

The Prism of Colour in Philip Larkin's Poetry

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Abstract:

Philip Larkin animates the imagery that he creates with various colours and fine hues. In this paper, Larkin's colour spectrum is inspected to uncover how its elements are manipulated along Larkin's *Oeuvre* from the early juvenilia to the later and posthumous poems. The study focuses on the poems in which Larkin seems to make colours dynamic and vital agents of awareness, candour, abstruseness, frolicsomeness, and wishful thinking among many other manifestations. An introduction of an iridescent colour range or a commentary on an opalescent background is set to demystify or even mystify as fit so that the questions of existence, knowledge, youth, old age, life, and death are effortlessly and most vividly argued.

Key Words: Philip Larkin, colour, blue, white, the Whitsun Weddings, High Windows, life, youth, death.

Introduction

From his early poetic attempts to his last poems, Philip Larkin makes full use of the colour spectrum. Though his signature colour seems to be the blue of the heavenly dome, which 'High Windows' brings to a climax, many other colours made their way to his poems serving both pragmatic as well as visionary and intellectual ends. On the one hand, Larkin's employment of colour documents his interest in painting which dates from his school days when he and his friend James Sutton used to dream of becoming novelist and painter respectively. On the other, colours help Larkin to focus and explore reality most vividly and attractively, drawing attention to seemingly descriptive details that capture thought and advance philosophical intimations.

His third book of verse *The Whitsun Weddings* published in 1964 seems to inaugurate Larkin's extensive investment in colour for poetical and philosophical ends. Likewise, his last collection *High Windows* (1974) makes of colour a powerful agent of thought and introspection. Nevertheless, in his early poems and his first two books of verse *The North Ship* (1945) and *The Less Deceived* (1955), colour is by no means absent. It is always present as a background prop and a vehicle of thoughts and reflections on reality and what is beyond reality.

The present paper traces the colour prism in Larkin's poetry in an attempt to explain how colour operates as a motif and how it changes and transforms as Larkin's poetics evolves, develops and matures. It also endeavours to uncover the thematic and poetical implications which colours host and their use empowers or enhances.

Colours in Art and Literature

Colour has occupied an important position in language and thought besides its primary importance in the fine arts. In philosophy and literature, colour is used to embody sensations and perceptions and explain intellectual and aesthetic concepts. Some colours seem to correlate with specific notions and concepts. Artists, novelists and poets are drawn by a certain colour(s) making it their "signature color" and an individualistic stylistic option. Riley gives a concise survey of major signature palettes which range from:

Vermeer's blue and lemon yellow to van Gogh's very different blues and yellows, or Barnett Newman's red, Yves Klein's or Sam Francis's blue, the greens of Degas and Chagall. Hegel's "grey on grey" and the vivid reds of Jung's mandalas, the azure of Mallarmé, the blue of Trakl, or the yellow of Proust, and the gold and white of Scriabin are all as individual as any stylistic feature. (1995 : 10-11)

Being an "ever-elusive notion", colour is a complex phenomenon. Since Goethe's *Theory of Colour*, many artists and philosophers attempted to engage with the notion of colour to determine its "ontological status" (Riley, 1995: 4-8). Goethe (1976 :xvii, 31) pronounces colour as "a degree of darkness" and Charles Lock Eastlake in his preface to Goethe's *Theory of Colour* concludes that "the colours are acts of light; its active and passive modifications". The characterisation of the way colours act on the senses "aesthetically or psychologically" and "the emotional responses involved" are found likewise enigmatic (Riley, 1995: 8). Colour, William H. Gass (1975:73) proposes, "is consciousness itself, color is feeling, and shape". Therefore, it operates on the perceptive and mental apparatus. Riley finds colour an essential part in many "behavioral areas" such as "emotion, memory, learning, special aptitudes or disabilities, imagination, social patterns, dream imagery, and motivation" (Riley, 1995: 298). Along with sensations and perceptions, culture as well as "social development" are reflected in colour categorisations so that Dedrick (1998: 3) claims it is possible to "use colour vocabulary to gauge the social and mental evolution of a culture".

