

consciousness nevertheless created a revitalized climate of esoteric inquiry.

Figures such as Freud and Jung, Bergson and James, as well as the Fabians and others, were often deeply influenced by, or even immersed in, a worldview that was essentially drawn from the Gnostic, cabalistic, and Hermetic traditions the occultists regurgitated. Thanks to their influence, what is essentially an occultist worldview came to permeate much of the Western mind in the last century. Why should it be surprising that so many people today spout it still, and that so many of its claims and promises have become the commonly, though unconsciously, held assumptions of modern life?

Whittaker Chambers writes in the Preface to *Witness* that communism was not an invention of the 20th century but, in fact, is "man's second oldest faith. Its promise was whispered in the first days of the Creation under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: 'ye shall be as gods.'" It is precisely the same promise that magic—the alchemy, the Cabala, and the demon-raising of the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley—tried to fulfill. It is no accident that so many Fabians were connected to it; their vision of a planned and closely regulated utopia ruled by an elite armed with its own secret knowledge is largely a secularized version of what the magicians of the Golden Dawn fantasized about. Orthodox Christians will find the vision of man-made-god blasphemous and abhorrent, as well as profoundly evil in itself, regardless of how many fancy rituals and soupy formulas dress it up. Aside from its theological import, however, the vision also supposes that human beings can ignore, transcend, and violate the laws of nature (including those that govern their own nature) and build their New Jerusalem as they fancy. The New Jerusalem that the Golden Dawn, the Theosophical Society, and similar cults tried to construct with their fake magic failed, as did that of their secularized heirs in Moscow, Beijing, and Washington. No doubt Madonna and her outside-the-box "Kabbalistic" buddies think they will do better in the future.

*Samuel Francis is a nationally syndicated columnist and political editor of Chronicles.*

## Daffodils for Wordsworth

by Patrick Walsh

Philip Larkin: Collected Poems  
edited by Anthony Thwaite  
New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux;  
218 pp., \$14.00



The name Philip Larkin (1922-1985) is a wonderfully poetic one, conjuring an image of a lover of horses on a carefree adventure. Such, however, is far from the temperament of this 20th-century poet, whose poetry is more suggestive of some horse in a Dickens novel, harnessed to an industrial wheel and moving forever round in some dreary factory. Larkin believes that there is "no elsewhere that underwrites our existence." His friend Kingsley Amis described him as "one who found the universe a bleak and hostile place and recognized very clearly the disagreeable realities of human life, above all the dreadful effects of time on all we have and are."

Larkin's sustained melodious song is of the endless passage of time and coming death. "Aubade," which means a morning song, first appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* during Advent 1977. It is an advent of death, not birth:

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.

Czeslaw Milosz appreciated the poetic skill and craftsmanship of Larkin's five-stanza poem but protested that

the poem leaves me not only dissatisfied but indignant and I wonder why myself. Perhaps we forget too easily the centuries-old mutual hostility between reason, science and science-inspired philos-

ophy on the one hand and poetry on the other? Perhaps the author of the poem went over to the side of the adversary and his ratiocination strikes me as a betrayal? For death in the poem is endowed with the supreme authority of Law and universal necessity, while man is reduced to nothing, to a bundle of perceptions, or even less, to an interchangeable statistical unit.

Larkin was strongly influenced by Thomas Hardy and writes with his hard clarity. Hardy's poetry, however, is more open to the possibility of grace working through nature. Even Hardy hearing a "Darkling Thrush" holds open the possibility of "Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew / And I was unaware." Ecstatic notes of optimism are not to be found in Larkin. Yet, in his Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse*, Larkin says that he wanted "to bring together poems that will give pleasure to their readers." This theme recurs in his essays. Larkin believed that poetry readers should "enjoy what they read," wanting to know, "if not, what the point is of carrying on."

I do not take much pleasure in the content of Larkin's poems, but I do delight in his use of language and in a poetry that scans and rhymes and is coherent. These qualities are altogether rare today, but Larkin is a master of traditional verse: He suffers in perfect iambs. Larkin rightly took pleasure in the form of his poems. How he found pleasure in their burden, I have trouble fathoming.

