CHAPTER IV

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When The Whitsum Weddings was published in 1964, almost ten years after the publication of The Less Deceived, Larkin was already an established poet. The volume was well received both by critics and readers throughout England and America. It won laurels from the Times Literary Supplement and the National Review of Books. Kenneth Allott's comment was approvingly quoted:

Larkin is the most exciting new poetic voice -
with the possible exception of Dylan Thomas -
since Auden.¹

The collection brought prestige to Larkin, who was already an acclaimed poet. The Whitsum Weddings definitely attracted more public notice than The Less Deceived, for, in its first six months, 3,800 copies were sold; a great success for a volume of new poems by a contemporary poet. In 1965 it was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry which he accepted with characteristic self-deprecatory remark that Auden had won the medal at the age of thirty,

whereas he was forty-two. The award further evoked the interest of mass-media. Larkin was the subject of a BBC Monitor film and an article in *The Sunday Times Colour Supplement* and *The Guardian*. He was given the Arts Council award, an honorary doctorate from Queen's University, Belfast, and a fellowship at All Souls, Oxford.

It was largely agreed by the critics that *The Whitsun Weddings* represents no radical development in tone and style since his previous collection. Francis Hope, in *Encounter* complains: '... there was no poem here which would look out of place in *The Less Deceived* and as that was published years ago, one might say that Mr. Larkin was consistent to the point of being static.'² Mr. Hope is obviously overstating his case a little. Larkin himself has only this to say about his poetic development:

I suppose I'm less likely to write a really bad poem now, but possibly equally less likely to write a really good one. If you can call that development, then I've developed. ³

³ Ian Hamilton, 'Four Conversations', pp.64-65.
The Whitsun Weddings differs from the earlier collections in the greater number of the really good poems it contains. Reviewing the volume, The Times Literary Supplement acknowledged that out of thirty-two poems, at least ten were among Larkin's best, and indeed among the best poems of the time. The poems in The Whitsun Weddings clearly show an extension of linguistic range and an enlargement of sympathy for the common-man's predicament and suffering. His poetic world is now more clearly defined, the places in these poems are familiar to us and they tell us about ordinary people. The language too is the language we speak - it is more colloquial and less contrived. Indeed, Larkin always was able to speak in a simple and straightforward manner, but he seems, with this volume, to have moved towards an extraordinary naturalness and ease of speech. The conversational idiom, tone and rhythm are so accurately caught that it comes as a surprise to discover how frequently they are accommodated within the demands of complex stanzaic patterns. Larkin's use of familiar objects, situations and language brings his poems a step closer to reality than his previous attempts were able to do.

The vision now is more objective and the poems appear to be comparatively free from the stress and strain of
personal pain. The sadness remains but it is now sufficiently distanced and depersonalised. The humblest details of dull and drab reality find a place in his poetry now. The imagery of 'moonlit nights', 'herald-like cocks', 'lakes and clouds' give way to 'sixty-watt bulbs' 'moustached women' and 'long-coated characters scrabbling among the dustbins'. Now he is able to laugh and share the jokes with us. The humour is directed most often at himself, and this ability to mock at himself is a clear indication of an inner growth and a genuine humility.

The volume aptly opens with 'Here' (TW 9), a poem ostensibly about a train journey to Hull but also suggestive of the various moods of the poems in this volume that the reader during his 'journey' through the volume may experience. There are two other significant poems in The Whitsun Weddings that are about train journey, the title poem 'The Whitsun Weddings' and 'Dockery and Son'. Seamus Heaney has remarked:

> If Philip Larkin were ever to compose his version of Divine Comedy he would probably discover himself not in a dark wood but in a railway tunnel half-way on a journey down England.