Larkin's Rainbows

Larkin launches a varied and curious collection of colours in *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) particularly in the title poem itself, "The Large Cool Store" and "Here". The opening poem, 'Here', showcases the contrast between the wild and urban landscapes. Camera-like, the eye of the observer records the phantasmagoria passing before him as he watches from the train window. At first, the entire vista is monochromatic due to the semi-darkness of the dawn where the scene alternates in shadowy colours. However, when the wilderness is left behind and the urban landscape takes over, colours make their way to the bright morning picture. The eye,

which has explored the murky scene earlier, darts a glance up the eastern horizon to greet “The piled gold clouds” above the “widening river” as the city approaches (Burnett, 2012: 49).¹ Henceforth, the *gold* of the clouds activates a more varied spectrum.

The items of urbanity uncovered under the daylight is out on a limb with that of the heathland shrouded in the semi-darkness, exposing and deepening the discrepancy between the dark, almost exotic and daylight, urban landscapes. The asymmetry which ‘Here’ invests in is sealed when “red-kitchen-ware” displayed behind shops’ windows smudges the picture and widens the aesthetic gap between the downmarket urban and the splendid rustic. “The red of plastic kitchen-ware”, as an index of the synthetic world and the banal urbanity, is set in contrast with the gold of the natural world in the first stanza (Rowe, 2011: 27). Disconcerted by the artificiality of the man-made vista, the eye hastens to return to the elemental landscape of the almost vacant wilderness. The mind’s eye supported by memory frees the observer from the synthetic banality, directing his outlook upward towards the ‘Luminously-peopled air’ and “past the poppies bluish neutral distance”. In gold and bluish hues, existence stands impervious and “out of reach”, face to face with “the sun”. In the first stanza, the dawn draws a silhouette of the pastoral, semi-cultivated heath whereas in the last, the mystical and intangible landscape is laid bare before the mind’s eye aided by the prospect of the rising sun. The wilderness in its actuality is nowhere to see in the middle of the urban metropolis uncovered by daylight; it is only conjured from the memory and tempered with by a mind that lets the sun invade the dawn murkiness. The colour spectrum is entirely absorbed by the firmamental blue that extends infinitively and eternally. Hence, luminosity and bluishness define the virtual inaccessible world of contemplation.

‘The Whitsun Weddings’ is a poem that relates the sceptic narrator’s encounter of newly married couples at train stations between Hull and London. At beginning of the journey, the sun and heat conspire against the traveller/narrator. In the third stanza, the bored narrator even diagnoses an impasse in which the sun appears as a hurdle and its ruinous influence is contagiously damaging, making him indisposed or reluctant to explore the elements of the sunny afternoon. This fretful disposition clings on urging him to be oblivious even to what goes on in the shade. He almost dismisses the entire afternoon as unworthy if not indeed a nuisance. When suddenly the narrator’s eyes are caught by the wedding guests gathered in the shades in their colourful attires to see the couples off, that afternoon is rescued. The cool shade harbours more colourful attractions than the narrator was prepared to admit. His mood is further lightened by the wholesomeness of what his eyes started to pick and enjoy. The pleasure escalates with “The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres” marking “off the girls unreally from the rest.” Though the pastel colour inventory looks vulgar and lurid, it redounds to the surreal impact the entire sight has on the narrator, which is that of discovery and surprise. Booth (2014: 145) finds in the painting-like

¹Archie Burnett (ed.) (2012). *The Complete Poems of Philip Larkin*. London: Faber and Faber. All subsequent references to the poems are from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

description “an abstract pattern of colour and shapes [that] underpins the depiction of how things look.” The blinding sun and the hanging heat are shoved off by the energetic vividness of the nuptials. The colourful moving feasts rob his attention and enlists his interest and pleasure. Later towards the end of the poem/journey, the “walls of blackened moss” redound to both verdure and blackness crowned by the rain shower of the final line “Set out of sight” from a cloudless sky which one expects to be blue and vast.

