, as if a kind of dumb  
And idiot child within them still survives  
To re-awake at kindness, thinking a voice  
At last calls them alone, that hands have come  
To lift and lighten; and such joy arrives  
Their thick tongues blort, their eyes squeeze grief, a crowd  
Of huge unheard answers jam and rejoice -

What's wrong! Moustached in flowered frocks they shake:  
By now, all's wrong. In everyone there sleeps  
A sense of life lived according to love.  
To some it means the difference they could make  
By loving others, but across most it sweeps  
As all they might have done had they been loved.  
That nothing cures. An immense slackening ache,  
As when, thawing, the rigid landscape weeps,  
Spreads slowly through them - that, and the voice above  
Saying Dear child, and all time has disproved.

Philip Larkin

## **Far Out**

Beyond the dark cartoons  
Are darker spaces where  
Small cloudy nests of stars  
Seem to float on air.

These have no proper names:  
Men out alone at night  
Never look up at them  
For guidance or delight,

For such evasive dust  
Can make so little clear:  
Much less is known than not,  
More far than near.

Philip Larkin



## First Sight

Lambs that learn to walk in snow  
When their bleating clouds the air  
Meet a vast unwelcome, know  
Nothing but a sunless glare.  
Newly stumbling to and fro  
All they find, outside the fold,  
Is a wretched width of cold.

As they wait beside the ewe,  
Her fleeces wetly caked, there lies  
Hidden round them, waiting too,  
Earth's immeasurable surprise.  
They could not grasp it if they knew,  
What so soon will wake and grow  
Utterly unlike the snow.

Philip Larkin

## For Sidney Bechet

That note you hold, narrowing and rising, shakes  
Like New Orleans reflected on the water,  
And in all ears appropriate falsehood wakes,

Building for some a legendary Quarter  
Of balconies, flower-baskets and quadrilles,  
Everyone making love and going shares--

Oh, play that thing! Mute glorious Storyvilles  
Others may license, grouping around their chairs  
Sporting-house girls like circus tigers (priced

Far above rubies) to pretend their fads,  
While scholars manqués nod around unnoticed  
Wrapped up in personnels like old plaids.

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

And greeted as the natural noise of good,  
Scattering long-haired grief and scored pity.

Philip Larkin

## Friday Night at the Royal Station Hotel

Light spreads darkly downwards from the high  
Clusters of lights over empty chairs  
That face each other, coloured differently.  
Through open doors, the dining-room declares  
A larger loneliness of knives and glass  
And silence laid like carpet. A porter reads  
An unsold evening paper. Hours pass,  
And all the salesmen have gone back to Leeds,  
Leaving full ashtrays in the Conference Room.

In shoeless corridors, the lights burn. How  
Isolated, like a fort, it is -  
The headed paper, made for writing home  
(If home existed) letters of exile: Now  
Night comes on. Waves fold behind villages.

Philip Larkin

## Going

There is an evening coming in  
Across the fields, one never seen before,  
That lights no lamps.

Silken it seems at a distance, yet  
When it is drawn up over the knees and breast  
It brings no comfort.

Where has the tree gone, that locked  
Earth to the sky? What is under my hands,  
That I cannot feel?

What loads my hands down?

Philip Larkin

## He Hears that His Beloved Has Become Engaged

For C.G.B.

When she came on, you couldn't keep your seat;  
Fighting your way up through the orchestra,  
Tup-heavy bumpkin, you confused your feet,  
Fell in the drum - how we went ha ha ha!  
But once you gained her side and started waltzing  
We all began to cheer; the way she leant  
Her cheek on yours and laughed was so exalting  
We thought you were stooging for the management.

But no. What you did, any of us might.  
And saying so I see our difference:  
Not your aplomb (I used mine to sit tight),  
But fancying you improve her. Where's the sense  
In saying love, but meaning indifference ?  
You'll only change her. Still, I'm sure you're right.

Philip Larkin

## High Windows

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--  
Bonds and gestures pushed to one side  
Like an outdated combine harvester,  
And everyone young going down the long slide

To happiness, endlessly. I wonder if  
Anyone looked at me, forty years back,  
And thought, That'll be the life;  
No God any more, or sweating in the dark

About hell and that, or having to hide  
What you think of the priest. He  
And his lot will all go down the long slide  
Like free bloody birds. And immediately

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.

Philip Larkin

## Homage to a Government

Next year we are to bring all the soldiers home  
For lack of money, and it is all right.  
Places they guarded, or kept orderly,  
We want the money for ourselves at home  
Instead of working. And this is all right.

It's hard to say who wanted it to happen,  
But now it's been decided nobody minds.  
The places are a long way off, not here,  
Which is all right, and from what we hear  
The soldiers there only made trouble happen.  
Next year we shall be easier in our minds.

Next year we shall be living in a country  
That brought its soldiers home for lack of money.  
The statues will be standing in the same  
Tree-muffled squares, and look nearly the same.  
Our children will not know it's a different country.  
All we can hope to leave them now is money.

Philip Larkin

## Home is So Sad

Home is so sad. It stays as it was left,  
Shaped to the comfort of the last to go  
As if to win them back. Instead, bereft  
Of anyone to please, it withers so,  
Having no heart to put aside the theft

And turn again to what it started as,  
A joyous shot at how things ought to be,  
Long fallen wide. You can see how it was:  
Look at the pictures and the cutlery.  
The music in the piano stool. That vase.

Philip Larkin



## How Distant

How distant, the departure of young men  
Down valleys, or watching  
The green shore past the salt-white cordage  
Rising and falling.

Cattlemen, or carpenters, or keen  
Simply to get away  
From married villages before morning,  
Melodeons play

On tiny decks past fraying cliffs of water  
Or late at night  
Sweet under the differently-swung stars,  
When the chance sight

Of a girl doing her laundry in the steerage  
Ramifies endlessly.  
This is being young,  
Assumption of the startled century

Like new store clothes,  
The huge decisions printed out by feet  
Inventing where they tread,  
The random windows conjuring a street.

Philip Larkin

## **I Have Started to Say**

I have started to say  
"A quarter of a century"  
Or "thirty years back"  
About my own life.

It makes me breathless  
It's like falling and recovering  
In huge gesturing loops  
Through an empty sky.

All that's left to happen  
Is some deaths (my own included).  
Their order, and their manner,  
Remain to be learnt.

Philip Larkin

## **I Remember, I Remember**

Coming up England by a different line  
For once, early in the cold new year,  
We stopped, and, watching men with number plates  
Sprint down the platform to familiar gates,  
'Why, Coventry!' I exclaimed. "I was born here.'