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Apart from the deeper significance of this comment about the seriousness and reverence with which Larkin treats his subjects, it also tells us why the poet prefers the train journey. It allows him a distant and uninterrupted observation and that passive participation which his 'less deceived', but too humane, persona requires. The poem 'Here' begins with swerving movements:

Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows
And traffic all night north; swerving through fields
Too thin and thistled to be called meadows,
And now and then a harsh-named halt, that shields
Workmen at dawn; swerving to solitude

Of skies and scarecrows, haystacks, hares and pheasants,
And the widening river's slow presence,
The piled gold clouds, the shining gull-marked mud,

Gathers to the surprise of a large town:

'Swerving' conveys in a subtle way an avoidance of
duty, suggestive of the poem's possible moral dimension. However, the speaker's rapt attention at this stage is held by the passing panorama - 'from rich industrial shadows' to 'solitude'. This visual sensitivity, apparent from
the graphic details about the places and people actually reflects his own sympathetic understanding:

Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster
Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water,
And residents from raw-estates, brought down
The dead straight miles by stealing flat-faced trolleys,

Push through plate-glass swing doors to their desires –
Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies,
Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers –

A cut-price crowd, urban yet simple, ...

The speaker describes this urban crowd with incredible detachment and photographic accuracy. The cheap suits, sharp shoes, toasters, mixers, washers and driers are all there – at once the symbols and realities, ends and means in themselves, the corrupt elements of hurried urban life.

There is a touch of pathos about this 'cut-price crowd, urban yet simple'. Though urban, these people are as gullible as the rural folk, or perhaps worse for they are doubly cheated: first, by the deliberately misleading labels like 'cut-price' and secondly, by their own
desire for acquisitions - 'Push through plate-glass swing doors to their desires'. But, the speaker, without passing any comment, remains true to the observed reality. The journey continues towards its destination:

And out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges
Fast-shadowed wheat-fields, running high as hedges,
Isolate villages, where removed lives

Loneliness clarifies. ...

When the journey approaches its end, the vision becomes clearer. To the Larkin speaker this isolation and, distance are necessary for a proper perspective:

... Here silence stands
Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,
Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,
Luminously-peopled air ascends;
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.

The journey to solitude ends in silence, which is a positive force (heat). The 'luminously-peopled air' has
a rare and unique brightness. Larkin has stated his preference for such isolations:

Anyone who knows me will tell you that I'm not fond of company. I'm very fond of people, but it's difficult to get people without company.5

Here, the Larkin speaker gets that difficult but self-willed opportunity. In this 'luminously peopled air' the elements do grow, thicken, flower and flow, though they are unnoticed, neglected, or hidden. At this 'neutral distance', the speaker finds another reality, which is almost a self-created Eden with his own private mythology. This unique experience, so powerful and intense, lifts him towards that moment of transcending freedom:

... ... ... Here is unfenced existence:

Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.

The sun appears in many other poems in this and in the next volume, High Windows ('Solar', 'The Explosion', 'The Old Fools') as a mysterious and benevolent life-

5 Philip Larkin, Required Writing 'Miscellaneous pieces 1955-1982', p.54.
giving force. But the sun's presence is no guarantee of
infinite freedom to the speaker. Even when all the barriers
of existence are downed the sun still remains 'out of
reach'. The reader becomes aware of the powerful conflict
between the romantic impulse which lifts the speaker towards
this moment of transcendence and the classical restraint
which keeps him rooted to everyday reality. So the poem
ends on an ambiguous, ambivalent note with the speaker's
acceptance of both, the possibility of a surrender to such
a moment of 'unfenced existence' and the limitations of
the finite which will always put the sun 'out of reach'.

The same ambivalence is found in 'the Importance of
Elsewhere' (TWW 34), where the Larkin speaker chooses
isolation for a clear perspective and an objective vision:

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.

Paradoxically, the strangeness of the place brings
familiarity; and the differences in people's customs and
life-styles make him feel close to them. This paradox is
a part of a modern man's less deceived psyche. This
complexity in response is a result of the speaker's honest acceptance of the limitations of human consciousness to include proximity and clarity of perspective simultaneously:

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.

The speaker's imagination becomes 'unworkable' with the proximity of the familiar elements. The deeper the attachment with the places and the people the greater is the need for detachment and distance. It is an irony that an artist with such a profound sensitivity towards human suffering has to choose alienation from his own people and this is a major aspect of his poetry.