Philip Larkin’s prism of colour is wide-ranged and various allowing for even finer shades. Larkin introduces a fluorescent and inventive range of colours in “The Whitsun Weddings”, but vivid colours have a more intensive and vital presence in “The Large Cool Place” written in (1961) than any other poem. The colourful array of girls’ dresses in “The Whitsun Weddings”, which captivates the interest of the fastidious traveller is bolstered up and enriched a few years after in “The Large Cool Place”. In the latter, Larkin’s narrator is a voyeur who steals glances at the seductive nightwear decorating shops’ windows. Though Booth (2005: 93) describes the colour range as “ethereal”, the dress code of the post-war society seems to have become more lurid and less uniformed, reflecting a radical change of taste towards the vulgar and less modest. As a reflection of emotion, colour “can be a vehicle of deception”, Riley (1995: 7, 6) intimates, and bright colours in particular are regarded with suspicion and treated “as though” they “are dangerous.” Therefore, colour inventiveness is an index of a radical social and ideological change. It is one of the elements that announces the advent of a new era where the bright colours “brilliant reds, green, and blue” are no longer looked at with suspicion, marking an “avant-garde” view, which endorses “visual jazz”. Colours document a social and intellectual shift that caters to the taste of the common majority rather than elitist minorities.

Besides, the variety of the “weekday” couture which the third line lists, colours match the new standards in “browns and greys, maroon and navy” (p. 61). These are the colour codes of “the cut-price” crowd or the working people who leave homes early in the morning so as not to be late for “factory, yard and site.” On the other hand, “Modes For Night” that draw that same crowd are set in “Lemon, sapphire, moss-green, rose”. The colour array whose items deviate from the customary colour names (in contrast to yellow, blue, green, and pink) creates an ecstatic and exotic atmosphere that paves the way for the “unearthly love” and “unreal wishes” of the last stanza, which reminds the reader of “The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres” of the girls looking unreal in “The Whitsun Weddings”. The nightwear and the minute nuances of bright colours are the artificial endeavour to romanticise “synthetic” love, the only version of romance which the modern world offers.

In “To the Sea” from *High Windows*, colour is essential in the postcard-like representation of the sea. Larkin holds onto the norms, refraining from the inventive nuances of modern fabric industry which feature in “The Large Cool Store”. Instead, he enlists traditional colours as he celebrates tradition. So, the “blue water”, “red bathing caps”, the “yellow sand”, the “white steamer stuck in the afternoon”, and “children, frilled in white” along with “clear water” complete the picture perfect of

the beach (p. 75). The exclusiveness of essential colours “blue, red, yellow and white bits of colour” establishes irresistible references to “the beach paintings of, say, Boudin” (Stojkovic, 2006: 111). This is one of the few cases in which white loses its sombre connotation prevalent in poems like “Ambulances” and “Sympathy in White Major” (analysed below). In all, this colourful vignette is reserved to embody the energy and dynamism of the beach as long as it is abuzz with swimmers. But once the beach day is concluded and “families start to trek back to the cars”, colours change. Now that the brightness of the daylight is gone, the observer is no longer blinded by the hectic ambience of the beach. The eye starts to spot “the rusting soup-tins”; more importantly, the “the white steamer” is no longer in sight and “Like breathed-on glass / The sunlight has turned milky.” The view turns foggy with opacity and the transparency which the “clear water over smoothed pebbles” secures is altogether lost.

The milky light in “To the Sea” looks deeper in an earlier poem, “Coming” (*The Less Deceived*), and is hence dubbed “chill and yellow” when it “Bathes the serene / Foreheads of houses” (p. 29). Larkin could have used golden instead of yellow which is a more natural way to describe sunlight and is in line with celebrating an upcoming spring and a potential change as the colour gold is “consistently signifying transcendence” (Messenger, 2003: 307). Yellow does not have about it as a colour all the positivity and magnificence of gold. The choice of yellow has something to do with a sun that belongs to an ending chilly winter promising an ensuing warm spring that yet has to be realised and experienced to be true.²