I leant far out, and squinned for a sign  
That this was still the town that had been 'mine'  
So long, but found I wasn't even clear  
Which side was which. From where those cycle-crates  
Were standing, had we annually departed

For all those family hols? . . . A whistle went:  
Things moved. I sat back, staring at my boots.  
'Was that,' my friend smiled, 'where you "have your roots"?'  
No, only where my childhood was unspent,  
I wanted to retort, just where I started:

By now I've got the whole place clearly charted.  
Our garden, first: where I did not invent  
Blinding theologies of flowers and fruits,  
And wasn't spoken to by an old hat.  
And here we have that splendid family

I never ran to when I got depressed,  
The boys all biceps and the girls all chest,  
Their comic Ford, their farm where I could be  
'Really myself'. I'll show you, come to that,  
The bracken where I never trembling sat,

Determined to go through with it; where she  
Lay back, and 'all became a burning mist'.  
And, in those offices, my doggerel  
Was not set up in blunt ten-point, nor read  
By a distinguished cousin of the mayor,

Who didn't call and tell my father There  
Before us, had we the gift to see ahead -  
'You look as though you wished the place in Hell,'  
My friend said, 'judging from your face.' 'Oh well,  
I suppose it's not the place's fault,' I said.

'Nothing, like something, happens anywhere.'

Philip Larkin

## **If Hands Could Free You, Heart**

If hands could free you, heart,  
Where would you fly?  
Far, beyond every part  
Of earth this running sky  
Makes desolate? Would you cross  
City and hill and sea,  
If hands could set you free?

I would not lift the latch;  
For I could run  
Through fields, pit-valleys, catch  
All beauty under the sun--  
Still end in loss:  
I should find no bent arm, no bed  
To rest my head.

Philip Larkin

## **Ignorance**

Strange to know nothing, never to be sure  
Of what is true or right or real,  
But forced to qualify or so I feel,  
Or Well, it does seem so:  
Someone must know.

Strange to be ignorant of the way things work:  
Their skill at finding what they need,  
Their sense of shape, and punctual spread of seed,  
And willingness to change;  
Yes, it is strange,

Even to wear such knowledge - for our flesh  
Surrounds us with its own decisions -  
And yet spend all our life on imprecisions,  
That when we start to die  
Have no idea why.

Philip Larkin

## **Is It For Now Or For Always**

Is it for now or for always,  
The world hangs on a stalk?  
Is it a trick or a trysting-place,  
The woods we have found to walk?

Is it a mirage or miracle,  
Your lips that lift at mine:  
And the suns like a juggler's juggling-balls,  
Are they a sham or a sign?

Shine out, my sudden angel,  
Break fear with breast and brow,  
I take you now and for always,  
For always is always now.

Philip Larkin

## **Library Ode**

New eyes each year  
Find old books here,  
And new books,too,  
Old eyes renew;  
So youth and age  
Like ink and page  
In this house join,  
Minting new coin.

Philip Larkin

## Like the Train's Beat

Like the train's beat  
Swift language flutters the lips  
Of the Polish airgirl in the corner seat,  
The swinging and narrowing sun  
Lights her eyelashes, shapes  
Her sharp vivacity of bone.  
Hair, wild and controlled, runs back:  
And 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.  
And all humanity of interest  
Before her angled beauty falls,  
As whorling notes are pressed  
In a bird's throat, issuing meaningless  
Through written skies; a voice  
Watering a stony place.

Philip Larkin



## Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album

At last you yielded up the album, which  
Once open, sent me distracted. All your ages  
Matt and glossy on the thick black pages!  
Too much confectionery, too rich:  
I choke on such nutritious images.

My swivel eye hungers from pose to pose --  
In pigtails, clutching a reluctant cat;  
Or furred yourself, a sweet girl-graduate;  
Or lifting a heavy-headed rose  
Beneath a trellis, or in a trilby-hat

(Faintly disturbing, that, in several ways) --  
From every side you strike at my control,  
Not least through those these disquieting chaps who loll  
At ease about your earlier days:  
Not quite your class, I'd say, dear, on the whole.

But o, photography! as no art is,  
Faithful and disappointing! that records  
Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds,  
And will not censor blemishes  
Like washing-lines, and Hall's-Distemper boards,

But shows a cat as disinclined, and shades  
A chin as doubled when it is, what grace  
Your candour thus confers upon her face!  
How overwhelmingly persuades  
That this is a real girl in a real place,

In every sense empirically true!  
Or is it just the past? Those flowers, that gate,  
These misty parks and motors, lacerate  
Simply by being you; you  
Contract my heart by looking out of date.

Yes, true; but in the end, surely, we cry  
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)  
You, balanced on a bike against a fence;  
To wonder if you'd spot the theft  
Of this one of you bathing; to condense,

In short, a past that no one now can share,  
No matter whose your future; calm and dry,  
It holds you like a heaven, and you lie  
Unvariably lovely there,

Smaller and clearer as the years go by.

Philip Larkin

## **Long Sight In Age**

They say eyes clear with age,  
As dew clarifies air  
To sharpen evenings,  
As if time put an edge  
Round the last shape of things  
To show them there;  
The many-levelled trees,  
The long soft tides of grass  
Wrinkling away the gold  
Wind-ridden waves- all these,  
They say, come back to focus  
As we grow old.

Philip Larkin

## Love Again

Love again: wanking at ten past three  
(Surely he's taken her home by now?),  
The bedroom hot as a bakery,  
The drink gone dead, without showing how  
To meet tomorrow, and afterwards,  
And the usual pain, like dysentery.

Someone else feeling her breasts and cunt,  
Someone else drowned in that lash-wide stare,  
And me supposed to be ignorant,  
Or find it funny, or not to care,  
Even ... but why put it into words?  
Isolate rather this element

That spreads through other lives like a tree  
And sways them on in a sort of sense  
And say why it never worked for me.  
Something to do with violence  
A long way back, and wrong rewards,  
And arrogant eternity.

Philip Larkin

## Love Songs In Age

She kept her songs, they kept so little space,  
The covers pleased her:  
One bleached from lying in a sunny place,  
One marked in circles by a vase of water,  
One mended, when a tidy fit had seized her,  
And coloured, by her daughter -  
So they had waited, till, in widowhood  
She found them, looking for something else, and stood

Relearning how each frank submissive chord  
Had ushered in  
Word after sprawling hyphenated word,  
And the unfailing sense of being young  
Spread out like a spring-woken tree, wherein  
That hidden freshness sung,  
That certainty of time laid up in store  
As when she played them first. But, even more,

The glare of that much-mentionned brilliance, love,  
Broke out, to show  
Its bright incipience sailing above,  
Still promising to solve, and satisfy,  
And set unchangeably in order. So  
To pile them back, to cry,  
Was hard, without lamely admitting how  
It had not done so then, and could not now.