This deliberate withdrawal from any active participation was a historical necessity for the writers of the fifties. Donald Davie voices this feeling:

A neutral tone is nowadays preferred.
And yet it may be better, if we must,
To praise a stance impressive and absurd
Than not to see the hero for the dust.6

The Larkin persona's detached and passive attitude is partly a pose and partly an intrinsic need. His 'love for people but dislike for company' is stated earlier. In an alien environment where separateness is pronounced by the very difference of things, his isolation, his loneliness is easily accomplished. But in England he enjoys no such privilege. England is not 'elsewhere' and his loneliness is difficult of accomplishment presently because his existence in inalienable from the context of customs and establishments, all his own. Here, in England 'no elsewhere' underwrites his existence, as in Ireland. He must face his stark self there. Behind the apparent irony or paradox, there is the intolerable problem of facing life without excuses. The ambivalence here lies in his ambivalent relationship to his own country which denies him what Ireland can give.

'Ignorance' (TWW 39) is concerned not with his own dilemma or ambivalence but with the situation of Man himself:

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'.

The Larkin speaker confesses his ignorance which is
discomforting and strange. While Nature knows its own
mysterious ways, the Man suffers these limitations and
isolation:

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.

The whole human existence is strewn with imprecisions.
The knowledge of the limitations of the finite makes the
Larkin speaker wonder at the strangeness of this nascience
in which man lives and dies. None really knows the truth
or the mystery. Larkin has written:

The days when one could claim to be the priest of
a mystery are gone; to-day mystery means either
ignorance or hokum, neither a fashionable quality. Yet writing a poem is still not an act of will. 7

But the incomprehensible nature of the mystery of Life and Death, does not defeat the Larkin speaker now. The very act of writing poems is a mystery to him. His faith in Art finds deeper roots now. He said in an interview that 'Poetry chose me' - Thus a very intimate experience of such moments of will's surrender have dispelled the earlier gloom. Even in the most melancholic poems, there are notes of either positive assertions of at least, some redeeming aspects to save them from the earlier dejection. There is a newly acquired detachment which allows the most personal to be treated in the most impersonal manner: In 'Wild Cats' (TWW 41) he narrates his failure in love:

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.

— Now, with a wry and candid admission, devoid of any bitterness or sorrow he accepts the dull and the drab (the girl in specs') while longing for the beautiful (the bosomy English rose). Like Prufrock, perhaps he will never hear the mermaid sing to him — but there is a world of difference in Larkin's admission of it now. There is no trace of self-pity. Instead there is a smiling shrug as the poet faces up to failures of the flesh and spirit, no less painful than Prufrock's.

The same self-mockery is witnessed in 'Self's the Man' (TWW 24–25). The speaker compares his life with that of his friend Arnold's and makes the reader laugh at his own expense:

Oh, no one can deny
That Arnold is less selfish than I.

Then, admitting the danger of selfishness in his choice of remaining unmarried, he grants the virtue of sociability:

To compare his life and mine
Makes me feel a swine:
Oh, no one can deny
That Arnold is less selfish than I.
The self-deprecation, with clearly repeated lines and an admission of 'feeling swine' alerts the reader to the fact that exactly the opposite is meant. Then, after a graphic description of Arnold's married life, he continues:

But wait, not so fast;
Is there such a contrast?
He was out for his own ends
Not just pleasing his friends;

So Arnold too, like the speaker, is selfish, and a self-deceived man, to boot. His marriage was the result of his desire for a woman (to stop her getting away) and misplaced faith in illusory happiness in marriage. But, there is no judgement passed. With the characteristic non-committal tone in the end, he accepts the validity of both:

So he and I are the same,

Only I'm a better hand
At knowing what I can stand
Without them sending a van -
Or I suppose I can.