When spring itself is in the focus as in “Spring” (*The Less Deceived*), the traditional green is implemented though rather peculiarly in “Green-shadowed people” of the first line (p. 40). Jung (cited in Cronin, 1988: 39) correlates green with “sensation function” and hence it is more attuned with the elemental and primitive. The green of spring symbolising rejuvenation offers a new lease to life and shelters people who observe how the grass “awakened”, children play, birds sing, and the sun flashes “like a dangled looking-glass”. Sitting under the green shadow, which the trees cast, people in effect watch their youth slip and fritter away. In “Send no money” (*The Whitsun Weddings*), green, in italics, is a metaphor for immaturity, inexperience, and naivety which are assumingly absent from the “eye” of the “booming Boy” (p. 70). Equating green with care-free, uninformed boyhood echoes “Fern Hill” by Dylan Thomas whose poetry the young Larkin used to read and listen to with great relish though he later found extravagant.

“The green shore past the salt-white cordage” eyed by the departing “young men” in “How Distant” (*High Windows*) makes clear and deep the sense of loss that the voyagers experience as they cast their last look on the land (p. 88). Green in “Continuing to Live”, is no longer a procreative colour, but a property of an evening that has death in store unlike the green evening of Keats’s *Endymion*, as Burnett (2012: 493) notes. The image of “the green evening quiet in the sun” hails life and

² In *The Less Deceived*, “No Road” discusses a love affair that has come to an end and hence Larkin talks about “a cold sun” (35).

energy in Keats' poem, but introduces extinction in Larkin's, hence a death ambience is activated (1990: 87).

"The Old Fools" (*High Windows*) exposes the cruelty of old age much to the oblivion of the aged themselves. Light acutely brings to notice morbid signs like the "ash hair" (p. 81) in place of grey or white (in "Show Saturday" and "Heads in the women's Ward" for instance), which the second stanza lists among the "looks" that mark old age. It is worth mentioning that "ash" appears in an earlier poem "Dry-Point" (*The Less Deceived*) to modify the hills in "What ashen hills", which stand for the failure and sterility of the erotic fulfilment; the so-called ashen hills emerge at the wake of collapse of "the bright blown walls" (p. 31). Ashes of course are a common euphemism for the remains of the lifeless body. Ash also marks the end of a burning fire and typifies impotence and infertility as it cannot start new fires unlike sparks, for instance.

In the Baudelairean "Femmes Damées", the sunny outside of the early morning is caught in a snap-like motionless picture. "A Green Line bus" and "plots of cabbages" are visible in contrast to the inside where "the living-room is ruby" and "the fire is ash". The green, ruby/red, and ash/grey are codes for energy/incipience, sensuality/eroticism, and the ultimate demise which in themselves summarise existence. With "her pale gold hair" falling down, Rosemary is caught weeping and then staring frantically while the beast-like Rachel smiles "with satisfied ferocity" (p. 117). Gold appears pale as the transcendence, which desire promises, turns, upon consummation, to be fake or wanting.

Red takes on various forms and suggests some kind of transformation from one state to another. The synthetic red of the chintzy, plastic kitchenware indicates mediocrity in "Here" (discussed above). The red, opposed to white, delineates the life/death compact in "Ambulances". Ruby in "Femmes Damées" is an index of an erotica, which lures but also deludes. Red, however, defines the east that expands before the watching persona in "XXV" (*The North Ship*) and marks the end of the last night dream where the beloved comes "Unbidden" (p. 18). Love has already expired and passion faded; sunrise is the cue to embrace reality. The severance, however, has not been accomplished without effort.