Philip Larkin

## **Love, We Must Part Now**

Love, we must part now: do not let it be  
Calamitous and bitter. In the past  
There has been too much moonlight and self-pity:  
Let us have done with it: for now at last  
Never has sun more boldly paced the sky,  
Never were hearts more eager to be free,  
To kick down worlds, lash forests; you and I  
No longer hold them; we are husks, that see  
The grain going forward to a different use.

There is regret. Always, there is regret.  
But it is better that our lives unloose,  
As two tall ships, wind-mastered, wet with light,  
Break from an estuary with their courses set,  
And waving part, and waving drop from sight.

Philip Larkin

## **Maiden Name**

Marrying left your maiden name disused.  
Its five light sounds no longer mean your face,  
Your voice, and all your variants of grace;  
For since you were so thankfully confused  
By law with someone else, you cannot be  
Semantically the same as that young beauty:  
It was of her that these two words were used.

Now it's a phrase applicable to no one,  
Lying just where you left it, scattered through  
Old lists, old programmes, a school prize or two  
Packets of letters tied with tartan ribbon -  
Then is it scentless, weightless, strengthless, wholly  
Untruthful? Try whispering it slowly.  
No, it means you. Or, since you're past and gone,

It means what we feel now about you then:  
How beautiful you were, and near, and young,  
So vivid, you might still be there among  
Those first few days, unfingermarked again.  
So your old name shelters our faithfulness,  
Instead of losing shape and meaning less  
With your depreciating luggage laden.

Philip Larkin

## **Maturity**

A stationary sense... as, I suppose,  
I shall have, till my single body grows  
Inaccurate, tired;  
Then I shall start to feel the backward pull  
Take over, sickening and masterful -  
Some say, desired.

And this must be the prime of life... I blink,  
As if at pain; for it is pain, to think  
This pantomime  
Of compensating act and counter-act  
Defeat and counterfeit, makes up, in fact  
My ablest time.

Philip Larkin



## MCMXIV

Those long uneven lines  
Standing as patiently  
As if they were stretched outside  
The Oval or Villa Park,  
The crowns of hats, the sun  
On moustached archaic faces  
Grinning as if it were all  
An August Bank Holiday lark;  
And the shut shops, the bleached  
Established names on the sunblinds,  
The farthings and sovereigns,  
And dark-clothed children at play  
Called after kings and queens,  
The tin advertisements  
For cocoa and twist, and the pubs  
Wide open all day;  
And the countryside not caring  
The place-names all hazed over  
With flowering grasses, and fields  
Shadowing Domesday lines  
Under wheats' restless silence;  
The differently-dressed servants  
With tiny rooms in huge houses,  
The dust behind limousines;  
Never such innocence,  
Never before or since,  
As changed itself to past  
Without a word--the men  
Leaving the gardens tidy,  
The thousands of marriages  
Lasting a little while longer:  
Never such innocence again.

Philip Larkin

## **Modesties**

Words as plain as hen-birds' wings  
Do not lie,  
Do not over-broider things -  
Are too shy.

Thoughts that shuffle round like pence  
Through each reign,  
Wear down to their simplest sense  
Yet remain.

Weeds are not supposed to grow  
But by degrees  
Some achieve a flower, although  
No one sees.

Philip Larkin

## Money

Quarterly, is it, money reproaches me:  
'Why do you let me lie here wastefully?  
I am all you never had of goods and sex,  
You could get them still by writing a few cheques.'

So I look at others, what they do with theirs:  
They certainly don't keep it upstairs.  
By now they've a second house and car and wife:  
Clearly money has something to do with life

- In fact, they've a lot in common, if you enquire:  
You can't put off being young until you retire,  
And however you bank your screw, the money you save  
Won't in the end buy you more than a shave.

I listen to money singing. It's like looking down  
From long French windows at a provincial town,  
The slums, the canal, the churches ornate and mad  
In the evening sun. It is intensely sad.

Philip Larkin

## **Mother, Summer, I**

My mother, who hates thunder storms,  
Holds up each summer day and shakes  
It out suspiciously, lest swarms  
Of grape-dark clouds are lurking there;  
But when the August weather breaks  
And rains begin, and brittle frost  
Sharpens the bird-abandoned air,  
Her worried summer look is lost,

And I her son, though summer-born  
And summer-loving, none the less  
Am easier when the leaves are gone  
Too often summer days appear  
Emblems of perfect happiness  
I can't confront: I must await  
A time less bold, less rich, less clear:  
An autumn more appropriate.

Philip Larkin

## Mr Bleaney

'This was Mr Bleaney's room. He stayed  
The whole time he was at the Bodies, till  
They moved him.' Flowered curtains, thin and frayed,  
Fall to within five inches of the sill,

Whose window shows a strip of building land,  
Tussocky, littered. 'Mr Bleaney took  
My bit of garden properly in hand.'  
Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook

Behind the door, no room for books or bags -  
'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.  
I know his habits - what time he came down,  
His preference for sauce to gravy, why

He kept on plugging at the four aways -  
Likewise their yearly frame: the Frinton folk  
Who put him up for summer holidays,  
And Christmas at his sister's house in Stoke.

But if he stood and watched the frigid wind  
Tousling the clouds, lay on the fusty bed  
Telling himself that this was home, and grinned,  
And shivered, without shaking off the dread

That 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, I don't know.

Philip Larkin

## Mr. Bleaney

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The whole time he was at the Bodies, till  
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And at his age having no more to show  
Than one hired box should make him pretty sure  
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Philip Larkin

## **Myxomatosis**

Caught in the center of a soundless field  
While hot inexplicable hours go by  
What trap is this? Where were its teeth concealed?  
You seem to ask.  
I make a sharp reply,  
Then clean my stick. I'm glad I can't explain  
Just in what jaws you were to suppurate:  
You may have thought things would come right again  
If you could only keep quite still and wait.

Philip Larkin

## **New Eyes Each Year**

New eyes each year  
Find old books here,  
And new books,too,  
Old eyes renew;  
So youth and age  
Like ink and page  
In this house join,  
Minting new coin.

Philip Larkin



## Next Please

Always too eager for the future, we  
Pick up bad habits of expectancy.  
Something is always approaching; every day  
Till then we say,

Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear  
Sparkling armada of promises draw near.  
How slow they are! And how much time they waste,  
Refusing to make haste!

Yet still they leave us holding wretched stalks  
Of disappointment, for, though nothing balks  
Each big approach, leaning with brasswork prinked,  
Each rope distinct,

Flagged, and the figurehead with golden tits  
Arching our way, it never anchors; it's  
No sooner present than it turns to past.  
Right to the last

We think each one will heave to and unload  
All good into our lives, all we are owed  
For waiting so devoutly and so long.  
But we are wrong:

Only one ship is seeking us, a black-  
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back  
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake  
No waters breed or break.