Compared with Arnold's, the speaker's choice is shown
to be more responsible and well considered. Arnold's anticipation of happiness (after getting the desired woman) through marriage, resulted into drudgery and dull routine, thus proving his lack of wisdom and foresight. If the speaker's choice of singlehood is selfish, at least it has more wisdom and less deception. But the last line brings typical Larkinsque ambiguity 'Or I suppose I can', conceding the possibility of the speaker's choice being equally wrong. So, once again, they both could be right or wrong, none can speak for the other, and each must reach his own truth with honesty and responsibility.

The title 'Self's the Man' asserts the merits of individuality, which was an emotional, political and social necessity of the writers of the fifties. John Wain has observed that:

'Larkin often makes the point that for him withdrawal from life is necessary for the preservation of the self, though in poems such as 'Dockery and Son', 'Self's the Man' and 'Send No Money' he explores with subtlety his own doubts and the heavy price he has had to pay ...
The humour comes from a deliberate refusal to be involved, a sense that life is so chaotic and irrational that force is the only possible medium for its expression.®

In an age of collectivism, it becomes a moral and spiritual necessity for an individual to think and feel as one and not as a mass. Larkin's choice for isolation is born out of his ruthlessness with self and an honest and cautious acceptance of the fact that a hope for comfort from another person is only an illusion. 'Talking in Bed' (TWW 29) poignantly brings out the conflict between a desire for togetherness and the impossibility of its fulfilment:

Talking in bed ought to be the easiest,
Lying together there goes back so far,
An emblem of two people being honest.

Yet more and more time passes silently.

What ought to be the easiest is the most difficult.
The ideals of love, honesty, warmth, comfort probably

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exist in the past, but the Larkin speaker finds indif
erence among people and alienation from Elemental Nature.
'None of these cares for us' has no note of self-pity,
only a warning that, when all the other communications
have failed and man is alienated from the greatest source
of mystery, Nature, there is an urgent need for human
solidarity. Instead, he finds:

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.

Truth is beyond human grasp and so the most a man can
aspire to is 'not untruth', i.e. lesser deception and even
that is not easily attainable - Even (at this unique dis­
tance from isolation) during the most intimate moments -
(while 'Talking in Bed') when one is most vulnerable and
defenceless, it becomes difficult for the Larkin speaker
to combine truth and kindness. Truth is harsh and would
cause pain, which will alienate a person - Thus, with such
ironical realities, it becomes more and more difficult to
combine wish and its fulfilment. The poem is not negative
and it does not end on a note of despair about this irony of human existence. On the contrary the poet dispassionately brings out the threat faced by a modern man, who is alienated from the elemental Nature. He warns that the survival of mankind now depends on human solidarity and love. So, 'ought to' is in the sense of 'a must' — an urgent need. Even this poem shows Larkin's deeper faith in human resilience and its potential to regain lost values (an emblem of two people being honest).

'The Whitsun Weddings' (TWW 21-23), the title poem celebrates Larkin's faith in the survival of human emotions, through social rituals and customs. Larkin's wish in preserving an experience through a poem which can be recreated in the reader, affirms his faith in people and their traditions. To the reader, the speaker of 'The Whitsun Weddings' is reminiscent of the speaker of 'Church Going' (TLD 28-29). They both share similarity in movement — the initial wryness and indifference slowly turn into casual curiosity, gradually leading towards serious quest and reflections and ending in profound wisdom and final assertion of faith. The poem opens on a mundane plane; the regular commuter hurries to catch a train, and once aboard settles into his usual way:
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.

A typical Larkinsque situation is found where the speaker sitting at the back in a corner, quietly witnessing both - a void (three quarter empty) and a wonder (sunlit Saturday). The journey begins from where 'sky, Lincolnshire and water meet'. The speaker accurately observes and records everything as it exists, without any heightening or blurring of details. Here we find Larkin, the novelist (in faithful recording of every detail) and the poet (in transmuting that into a poem), at his best:

All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept
For miles inland,
A slow and stopping curve southward 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
Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth
Until the next town, new and nondescript,
Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

The speaker's attention is rapt, and unwavering. The industrialized landscape is as important as the people that inhabit it. He cannot see a place without the life that is associated with it. While commenting on John Betjeman's poem 'the Metropolitan Railway' Larkin writes:

It isn't surprising ... that his poems should be about people as well as places, nor that just as places cannot be separated from people, so the people cannot be separated from their places. Each of them carries a sharply-realized background ... place is presented in terms of its human association, without which it would be insignificant: not a house, or a single building or a church ... but your surroundings; not a town or a street, but our whole over-populated island'.