Larkin intends his colours to have about them some peculiarity that defines their uniqueness and triggers untypical sensations. When a warning is sent against a peculiar or even an eccentric bend of the speaker's mind in "If, My Darling" (*The Less Deceived*), "Monkey-brown" and "fish-grey" infiltrate into the colour territory to paint "the creep of the varying light" (p. 44). The brown-grey ambience in association with animals (monkey and fish) is designed to typify the wilderness of a fear-inspiring mind that remains unpredictable and untamed. Indeed, in this poem, the speaker warns his "darling" if she ever schemes to read his mind. Alice-like, she has to brace herself for the wonders which this Rabbit hole-like mind of his has in store for her. The corollary is a "nightmarish setting... lightened by its wittily gothic presentation" (Reibetanz, 1986: 272). Prying such a mind open may inflict pain and incur damages on the curious party. Thus, the relative drabness of brown transforms into inventiveness: almost an exotica as it is. Nonetheless, brown retains its

traditional ambience when it colours four of the eight eggs mentioned in “Show Saturday” (*High Windows*) which celebrates ritual and tradition. Larkin is keen on honouring culture and preserving its tradition. The brown along with the other four eggs white in colour make their way into a long list of ordinaries that furnish the interior of the show tents, which the poet wishes to keep intact.

Analogous uncommon hues stand out in “Livings II”, where the lighthouse keeper talks about a tumultuous day sky that “builds / Grape-dark over the salt / Unsown stirring fields” (p. 28). In contrast, the snowy night lets loose and uncontrollable the “Leather-black” waters. Grape-dark and leather-black fall in neatly with the overall poetic disposition of a Prometheus-like lighthouse keeper singing the praises of the aquatic world and its creatures, which he regulates to keep in check any destructive impetus on the part of the ocean. In keeping with the latter use, Larkin uses “Stoned-coloured light” in “Sad Steps” to furnish the optics of a moonlit nightscape unveiled after “the moon dashes through clouds” (p. 89). The speaker’s pathos and the sorrow he wallows in make the imagery almost colourless if not for the “Stoned-coloured light”.

The Whites and the Blues

There are quite a few colours that have acquired major thematic and symbolic roles with their constant occurrence in Larkin’s poetry. White and blue top the list as the colours that are most thematically employed. The poems invest in such colours, not as mere props or supplementary factors, but major motifs and pivotal poetical agents. “Sympathy in White Major” (*High Windows*) makes of white a launching point to an argument on colour, race, and identity. As such, race used as “the indelible mark of negative difference” is measured against white being “colourless” and “transcendental” (Osborne, 2008: 245). Further, written as a parody of Gautier’s “Symphonie en blanc majeur”, the poem revolves around making white a vehicle of the sensational and elemental as Barthes (in Riley, 1995: 58) illuminates rather than the rhetorical. Marked by “completeness and nothingness. Like the shape of the circle”, Riley (1995: 303) argues, white “serves as a symbol of integration without presenting to the eye the variety of vital forces that it integrates, and thus is as complete and empty as the circle.” And indeed, there is in the poem a sense of blankness like a gaping hollow.

Right from the very beginning with “cubes of ice” and the “foaming gulps” of the mixed drink, the scale is tipped in favour of whiteness and transparency. The thematic locus is the lack of colour, nothingness, or blankness, which portend the helplessness and impotence of the final lines. The speaker considers himself in relation to humanity speaking in the third person. As a hypothetical outsider, he has everything seemingly clearly charted before his eyes. He believes in his altruistic personality which his devotion “to others” proves. He pronounces his stance as different and thinks that he stands apart from others. His means and devices differ though in the end “It didn’t work for them or me” (p. 76), a matter that supports the blankness-nothingness hypothesis to which white lends power. When he toasts for “*the whitest man*” he knows in the end of a long self-panegyric in italics, the eulogy is caricature-like and even comical. After all, “white is not my favourite colour”, he

announces rather anticlimactically, abandoning the italics in which the entire final stanza is couched except for the last line. In pronouncing his disinclination towards white, “a wedge” is driven “between white as a symbol of moral purity and white as a racial signifier. Indeed, it is to bring white pigmentation into the racial debate it is assumed by whites to transcend” (Osborne, 2008: 244). The comically idolised figure of the whitest man of the toast is further brought down.