I used to think Larkin was simply having a lark in his poems. Starting to laugh, however, I found that I could manage only a cynical smirk. He says children are mean and seems to think that love is just selfishness. Sadly, he never moves beyond this stance. Larkin's is the antithesis of passion, for passion means "to let," "to allow," and it entails suffering. This pained suffering is part of a higher nature of which we are capable. Larkin closes himself to this mystery, thinking it "wiser to keep away."

In "Love," he writes that

The difficult part of love  
Is being selfish enough,  
Is having the blind persistence  
To upset an existence  
Just for your own sake  
What cheek it must take.

Larkin never married. Of his parents'

union (which was not an unhappy one), he writes, "the marriage left me with two convictions: that human beings should not live together, and that children should be taken from their parents at an early age." I find much of his poetry to be a kind of self-willed negativity and a closing off of oneself to the world. Larkin once said that "deprivation was for him what daffodils were for Wordsworth."

Trying to put Larkin in perspective, I picked up *The Soul of London* by Ford Maddox Ford. The business of the artist, says Ford, "is to render the actual" and to be "passionately alive to all aspects of life" and open to it. For, in the modern world, "facts so innumerable beset us that the gatherer of facts is of little value." The artist must make out the pattern of the bewildering carpet that modern life is. Larkin, while painting the pattern of the carpet, never looks beyond a factual world and so closes himself off in darkness.

Hardy once said that we should admit that we are in the dark, but that light may follow. Larkin seems to think the darkness has virtue in itself. In a review of "The Poetry of William Barnes," he writes: "if his work has a deficiency, it is in lacking Hardy's bitter and ironical despair. Barnes is almost too gentle, too

submissive and forgiving." One might ask, "Too submissive, gentle, and forgiving" to whom?

I prefer Larkin's early poems, where a little light is allowed to shine, as in "Coming":

On longer evenings,  
Light chill and yellow,  
Bathes the serene  
Forehead of houses.  
A thrush sings,  
Laurel surrounded  
In the deep bare garden,  
Its fresh peeled voice  
Astonishing the brickwork.  
It will be spring soon  
It will be spring soon—  
And I whose childhood  
Is a forgotten boredom,  
Feel like a child  
Who comes on a scene  
Of adult reconciling,  
And can understand nothing  
But the usual laughter  
And starts to be happy.

Though Larkin sees no order in the universe, he maintains an ordered integrity in his poetry and is a formidable defender of tradition. He loathes academic poets and their parlor games with prose

that they call poetry. That is the curious thing about Larkin. This quotation from a *Paris Review* interview is uplifting:

It seems to me undeniable that up to this century literature used language in the way we all use it, painting represented what anyone with normal vision sees, and music was an affair of nice noises rather than nasty ones. The innovation of "modernism" in the arts consisted of doing the opposite. I don't know why, I'm not a historian. You have to distinguish between things that seemed odd when they were new, but are now quite familiar, such as Ibsen and Wagner, and things that seemed crazy when they were new and seem crazy now like Finnegan's Wake and Picasso.

This new edition reflects Larkin's own ordering of the poems and also contains his previously uncollected work. The reader can see how great a master he is of traditional poetic form and how fully he paints the emptiness of modernity.

Patrick J. Walsh writes from Quincy, Massachusetts.

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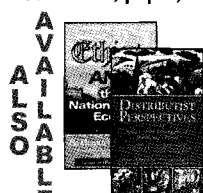


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# Becoming Native to This Place



This fall has been especially beautiful here in Rockford. There is some truth, however, in the old adage that “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” so I am not certain whether a year’s worth of rain and sun and cold nights with a moderately late first frost have all come together to provide particularly brilliant colors or whether the eyes of this beholder, somewhat less distracted than in recent years and moving more slowly, propelled by feet rather than by internal-combustion engine, have simply been more attentive and receptive. In any case, it has been a fall to remember, in every sense of that phrase.