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What Larkin appreciates in Betjeman's poem becomes the most important aspect of his own poem. His sympathy for the common man and his willingness to be a part of the living humanity reveal this other Larkin, who relinquishes his prized solitude, finding beauty in social life. At first, he casually disregards the noises, but soon he is caught in the rumble and the gaiety of the weddings:

... Struck, I learnt

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 jewellery—substitutes,
The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres that

Marked off the girls unreal 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 aboard; 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 ...

The favourite mask of detachment and distance is dropped and the speaker freely and spontaneously participates in the simple joys of these ordinary people. The little human touches - 'fathers' broad belts' or 'girls gripping their handbags tighter' — show how compassionately and lovingly the speaker observes even the minute details about their ordinary lives. There is a rare and awkward beauty in these lives. The earlier observation of these people in terms of shape and size and colour has changed into perceiving them as 'real' human beings. The tears and joys of these simple people 'at a religious wounding' are recreated in the reader's minds with equal intensity. The ordinary experience is transformed into a vision of beauty. The success of such poems
lies in the treatment of the subject. Larkin's unpre-
tentious and penetrating eye has immense sympathy for
the innocent chaos and simple beauty of such celebrations:

... Free at last,
And loaded with the sum of all they saw,
We hurried towards London, shuffling gouts 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 diéd',
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
Travelling coincidence; and what it held
Stood ready to be loosed with all the power
That being changed can give. ...

The initial casualness is replaced by the serious reflection on 'the sum of all that he has seen'. His deeper involvement, as contrasted with the young couples' indifference - (they never thought of the others they would never meet) - helps him understand and interpret the significance of this 'frail travelling coincidence'. The burst of happiness of the young couples is frail, because it is transient. There is a unique blending of joy, sadness, beauty, innocence and pathos in this observation: 'free at last' - suggests the freedom of an enlightened mind through experience. The speaker's intense observation has changed the ordinary reality. His imagination and sensibility have grasped the salient features of reality.

... 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.

The metaphor of 'arrow-shower' suggests fertility and
growth. The young couples with their new awareness will bring joy and happiness to London. Larkin accepts the meaningfulness of marriage.

The poem is both beautiful and true. It remains realistic while it celebrates the moments of awareness and beauty. It does not make any absolute assertion but delicately and truthfully records the moments of rare and simple beauty. Larkin's sensitive alertness to every detail of reality and his ability to transform the real to the symbolic with such dispassionate tone is singular. The place and the people all participate in this rare vision of beauty. The faith in the uniqueness and permanence of such rituals is confirmed and the speaker is ripened by this newly acquired knowledge.

The same hopeful vision of life is offered in the poem 'First sight' (TWW 36). The lambs which were born in the 'wretched width of cold' and 'know nothing but sunless glare' are ignorant of the joys of spring that are in store for them, of 'Earth's immeasurable surprise':

They could not grasp it if they knew,
What so soon will wake and grow
Utterly unlike the snow.
The duality in vision is lyrically brought out here. This confusing experience, 'to be able to know but unable to grasp' is the inescapable irony of human existence. But the success of the poem lies in the tone that Larkin has adopted, so different from his usual one. The blundering movements of the lambs and their absurd and innocent stumbling and failing are effectively shown by the use of the part-rhymes and the regular thump of the trochaic metre in the first stanza. The lambs almost become an image of confused common-sense, bemused mankind.