Philip Larkin

## **Next, Please**

Always too eager for the future, we  
Pick up bad habits of expectancy.  
Something is always approaching; every day  
Till then we say,

Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear  
Sparkling armada of promises draw near.  
How slow they are! And how much time they waste,  
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Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back  
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake  
No waters breed or break.

Submitted by joel

Philip Larkin

## Night Music

At one the wind rose,  
And with it the noise  
Of the black poplars.

Long since had the living  
By a thin twine  
Been led into their dreams  
Where lanterns shine  
Under a still veil  
Of falling streams;  
Long since had the dead  
Become untroubled  
In the light soil.  
There were no mouths  
To drink of the wind,  
Nor any eyes  
To sharpen on the stars'  
Wide heaven-holding,  
Only the sound  
Long sibilant-muscled trees  
Were lifting up, the black poplars.

And in their blazing solitude  
The stars sang in their sockets through  
the night:  
'Blow bright, blow bright  
The coal of this unquickened world.'

Philip Larkin

## Night-Music

At one the wind rose,  
And with it the noise  
Of the black poplars.

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By a thin twine  
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Under a still veil  
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the night:  
'Blow bright, blow bright  
The coal of this unquickened world.'

Philip Larkin

## No Road

Since we agreed to let the road between us  
Fall to disuse,  
And bricked our gates up, planted trees to screen us,  
And turned all time's eroding agents loose,  
Silence, and space, and strangers - our neglect  
Has not had much effect.

Leaves drift unswept, perhaps; grass creeps unmown;  
No other change.  
So clear it stands, so little overgrown,  
Walking that way tonight would not seem strange,  
And still would be followed. A little longer,  
And time would be the stronger,

Drafting a world where no such road will run  
From you to me;  
To watch that world come up like a cold sun,  
Rewarding others, is my liberty.  
Not to prevent it is my will's fulfillment.  
Willing it, my ailment.

Philip Larkin

## **Nothing to Be Said**

For nations vague as weed,  
For nomads among stones,  
Small-statured cross-faced tribes  
And cobble-close families  
In mill-towns on dark mornings  
Life is slow dying.

So are their separate ways  
Of building, benediction,  
Measuring love and money  
Ways of slowly dying.  
The day spent hunting pig  
Or holding a garden-party,

Hours giving evidence  
Or birth, advance  
On death equally slowly.  
And saying so to some  
Means nothing; others it leaves  
Nothing to be said.

Philip Larkin

## Poetry of Departures

Sometimes you hear, fifth-hand,  
As epitaph:  
He chucked up everything  
And just cleared off,  
And always the voice will sound  
Certain you approve  
This audacious, purifying,  
Elemental move.

And they are right, I think.  
We all hate home  
And having to be there:  
I detect my room,  
It's specially-chosen junk,  
The good books, the good bed,  
And my life, in perfect order:  
So to hear it said

He walked out on the whole crowd  
Leaves me flushed and stirred,  
Like Then she undid her dress  
Or Take that you bastard;  
Surely I can, if he did?  
And that helps me to stay  
Sober and industrious.  
But I'd go today,

Yes, swagger the nut-strewn roads,  
Crouch in the fo'c'sle  
Stubbly with goodness, if  
It weren't so artificial,  
Such a deliberate step backwards  
To create an object:  
Books; china; a life  
Reprehensibly perfect.

Philip Larkin

## Reasons for Attendance

The trumpet's voice, loud and authoritative,  
Draws me a moment to the lighted glass  
To watch the dancers - all under twenty-five -  
Solemnly on the beat of happiness.

- Or so I fancy, sensing the smoke and sweat,  
The wonderful feel of girls. Why be out there ?  
But then, why be in there? Sex, yes, but what  
Is sex ? Surely to think the lion's share  
Of happiness is found by couples - sheer

Inaccuracy, as far as I'm concerned.  
What calls me is that lifted, rough-tongued bell  
(Art, if you like) whose individual sound  
Insists I too am individual.  
It speaks; I hear; others may hear as well,

But not for me, nor I for them; and so  
With happiness. Therefor I stay outside,  
Believing this, and they maul to and fro,  
Believing that; and both are satisfied,  
If no one has misjudged himself. Or lied.

Philip Larkin



## Sad Steps

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

Four o'clock: wedge-shaped gardens lie  
Under a cavernous, a wind-pierced sky.  
There's something laughable about this,

The way the moon dashes through the clouds that blow  
Loosely as cannon-smoke to stand apart  
(Stone-coloured light sharpening the roofs below)

High and preposterous and separate--  
Lozenge of love! Medallion of art!  
O wolves of memory! Immensements! No,

One shivers slightly, looking up there.  
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; that it can't come again,  
But is for others undiminished somewhere.

Philip Larkin

## Send No Money

Standing under the fobbed  
Impendent belly of Time  
Tell me the truth, I said,  
Teach me the way things go.  
All the other lads there  
Were itching to have a bash,  
But I thought wanting unfair:  
It and finding out clash.

So he patted my head, booming Boy,  
There's no green in your eye:  
Sit here and watch the hail  
Of occurence clobber life out  
To a shape no one sees -  
Dare you look at that straight?  
Oh thank you, I said, Oh yes please,  
And sat down to wait.

Half life is over now,  
And I meet full face on dark mornings  
The bestial visor, bent in  
By the blows of what happened to happen.  
What does it prove? Sod all.  
In this way I spent youth,  
Tracing the trite untransferable  
Truss-advertisement, truth.

Philip Larkin

## **Since the Majority of Me**

Since the majority of me  
Rejects the majority of you,  
Debating ends forwith, and we  
Divide. And sure of what to do

We disinfect new blocks of days  
For our majorities to rent  
With unshared friends and unwalked ways,  
But silence too is eloquent:

A silence of minorities  
That, unopposed at last, return  
Each night with cancelled promises  
They want renewed. They never learn.

Philip Larkin

## **Skin**

Obedient daily dress,  
You cannot always keep  
That unfakable young surface.  
You must learn your lines -  
Anger, amusement, sleep;  
Those few forbidding signs

Of the continuous coarse  
Sand-laden wind, time;  
You must thicken, work loose  
Into an old bag  
Carrying a soiled name.  
Parch then; be roughened; sag;

And pardon me, that  
I could find, when you were new,  
No brash festivity  
To wear you at, such as  
Clothes are entitled to  
Till the fashion changes.

Philip Larkin

## **Solar**

Suspended lion face  
Spilling at the centre  
Of an unfurnished sky  
How still you stand,  
And how unaided  
Single stalkless flower  
You pour unrecompensed.

The eye sees you  
Simplified by distance  
Into an origin,  
Your petalled head of flames  
Continuously exploding.  
Heat is the echo of your  
Gold.

