

Philip Larkin

Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Manjhi
Dept. of English
J. N. College, Madhubani

Degree - III (English Honors)
Paper - VI
Unif - I (VIII)
Topic - "Philip Larkin"
Lecture - 02

Philip Larkin (1922-85)

Ambulances, comparatively a shorter poem in only five stanzas is the finest specimen under the conditions of modern urban life with its secularity and impersonality, we tend to forget the fact of death. But the sight of an ambulance restores to us the real perspective of things and a sober perception of our own mortality. The very opening lines of the poem disclose the same idea. In the atmosphere of an ambulance is described —

⁶⁰ "closed like confessionals, they thread
loud noons of cities, giving back
None of the glances they absorb
light glossy grey, arms on a plague".

There is an instance in the poem where we find intimations of our own death in the death of others —

⁶¹ "The fastened, doors recede, poor soul.
They whisper at their own distress."

The same image is found in Donne's "Meditations" where he writes —

⁶² "Any man's death diminishes me, because

I am involved in mankind and,
Therefore, never tend to know
For whom The bell tolls,
If tolls for Thee."

"Church Going" is another important poem by Larkin. The very title reflects double meaning. "Church going" implies the act of going into a church and also the disappearance of church as an institution. It beautifully describes the church. The lines follow —

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

"The Whitsun Weddings" is yet another important poem by Philip Larkin. It has been taken from "The Whitsun Weddings" itself. Whitsun is that particular day which comes after seven Sundays after Easter. The stanza form used in the poem reminds us of the stanza form used by John Keats in his poems —

That Whitsun, I was late getting away;
Not till about

One - twenty on the sunlit Saturday

Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out

Thus Philip Larkin to sum up is the most significant poet of the modern era.