In the poem 'Faith Healing' (TWW 15) the picture of the helplessly wailing women who 'file' themselves before a faith-healer who, in contrast, has a totally commercial appearance and approach bring out the same picture of innocent blundering. These women are aptly described as having a dumb and idiot child within them:

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 blurt, their eyes squeeze grief,...

How beautifully pathetic is this picture of straying women! ... 'exiled' - from the Ideal paradise! Their naive faith that 'a voice / At last calls them alone' as if their prayers are finally answered and finally their moment of ecstasy has arrived: they 'squeeze grief', - 'jam and rejoice'.

Their innocent blundering before the artificial and pretentious voice of the preacher is no different from the newly born lambs of 'First Sight! Their simple faith and innocent longings for love, care and cure afford a momentary release. They feel very close to their desired Heaven and when asked 'what's wrong!', all their romantic illusions and hopes and aspirations are shattered:

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.
The hope for the fulfilment of Love is perennial in human nature. Larkin brings out this immortal longing for love: 'In everyone there sleeps / A sense of life lived according to love'.

Love is inseparable from life. It is so integral that if love fails, life loses its meaning. The poet's faith in the power of love is seen in these lines of 'Love Songs in Age (TWW 12) 'The glare of that much-mentioned brilliance, love, / ... still promising to solve and satisfy', Like the vulnerable women of 'Faith Healing', everyone's hope of finding justification for life in love, fails precisely because the claims are too great. - 'That nothing cures' -

The disillusionment in love (any kind of love, here it is these women's faith in God and love) is inevitable. Larkin's definition of faith lies in the awareness of the disjunction between wish and actuality - ideal and reality. His denial of the fulfilment of any desire - (love here) comes only after he has recognized the power of love. He accepts the reality, i.e. 'all time has disproved' but he also concedes to the claims of love - that only love can 'solve and satisfy'.

'An Arundel Tomb' (TWW 45-46) brings out beautifully Larkin's faith in the value and permanence of art and love.

Side by side, their faces blurred,
The earl and countess lie in stone,

The reader anticipates a ruthless scrutiny of the emotion of love with the pun meant on 'lie'. Otherwise insignificant, the stone sculpture suddenly catches the Speaker's attention:

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:

If this pose of love was 'a lie', it would not have lasted so long. There must be something more perennial to bind them together for so long. The passage of time is indicated very effectively in a few words:

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

Paradoxes in life and art are exemplified here. The
value of art is proved by its long, endurance against
time. The stone effigy vaguely shows the significance
of heroic ideals, of the past age through 'jointed armou' 'stiffened pleat'. But the sculptor's desire to preserve
the uniqueness of art (like Larkin's too) has not been
fulfilled. Time has washed away their identity but what
has remained like 'snow' and 'bird-calls' and 'summer
nights' is an attitude:

Only an attitude remains:

Time has transfigured 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.

Larkin's carefully considered 'almost-instinct'
'almost true' - is his way of asserting his faith in
survival of art and love. Time may be an adversary force to all that man aspires to achieve or wants to preserve but the place of art in man's life is like his belief in God. Larkin has said:

In a humanist society, art — and especially modern, or current, art—assumes great importance, and to lose touch with it is parallel to losing one's faith in a religious age.  

Larkin creates his world of art through his poetry. Lolette Kuby has expressed this beautifully:

To him, poetry is a kind of intelligent, interpretive, unifying memory which retards for a while the otherwise immediate passage of experience into oblivion. It may almost be called 'a way of loving', since to see the uniqueness of a thing or a person is a loving of it (see 'Broadcast', 'For Sidney Bechet') and to preserve its uniqueness is art.


But complete, calm success in love is rare in Larkin's poetry. The poem 'Broadcast' (TWW 14), is about how the poet's loving attention to the 'beautiful and devout' face, lends him to an impulse to act.

By being distant overpower my mind
All the more shamelessly, their cut-off shout
Leaving me desperate to pick out
Your hands, tiny in all that air, applauding.