Coined there among  
Lonely horizontals  
You exist openly.  
Our needs hourly  
Climb and return like angels.  
Unclosing like a hand,  
You give for ever.

Philip Larkin

## Story

Tired of a landscape known too well when young:  
The deliberate shallow hills, the boring birds  
Flying past rocks; tired of remembering  
The village children and their naughty words,  
He abandoned his small holding and went South,  
Recognised at once his wished-for lie  
In the inhabitants' attractive mouth,  
The church beside the marsh, the hot blue sky.

Settled. And in this mirage lived his dreams,  
The friendly bully, saint, or lovely chum  
According to his moods. Yet he at times  
Would think about his village, and would wonder  
If the children and the rocks were still the same.

But he forgot all this as he grew older.

Philip Larkin

## Sunny Prestatyn

Come to Sunny Prestatyn  
Laughed the girl on the poster,  
Kneeling up on the sand  
In tautened white satin.  
Behind her, a hunk of coast, a  
Hotel with palms  
Seemed to expand from her thighs and  
Spread breast-lifting arms.

She was slapped up one day in March.  
A couple of weeks, and her face  
Was snaggle-toothed and boss-eyed;  
Huge tits and a fissured crotch  
Were scored well in, and the space  
Between her legs held scrawls  
That set her fairly astride  
A tuberous cock and balls

Autographed Titch Thomas, while  
Someone had used a knife  
Or something to stab right through  
The moustached lips of her smile.  
She was too good for this life.  
Very soon, a great transverse tear  
Left only a hand and some blue.  
Now Fight Cancer is there.

Philip Larkin

## **Take One Home For the Kiddies**

On shallow straw, in shadeless glass,  
Huddled by empty bowls, they sleep:  
No dark, no dam, no earth, no grass -  
Mam, get us one of them to keep.

Living toys are something novel,  
But it soon wears off somehow.  
Fetch the shoebox, fetch the shovel -  
Mam, we're playing funerals now.

Philip Larkin



## Talking In Bed

Talking in bed ought to be easiest,  
Lying together there goes back so far,  
An emblem of two people being honest.  
Yet more and more time passes silently.  
Outside, the wind's incomplete unrest  
Builds and disperses clouds in the sky,  
And dark towns heap up on the horizon.  
None of this cares for us. 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.

Philip Larkin

## The Building

Higher than the handsomest hotel  
The lucent comb shows up for miles, but see,  
All round it close-ribbed streets rise and fall  
Like a great sigh out of the last century.  
The porters are scruffy; what keep drawing up  
At the entrance are not taxis; and in the hall  
As well as creepers hangs a frightening smell.

There are paperbacks, and tea at so much a cup,  
Like an airport lounge, but those who tamely sit  
On rows of steel chairs turning the ripped mags  
Haven't come far. More like a local bus.  
These outdoor clothes and half-filled shopping-bags  
And faces restless and resigned, although  
Every few minutes comes a kind of nurse

To fetch someone away: the rest refit  
Cups back to saucers, cough, or glance below  
Seats for dropped gloves or cards. Humans, caught  
On ground curiously neutral, homes and names  
Suddenly in abeyance; some are young,  
Some old, but most at that vague age that claims  
The end of choice, the last of hope; and all

Here to confess that something has gone wrong.  
It must be error of a serious sort,  
For see how many floors it needs, how tall  
It's grown by now, and how much money goes  
In trying to correct it. See the time,  
Half-past eleven on a working day,  
And these picked out of it; see, as they climb

To their appointed levels, how their eyes  
Go to each other, guessing; on the way  
Someone's wheeled past, in washed-to-rags ward clothes:  
They see him, too. They're quiet. To realise  
This new thing held in common makes them quiet,  
For past these doors are rooms, and rooms past those,  
And more rooms yet, each one further off

And harder to return from; and who knows  
Which he will see, and when? For the moment, wait,  
Look down at the yard. Outside seems old enough:  
Red brick, lagged pipes, and someone walking by it  
Out to the car park, free. Then, past the gate,  
Traffic; a locked church; 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! And so, unreal  
A touching dream to which we all are lulled

But wake from separately. In it, conceits  
And self-protecting ignorance congeal  
To carry life, collapsing only when

Called to these corridors (for now once more  
The nurse beckons -). Each gets up and goes  
At last. Some will be out by lunch, or four;  
Others, not knowing it, have come to join  
The unseen congregations whose white rows  
Lie set apart above - women, men;  
Old, young; crude facets of the only coin

This place accepts. All know they are going to die.  
Not yet, perhaps not here, but in the end,  
And somewhere like this. That is what it means,  
This clean-sliced cliff; a struggle to transcend  
The thought of dying, for unless its powers  
Outbuild cathedrals nothing contravenes  
The coming dark, though crowds each evening try

With wasteful, weak, propitiatory flowers.

Philip Larkin

## The Explosion

On the day of the explosion  
Shadows pointed towards the pithead:  
In the sun the slagheap slept.

Down the lane came men in pitboots  
Coughing oath-edged talk and pipe-smoke  
Shouldering off the freshened silence.

One chased after rabbits; lost them;  
Came back with a nest of lark's eggs;  
Showed them; lodged them in the grasses.

So they passed in beards and moleskins  
Fathers brothers nicknames laughter  
Through the tall gates standing open.

At noon there came a tremor; cows  
Stopped chewing for a second; sun  
Scarfed as in a heat-haze dimmed.

The dead go on before us they  
Are sitting in God's house in comfort  
We shall see them face to face--

plian as lettering in the chapels  
It was said and for a second  
Wives saw men of the explosion

Larger than in life they managed--  
Gold as on a coin or walking  
Somehow from the sun towards them

One showing the eggs unbroken.

Philip Larkin

## **The Importance of Elsewhere**

Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home,  
Strangeness made sense. The salt rebuff of speech,  
Insisting so on difference, made me welcome:  
Once that was recognised, we were in touch

Their draughty streets, end-on to hills, the faint  
Archaic smell of dockland, like a stable,  
The herring-hawker's cry, dwindling, went  
To prove me separate, not unworkable.

Living in England has no such excuse:  
These are my customs and establishments  
It would be much more serious to refuse.  
Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.

Philip Larkin

## **The Little Lives of Earth and Form**

The little lives of earth and form,  
Of finding food, and keeping warm,  
Are not like ours, and yet  
A kinship lingers nonetheless:  
We hanker for the homeliness  
Of den, and hole, and set.

And this identity we feel  
- Perhaps not right, perhaps not real -  
Will link us constantly;  
I see the rock, the clay, the chalk,  
The flattened grass, the swaying stalk,  
And it is you I see.