Fall has always been my favorite season, and not just because of the physical beauty. It is the season that, it seems to me, most strongly evokes a sense of place. The beauty of spring can be enjoyed anywhere, and, indeed, the enjoyment is often enhanced by a measure of novelty—new growth seems especially new when you are seeing it for the first time. Summer—even (or, perhaps, especially) a summer spent at home—is a time of restlessness. Winter is a time of home and hearth and family, a season shuttered against the world outside—a bourgeois season, certainly; but, to a great extent, the delights of home can be shared even by those who have little connection to the broader place in which they find themselves.

The beauty of fall is enhanced by familiarity. When I was growing up in Michigan, we always went “up north” to see the colors, but year after year we traveled back to the same locations, and it was a comfort to note how little things had changed from fall to fall. And we always stopped at the same roadside stands on the way home, to buy potatoes and onions in 50-pound sacks to stock the root cellar for the coming cold.

Familiarity is inextricable from memory—an obvious point, but one that bears repeating, for man, without memory, is something less than human. And memory is an aspect of imagination, which even in our day of passive entertainment—television, films, computer screens—is an active faculty. It is stimulated by sights and sounds and smells, but, in the end, our

memories are largely a matter of will, a point Merle Haggard understood better than most modern philosophers: *I guess everything does change / except what we choose to recall . . .*

As our fall stops at roadside stands suggest, men are creatures of habit—another old adage, and one that seems to have fallen on hard times. In a world of constant upheaval, in which even “conservatives” brag about their dedication to “progress,” we instinctively think of habit in a pejorative sense. Yes, there are good habits and bad habits, but shorn of the adjective, *habit* usually for us means the latter. “Creatures of habit” are unthinking, unfeeling, blindly pursuing lives by rote, mumbling the prayers they learned at their mother’s knee while fumbling through their beads. *Habit*, however, shares the same ultimate root (the Latin *habere*, to have, to hold) as *inhabit* and *habitation*—words that really mean nothing if separated from a particular place. J.R.R. Tolkien, in inventing his hobbits, may well have meant to suggest a combination of “human” and “rabbit” (as their long ears and furry feet would seem to indicate), but it is likely no coincidence that the word also brings to mind *habit*, for the hobbits are the ultimate creatures of habit—and, thus, of the Shire, of place.

Modern men spend much of their lives trying to break out of the patterns of everyday life, to discard their habits, and not only the bad ones—indeed, they tend to despise the good ones more than they do the bad. They want to make new memories, have a series of once-in-a-lifetime experiences—experiences that may have been shared with a few close friends or family members, but which aren’t the shared experiences of a particular community traveling together through time to eternity in a particular place.

Growing up in a small town where everyone impressed upon me the importance of going somewhere (else) and doing something (more important), I grew impatient with my grandfather, who would tell the same stories about the same people and the same places over and over again. Today, when no one tells stories any longer, I realize how lucky I was that he chose to cultivate his own memory—

and mine—through repetition, because those places, when I return to them, are still familiar to me, wrapped up in my memory with the sound of his voice. I only wish that my children, whom he never knew (he died a few months before my marriage), could sit at his feet and learn their history as well.

His stories will never be recorded in books, and yet they are more truly history than most of what is published under that title. For history is memory, and once the lines of memory are disrupted, the people who have gone before us, and even the buildings and places that still exist around us, become little more than data. A church can make way for a tunnel for a new jail, a school building can become an abortuary, cemeteries can lie unvisited and their occupants unmourned, neighborhoods can vanish and the city of which they were once a part can expand into nothingness, an insignificant quadrant of an artificial region dominated by four rivers.

God in His mercy, however, has given us this season, with all of its sights and sounds and smells, to stimulate our memory, to call us home, to give us the opportunity to reflect on the place in which He has placed us and to remember those who have gone before: people like my grandfather and Rockford radio icon Chris Bowman, who, whatever their faults, were people of place and of living memory, ties to a past that doesn’t have to die—indeed, that we shouldn’t allow to die, if we wish to remain men and not become mere insignificant data ourselves.

And so, as the days grow shorter and we prepare for the coming winter, let us not only call to mind but ask God to help us live the words of the ancient prayer: *Eternal memory. Eternal memory. Grant, O Lord, to your servant blessed repose and eternal memory.* <C>