Once again the reader faces the typical Larkinsque ambivalence. The poet's desperation to act out his impulse (to hold her hand shamelessly) has a subtle contradiction by being distant). Proximity with the lover induces passivity as in 'Reasons for Attendance' (TLD 18), Poetry of Desparture (TLD 34). But distance evokes a powerful impulse to act (hold her tiny hand). This dilemma cannot easily be resolved. The Larkin speaker knows that distance secures the impossibility of an action, which means no fear of failure. Romantic vision can retain its beauty and charm only when it is sufficiently away from actuality. Thus, Larkin accepts the value of love in human life, but with a caution.

In the poem 'For Sidney Bechet' (TWW 16), the speaker
recognizes the 'appropriate falsehood' awakened by the musical notes in others. But for him:

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.

The musical notes inspire him to surrender to art, like to love - 'Like an enormous Yes'. The first stanza reveals the deception involved in all the listeners, which has an ambiguity about the speaker's inclusion in it. But his 'Crescent City' is where art and morality both combine - 'noise of Good'. A moment of perfect bliss arrives when truth and beauty become one.

Larkin accepts the ennobling effect of an aesthetic experience. The success of art lies in evoking similar responses in the others. Larkin's most positive attitude towards life and art is revealed when he says:

One of the jobs of the poem is to make

the beautiful seem true and the true beautiful.\(^\text{12}\)

Larkin values the fidelity to experience the most. Beauty follows truth. Larkin's poetry elevates the ordinary to extraordinary and transforms the commonplace to the exceptional through this pure aesthetic experience. Even an experience of gloom or madness acquires a different meaning through his poems.

'Home is So Sad' (TWW 17) and 'As Bad as a Mile' (TWW 32) are both exquisite lyrics about a sense of failure in ordinary life or love. The former portrays a subtle and complex emotional state of mind:

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.

This sadness is a state of mind. The void created by 'the last to go' is borne with stoic calmness - 'stays at it was left'. There is a sense of loss combined
with a sense of failure 'Long fallen wide'. Every object is witness to this unrealized ideal. The experience of sadness becomes universal, through this exquisite lyric. This very impossibility of transforming the ideal into real is ironically made possible by this poem. The reader passes through an equivocal emotion of desperate beauty and sadness. The poet's hope in human understanding is further confirmed by this inclusion of the reader 'You can see how it was' - The universal truth that the ideal is unattainable is so beautifully conveyed that the poem paradoxically attains its perfection. There is a delicate but profound appreciation of human life through this experience of sadness. 'As Bad as a Mile' delineates the same sense of failure through the metaphor of an apple.

Like the experience of human failure, death is another phenomenon difficult to be reconciled with, for the Larkin Speaker. 'Mr. Bleaney', 'Take One Home for the Kiddies', 'Ambulances', 'Dockery and Son', and 'Nothing to be said', directly or obliquely refer to the theme of death.

In 'Nothing To Be Said' (TWW 11) the poet at first states 'Life is slow dying'. But soon the characteristic ambivalence follows:
Hours giving evidence
Or birth, advance
On death equally slowly.
And saying so to some
Means nothing; others it leaves
Nothing to be said.

The emphasis here is on the awareness of the limited amount of time (Hours), and then on the moral choice the man has to make within that limited time. The earlier note of despair, 'Come and choose wrong / come and choose wrong' (TLD 44) is no longer heard in this volume. Rather the scrutiny of the life-styles we adopt occupies the poet's interest. "How we live measures our own nature", the Speaker says in 'Mr. Bleaney'. The slow pace of death allows man enough time to realize and choose a life of responsibility. The ambiguity of last three lines, has both a note of hopelessness 'saying so to some means nothing' and hope that 'others it leaves / Nothing to be said' - a typical non-committal commitment affirms his faith in man's wisdom.

Similarly, in 'Dockery and Son' (TWW 37-38), 'Death-suited visitant' - the speaker, visits Oxford, and is
informed about his then co-student Dockery, whose choice for an early marriage (nineteen) and the speaker's own for bachelorhood, sets him off to evaluate the validity of human choices and their mysterious source:

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.