Philip Larkin

## **The Mower**

The mower stalled, twice; kneeling, I found  
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,  
Killed. It had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.  
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world  
Unmendably. Burial was no help:

Next morning I got up and it did not.  
The first day after a death, the new absence  
Is always the same; we should be careful

Of each other, we should be kind  
While there is still time.

Philip Larkin

## **The North Ship**

I saw three ships go sailing by,  
Over the sea, the lifting sea,  
And the wind rose in the morning sky,  
And one was rigged for a long journey.

The first ship turned towards the west,  
Over the sea, the running sea,  
And by the wind was all possessed  
And carried to a rich country.

The second ship turned towards the east,  
Over the sea, the quaking sea,  
And the wind hunted it like a beast  
To anchor in captivity.

The third ship drove towards the north,  
Over the sea, the darkening sea,  
But no breath of wind came forth,  
And the decks shone frostily.

The northern sky rose high and black  
Over the proud unfruitful sea,  
East and west the ships came back  
Happily or unhappily:

But the third went wide and far  
Into an unforgiving sea  
Under a fire-spilling star,  
And it was rigged for a long journey.

Philip Larkin



## The Old Fools

What do they think has happened, the old fools,  
To make them like this? Do they somehow suppose  
It's more grown-up when your mouth hangs open and drools,  
And you keep on pissing yourself, and can't remember  
Who called this morning? Or that, if they only chose,  
They could alter things back to when they danced all night,  
Or went to their wedding, or sloped arms some September?  
Or do they fancy there's really been no change,  
And they've always behaved as if they were crippled or tight,  
Or sat through days of thin continuous dreaming  
Watching light move? If they don't (and they can't), it's strange:  
Why aren't they screaming?

At death, you break up: the bits that were you  
Start speeding away from each other for ever  
With no one to see. It's only oblivion, true:  
We had it before, but then it was going to end,  
And was all the time merging with a unique endeavour  
To bring to bloom the million-petaled flower  
Of being here. Next time you can't pretend  
There'll be anything else. And these are the first signs:  
Not knowing how, not hearing who, the power  
Of choosing gone. Their looks show that they're for it:  
Ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried into lines -  
How can they ignore it?

Perhaps being old is having lighted rooms  
Inside your head, and people in them, acting.  
People you know, yet can't quite name; each looms  
Like a deep loss restored, from known doors turning,  
Setting down a lamp, smiling from a stair, extracting  
A known book from the shelves; or sometimes only  
The rooms themselves, chairs and a fire burning,  
The blown bush at the window, or the sun's  
Faint friendliness on the wall some lonely  
Rain-ceased midsummer evening. That is where they live:  
Not here and now, but where all happened once.  
This is why they give

An air of baffled absence, trying to be there  
Yet being here. For the rooms grow farther, leaving  
Incompetent cold, the constant wear and tear  
Of taken breath, and them crouching below  
Extinction's alp, the old fools, never perceiving  
How near it is. This must be what keeps them quiet:  
The peak that stays in view wherever we go  
For them is rising ground. Can they never tell  
What is dragging them back, and how it will end? Not at night?  
Not when the strangers come? Never, throughout  
The whole hideous, inverted childhood? Well,  
We shall find out.

Philip Larkin

## **The School in August**

The cloakroom pegs are empty now,  
And locked the classroom door,  
The hollow desks are lined with dust,  
And slow across the floor  
A sunbeam creeps between the chairs  
Till the sun shines no more.

Who did their hair before this glass?  
Who scratched 'Elaine loves Jill'  
One drowsy summer sewing-class  
With scissors on the sill?  
Who practised this piano  
Whose notes are now so still?

Ah, notices are taken down,  
And scorebooks stowed away,  
And seniors grow tomorrow  
From the juniors today,  
And even swimming groups can fade,  
Games mistresses turn grey.

Philip Larkin

## **The Spirit Wooed**

Once I believed in you,  
    And then you came,  
    Unquestionably new, as fame  
Had said you were. But that was long ago.

You launched no argument,  
Yet I obeyed,  
Straightaway, the instrument you played  
Distant Down sidestreets, keeping different time,

And never questioned what  
You fascinate  
In me; if good or not, the state  
You pressed towards. There was no need to know.

Grave pristine absolutes  
Walked in my mind:  
So that I was not mute, or blind,  
As years before or since. My only crime

Was holding you too dear.  
Was that the cause  
You daily came less near&mdash;a pause  
Longer than life, if you decide it so?

Anonymous submission.

Philip Larkin

## **The Trees**

The trees are coming into leaf  
Like something almost being said;  
The recent buds relax and spread,  
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again  
And we grow old? No, they die too,  
Their yearly trick of looking new  
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh  
In fullgrown thickness every May.  
Last year is dead, they seem to say,  
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

Philip Larkin

## **The View**

The view is fine from fifty,  
Experienced climbers say;  
So, overweight and shifty,  
I turn to face the way  
That led me to this day.

Instead of fields and snowcaps  
And flowered lanes that twist,  
The track breaks at my toe-caps  
And drops away in mist.  
The view does not exist.

Where has it gone, the lifetime?  
Search me. What's left is drear.  
Unchilded and unwifed, I'm  
Able to view that clear:  
So final. And so near.

Philip Larkin

## The Whitsun Weddings

That Whitsun, I was late getting away:  
Not till about  
One-twenty on the sunlit Saturday  
Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out,  
All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense  
Of being in a hurry gone. We ran  
Behind the backs of houses, crossed a street  
Of blinding windscreens, smelt the fish-dock; thence  
The river's level drifting breadth began,  
Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet.

All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept  
For miles inland,  
A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.  
Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and  
Canals with floatings of industrial froth;  
A hothouse flashed uniquely: hedges dipped  
And rose: and now and then a smell of grass  
Displace the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth  
Until the next town, new and nondescript,  
Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

At first, I didn't notice what a noise  
The weddings made  
Each station that we stopped at: sun destroys  
The interest of what's happening in the shade,  
And down the long cool platforms whoops and skirls  
I took for porters larking with the mails,  
And went on reading. Once we started, though,  
We passed them, grinning and pomaded, girls  
In parodies of fashion, heels and veils,  
All posed irresolutely, watching us go,

As if out on the end of an event  
Waving goodbye  
To something that survived it. Struck, I leant  
More promptly out next time, more curiously,  
And saw it all again in different terms:  
The fathers with broad belts under their suits  
And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;  
An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms,  
The nylon gloves and jewelry-substitutes,  
The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochers that

Marked off the girls unreally from the rest.  
Yes, from cafes  
And banquet-halls up yards, and bunting-dressed  
Coach-party annexes, the wedding-days  
Were coming to an end. All down the line  
Fresh couples climbed abroad: the rest stood round;  
The last confetti and advice were thrown,  
And, as we moved, each face seemed to define

Just what it saw departing: children frowned  
At something dull; fathers had never known

Success so huge and wholly farcical;  
The women shared  
The secret like a happy funeral;  
While girls, gripping their handbags tighter, stared  
At a religious wounding. Free at last,  
And loaded with the sum of all they saw,  
We hurried towards London, shuffling gout of steam.  
Now fields were building-plots. and poplars cast  
Long shadows over major roads, and for  
Some fifty minutes, that in time would seem

Just long enough to settle hats and say  
I nearly died,  
A dozen marriages got under way.  
They watched the landscape, sitting side by side  
-An Odeon went past, a cooling tower,  
And someone running up to bowl -and none  
Thought of the others they would never meet  
Or how their lives would all contain this hour.  
I thought of London spread out in the sun,  
Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat:

There we were aimed. And as we raced across  
Bright knots of rail  
Past standing Pullmans, walls of blackened moss  
Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail  
Traveling coincidence; and what it held  
Stood ready to be loosed with all the power  
That being changed can give. We slowed again,  
And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled  
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower  
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

Philip Larkin



## **This be the Verse**

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.  
They may not mean to, but they do.  
They fill you with the faults they had  
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn  
By fools in old-style hats and coats,  
Who half the time were sappy-stern  
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.  
It deepens like a coastal shelf.  
Get out as early as you can,  
And don't have any kids yourself.

Philip Larkin

## **This Is the First Thing**

This is the first thing  
I have understood:  
Time is the echo of an axe  
Within a wood.

Philip Larkin

## **To Failure**

You do not come dramatically, with dragons  
That rear up with my life between their paws  
And dash me butchered down beside the wagons,  
The horses panicking; nor as a clause  
Clearly set out to warn what can be lost,  
What out-of-pocket charges must be borne  
Expenses met; nor as a draughty ghost  
That's seen, some mornings, running down a lawn.

It is these sunless afternoons, I find  
Install you at my elbow like a bore  
The chestnut trees are caked with silence. I'm  
Aware the days pass quicker than before,  
Smell staler too. And once they fall behind  
They look like ruin. You have been here some time.

Philip Larkin

## **To My Wife**

Choice of you shuts up that peacock-fan  
The future was, in which temptingly spread  
All that elaborative nature can.  
Matchless potential! but unlimited  
Only so long as I elected nothing;  
Simply to choose stopped all ways up but one,  
And sent the tease-birds from the bushes flapping.  
No future now. I and you now, alone.

So for your face I have exchanged all faces,  
For your few properties bargained the brisk  
Baggage, the mask-and-magic-man's regalia.  
Now you become my boredom and my failure,  
Another way of suffering, a risk,  
A heavier-than-air hypostasis.

Submitted by Andrew Mayers

Philip Larkin

## **To Put One Brick Upon Another**

To put one brick upon another,  
Add a third and then a fourth,  
Leaves no time to wonder whether  
What you do has any worth.

But to sit with bricks around you  
While the winds of heaven bawl  
Weighing what you should or can do  
Leaves no doubt of it at all.

Philip Larkin

## Toads

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?

Six days of the week it soils  
With its sickening poison -  
Just for paying a few bills!  
That's out of proportion.

Lots of folk live on their wits:  
Lecturers, lispers,  
Losers, loblolly-men, louts-  
They don't end as paupers;

Lots of folk live up lanes  
With fires in a bucket,  
Eat windfalls and tinned sardines-  
They seem to like it.

Their nippers have got bare feet,  
Their unspeakable wives  
Are skinny as whippets - and yet  
No one actually \_starves\_.

Ah, were I courageous enough  
To shout, Stuff your pension!  
But I know, all too well, that's the stuff  
That dreams are made on:

For something sufficiently toad-like  
Squats in me, too;  
Its hunkers are heavy as hard luck,  
And cold as snow,

And will never allow me to blarney  
My way of getting  
The fame and the girl and the money  
All at one sitting.

I don't say, one bodies the other  
One's spiritual truth;  
But I do say it's hard to lose either,  
When you have both.

Philip Larkin

## Toads Revisited

Walking around in the park  
Should feel better than work:  
The lake, the sunshine,  
The grass to lie on,

Blurred playground noises  
Beyond black-stockinged nurses -  
Not a bad place to be.  
Yet it doesn't suit me.

Being one of the men  
You meet of an afternoon:  
Palsied old step-takers,  
Hare-eyed clerks with the jitters,

Waxed-fleshed out-patients  
Still vague from accidents,  
And characters in long coats  
Deep in the litter-baskets -

All dodging the toad work  
By being stupid or weak.  
Think of being them!  
Hearing the hours chime,

Watching the bread delivered,  
The sun by clouds covered,  
The children going home;  
Think of being them,

Turning over their failures  
By some bed of lobelias,  
Nowhere to go but indoors,  
Nor friends but empty chairs -

No, give me my in-tray,  
My loaf-haired secretary,  
My shall-I-keep-the-call-in-Sir:  
What else can I answer,

When the lights come on at four  
At the end of another year?  
Give me your arm, old toad;  
Help me down Cemetery Road.

Philip Larkin

## Tramere

In this dream that dogs me I am part  
Of a silent crowd walking under a wall,  
Leaving a football match, perhaps, or a pit,  
All moving the same way. After a while  
A second wall closes on our right,  
Pressing us tighter. We are now shut in  
Like pigs down a concrete passage. When I lift  
My head, I see the walls have killed the sun,  
And light is cold. Now a giant whitewashed D  
Comes on the second wall, but much too high  
For them to recognise: I await the E,  
Watch it approach and pass. By now  
We have ceased walking and travel  
Like water through sewers, steeply, despite  
The tread that goes on ringing like an anvil  
Under the striding A. I crook  
My arm to shield my face, for we must pass  
Beneath the huge, decapitated cross,  
White on the wall, the T, and I cannot halt  
The tread, the beat of it, it is my own heart,  
The walls of my room rise, it is still night,  
I have woken again before the word was spelt.

Philip Larkin



## Träumerei

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Of a silent crowd walking under a wall,  
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Philip Larkin

## Triple Time

This empty street, this sky to blandness scoured,  
This air, a little indistinct with autumn  
Like a reflection, constitute the present --  
A time traditionally soured,  
A time unrecommended by event.

But equally they make up something else:  
This is the furthest future childhood saw  
Between long houses, under travelling skies,  
Heard in contending bells --  
An air lambent with adult enterprise,

And on another day will be the past,  
A valley cropped by fat neglected chances  
That we insensately forbore to fleece.  
On this we blame our last  
Threadbare perspectives, seasonal decrease.