The gloominess felt is undeniable. The answer to this mystery of life is found neither in established belief
(what we think truest) nor his instinctual awareness (most want to do). The futility of efforts to unfold the mystery (those warp tight-shut door) may lead to a momentary bleakness. Failure due to inexplicability of life can bring 'boredom' - 'ennui' - and the fear of extinction can be the highest under such uncertainties. However, this sharp recognition of failure does not bring a note of despair. On the contrary, it emphasizes what is left behind, - preserved in history and life styles that we choose. Larkin's concern is with the 'attitude' that man takes, a state of mind which leads to an action rather than the action or the event itself.

No doubt, the dreadful nature of death occupies his constant attention, but it does not compel him to negate the value of life. On the contrary, it is precisely this awareness of a limited time that imposes a greater responsibility on an individual. While in an interview answering a question 'which (are) virtues and vices'? he said:

Well, thrift, hard work, reverence, desire to preserve — those are the virtues, ... on the other hand idleness, greed and treason.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} Philip Larkin, Required Writing, p.52.
Larkin's undivided attention to his people and places is intrinsically bound with his desire to preserve his experience through art. He writes with a sense of history that links the past with the present.

The effect of time on an individual's life appears in 'MCXXIV' (TWW 28) and 'Days' (TWW 27) overtly. 'Days' reflects on the fact of the mortality of man and his moral responsibility in life:

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?

There are two questions posed before the reader, first, questioning the purpose of life and the other which is an answer in itself, suggests the acceptance of the limitations of human existence not with any sense of despair but with a note of happiness - Life, continuously wakes us to the same truth that Eliot has so differently expressed in 'The Waste Land':

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME\(^1^4\)

Larkin's matter-of-fact and calm tone, so different from Eliot's alerts the reader to the same urgency, to the quick passage of Time.

There is no pessimism about this finality of death, but only an awareness which keeps the Larkin speaker responsible and less deceived. His choices are always well-considered and ring with a moral note. His choice for isolation is self-willed and manifests a deeper and greater sense of responsibility and reverence towards life. People can be indifferent to their 'places and people' - like Mr. Bleaney who did not notice 'Tussocky, littered' or never 'stood and watched the frigid wind / Tossling the clouds'. But the Larkin persona observes the vanishing panorama of his beloved England:

Never such innocence
Never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word -

He is keenly aware of something that is silently receding into past. Unlike the young couples of 'The Whitsun Weddings' who never 'thought of the others they would never meet / Or how their lives would all contain this hour' the speaker finds a deeper and wider significance
The less-deceived eye of this speaker can clearly see through the doubly trapped, 'crowds, colourless and careworn'. The false promises of the advertisement world delude them into believing that this is 'pure crust, pure foam, / Pure coldness to our live imperfect eyes' ('Essential Beauty', TWW 42) - The direct sympathy for an ordinary man as expressed in the earlier volume, now appears through a mask of irony and detachment. He watches the savage ironies of modern existence either with stoic calmness, or with self deprecation. He laughs at his own self or even at others. His poems are excellent dramatic monologues with many subtle shifts and turns. He employs this form to bring out the discrepancy between the speaker's views and the larger moral judgement implied by the poet. This allows the reader to search for values in an ironical way. Often this detached tone of the speaker becomes bitter or satirical or humorous or lyrical. The apparent simplicity conceals a very complex emotional response. A poet with such a profound sense of history cannot be easily understood. His awareness of the organic relationship of the human being with Time, is one of the major themes of High Windows. Even
his keen perception of the surface details conveys this sense of historical setting. They are not only important geographically but they represent an entire ethos.

The ambiguity in his responses is partly because his convictions are classical and his impulses are romantic. The ambivalence in his poetry results from this inclusion of the worthwhileness of human life and stubborn refusal to be deceived. 'What are days for'? he asks. And answers with gratefulness 'They are to be happy in!' - His attitude to life and art is so subtle, respectful and faithful that only such a poet can claim with so much faith and conviction (and yet calmness) that:

"What will survive of us is love."