Philip Larkin

## **Vers De Soci&eacute;t&eacute;**

My wife and I have asked a crowd of craps  
To come and waste their time and ours: perhaps  
You'd care to join us? In a pig's arse, friend.  
Day comes to an end.  
The gas fire breathes, the trees are darkly swayed.  
And so Dear Warlock-Williams: I'm afraid--

Funny how hard it is to be alone.  
I could spend half my evenings, if I wanted,  
Holding a glass of washing sherry, canted  
Over to catch the drivel of some bitch  
Who's read nothing but Which;  
Just think of all the spare time that has flown

Straight into nothingness by being filled  
With forks and faces, rather than repaid  
Under a lamp, hearing the noise of wind,  
And looking out to see the moon thinned  
To an air-sharpened blade.  
A life, and yet how sternly it's instilled

All solitude is selfish. No one now  
Believes the hermit with his gown and dish  
Talking to God (who's gone too); the big wish  
Is to have people nice to you, which means  
Doing it back somehow.  
Virtue is social. Are, then, these routines

Playing at goodness, like going to church?  
Something that bores us, something we don't do well  
(Asking that ass about his fool research)  
But try to feel, because, however crudely,  
It shows us what should be?  
Too subtle, that. Too decent, too. Oh hell,

Only the young can be alone freely.  
The time is shorter now for company,  
And sitting by a lamp more often brings  
Not peace, but other things.  
Beyond the light stand failure and remorse  
Whispering Dear Warlock-Williams: Why, of course--

Philip Larkin

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To come and waste their time and ours: perhaps  
You'd care to join us? In a pig's arse, friend.  
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With forks and faces, rather than repaid  
Under a lamp, hearing the noise of wind,  
And looking out to see the moon thinned  
To an air-sharpened blade.  
A life, and yet how sternly it's instilled

All solitude is selfish. No one now  
Believes the hermit with his gown and dish  
Talking to God (who's gone too); the big wish  
Is to have people nice to you, which means  
Doing it back somehow.  
Virtue is social. Are, then, these routines

Playing at goodness, like going to church?  
Something that bores us, something we don't do well  
(Asking that ass about his fool research)  
But try to feel, because, however crudely,  
It shows us what should be?  
Too subtle, that. Too decent, too. Oh hell,

Only the young can be alone freely.  
The time is shorter now for company,  
And sitting by a lamp more often brings  
Not peace, but other things.  
Beyond the light stand failure and remorse  
Whispering Dear Warlock-Williams: Why, of course--

Philip Larkin

## **Wants**

Beyond all this, the wish to be alone:  
However the sky grows dark with invitation-cards  
However we follow the printed directions of sex  
However the family is photographed under the flag-staff -  
Beyond all this, the wish to be alone.

Beneath it all, the desire for oblivion runs:  
Despite the artful tensions of the calendar,  
The life insurance, the tabled fertility rites,  
The costly aversion of the eyes away from death -  
Beneath it all, the desire for oblivion runs.

Philip Larkin

## **Water**

If I were called in  
To construct a religion  
I should make use of water.

Going to church  
Would entail a fording  
To dry, different clothes;

My litany would employ  
Images of sousing,  
A furious devout drench,

And I should raise in the east  
A glass of water  
Where any-angled light  
Would congregate endlessly.

Philip Larkin

## Wedding Wind

The wind blew all my wedding-day,  
And my wedding-night was the night of the high wind;  
And a stable door was banging, again and again,  
That he must go and shut it, leaving me  
Stupid in candlelight, hearing rain,  
Seeing my face in the twisted candlestick,  
Yet seeing nothing. When he came back  
He said the horses were restless, and I was sad  
That any man or beast that night should lack  
The happiness I had.

Now in the day  
All's ravelled under the sun by the wind's blowing.  
He has gone to look at the floods, and I  
Carry a chipped pail to the chicken-run,  
Set it down, and stare. All is the wind  
Hunting through clouds and forests, thrashing  
My apron and the hanging cloths on the line.  
Can it be borne, this bodying-forth by wind  
Of joy my actions turn on, like a thread  
Carrying beads? Shall I be let to sleep  
Now this perpetual morning shares my bed?  
Can even death dry up  
These new delighted lakes, conclude  
Our kneeling as cattle by all-generous waters?

Philip Larkin

## Wedding-Wind

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Philip Larkin



## Whatever Happened?

At once whatever happened starts receding.  
Panting, and back on board, we line the rail  
With trousers ripped, light wallets, and lips bleeding.

Yes, gone, thank God! Remembering each detail  
We toss for half the night, but find next day  
All's kodak-distant. Easily, then (though pale),

'Perspective brings significance,' we say,  
Unhooding our photometers, and, snap!  
What can't be printed can be thrown away.

Later, it's just a latitude: the map  
Points out how unavoidable it was:  
'Such coastal bedding always means mishap.'

Curses? The dark? Struggling? Where's the source  
Of these yarns now (except in nightmares, of course)?

Philip Larkin

## **When First We Faced**

When first we faced, and touching showed  
How well we knew the early moves,  
Behind the moonlight and the frost,  
The excitement and the gratitude,  
There stood how much our meeting owed  
To other meetings, other loves.

The decades of a different life  
That opened past your inch-close eyes  
Belonged to others, lavished, lost;  
Nor could I hold you hard enough  
To call my years of hunger-strife  
Back for your mouth to colonise.

Admitted: and the pain is real.  
But when did love not try to change  
The world back to itself--no cost,  
No past, no people else at all--  
Only what meeting made us feel,  
So new, and gentle-sharp, and strange?

Philip Larkin

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Philip Larkin

## **Why Did I Dream of You Last Night?**

Why did I dream of you last night?  
Now morning is pushing back hair with grey light  
Memories strike home, like slaps in the face;  
Raised on elbow, I stare at the pale fog  
beyond the window.

So many things I had thought forgotten  
Return to my mind with stranger pain:  
- Like letters that arrive addressed to someone  
Who left the house so many years ago.

Philip Larkin

## Wild Oats

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,

And in seven years after that  
Wrote over four hundred letters,  
Gave a ten-guinea ring  
I got back in the end, and met  
At numerous cathedral cities  
Unknown to the clergy. I believe  
I met beautiful twice. She was trying  
Both times (so I thought) not to laugh.

Parting, after about five  
Rehearsals, was an agreement  
That I was too selfish, withdrawn  
And easily bored to love.  
Well, useful to get that learnt,  
In my wallet are still two snaps,  
Of bosomy rose with fur gloves on.  
Unlucky charms, perhaps.

Philip Larkin

## **Wires**

The widest prairies have electric fences,  
For though old cattle know they must not stray  
Young steers are always scenting purer water  
Not here but anywhere. Beyond the wires

Leads them to blunder up against the wires  
Whose muscle-shredding violence gives no quarter.  
Young steers become old cattle from that day,  
Electric limits to their widest senses.

Philip Larkin