White along with grey are cogently the colours of death in many a poem where the ghostliness and white/grey go hand in hand. Based on the colour of the shroud and even the traditional representation of ghosts, white and grey are vehicles of lifelessness, ghastliness, and morbidity. In “Ambulances” (*The Whitsun Weddings*), the body on the stretcher is “Light glossy grey” and “a wild white face...overtops / Red stretcher-blankets” (p. 63) where white and red contrast death and life. The “white swaddling / Floats” cloud-like (p. 37) in “Age” (*The Less Deceived*) announces the journey towards old age and the fast approach of death if one thinks of swaddling clothes in opposition to shroud cloths. In “Cut Grass”, death and white are associated as the grass “dies in the white hours” when “hedges [are] snowlike strewn”. Death is put in more whitish details:

White lilac bowed,
Lost lanes of Queen Anne’s face,
And that high-built cloud
Moving at summer’s pace. (p. 94)

White introduces death and makes prominent the sense of loss and mutability to which all life is harnessed. Whiteness, inherent in lilacs, the high cloud, as well as the short-lived Queen Anne’s lace, makes death just as inherent and natural. The sky of an early morning after a sleepless night haunted by the notion of death in “Aubade” looks “white as clay, with no sun” (p. 116). The death-phobic persona has not yet shaken off the horrors of the previous night and its morbid introspections. White typifies best the featureless morning that puts an end to the enervating night.

However, white regains its positive properties in “Bridge for the Living” when the “white towers” and the “Long white-flowered lanes” seem to redound to the serenity and pleasantness of the urbanity. It betrays a pursuit of “purity through chromaticism”; purity itself being one of the concerns in literature (Riley, 1995: 5). The immaculateness if not indeed the purity of white are aided by the rest of the colour inventory of “skies / Of gold and shadows”, “ash-blue sea”, the “ice-crusted ships” which stand out like “A lighted memory no miles eclipse” (pp.118-19). White also stands for “gaiety” in “To the Sea” (*High Windows*). The ekphrasis of the beach with the white steamer in view is worthy reappraisal. When the white steamer is gone, the scene loses a major prop. As a result, the white degenerates into the “milky” of the misty glass, registering the end of beach “gaiety”.

Blue also has both primary priority and purity as Riley (1995: 232) suggests and in Larkin’s poetry too, blue is the colour used to communicate “the condition of wandering and becoming lost.” The sense of being lost is both metaphorical when thoughts and contemplation intensify, but it is also literal in the visual wandering

when the upward look meets a vast firmament beyond reach. Because of its inherent, climatic uplift, the blue in “High Windows” is saved for the last just like it is in “Here”. It is reserved to colour a worldview of surreal infinity whose starting point is a glance darted into the universe that unfolds miraculously before the mind’s eye. Behind “The sun-comprehending glass”, a heavenly panorama of “the deep blue air” is divined to glorify the nothingness, nowhere-ness, and endlessness of an incomprehensible existence. Further, the deep blue which the poem exalts stands in the lieu of “*the dark*” of the recalled thinking, the only other colour that makes an appearance in the poem. The contrariness operates on a far deeper level than the mere visible or superficial. The colour difference triggers a divorce between the social and the spiritual, actual and ideal, or constraint and liberty of mind. This is why “High Windows” typifies “the tendency of the modern mind to seek illusory refuge away from society”. The thinker, however, is not unaware of the unattainable idealism “symbolized by blue”, which he feverishly seeks. As a remedy, Stojkovic’ (2006: 186) illuminates, the reflector prefers to steer his mind away from “all words” and has it dissolve in ‘the deep blue air’.”

Everett (1986: 239) traces the symbolism of the blue as a colour motif to “*L’azur*”, “Mallarmé’s most consistent and philosophical symbol, delineating both the necessity and absence of the ideal” and hence the blue sky echoes “the void” and portrays “our longing”. The blue itself, due to “its unspecificity”, is enigmatic according to Harrison (2005: 122) when placed in analogy with “Stevensian pure blue of the imagination... It is Larkin’s attempt to designate the abyss” in terms of an immeasurable, infinite “sublime” and “a nothingness” where the “deep, blue air,” is “a part of the breath or afflatus of poetry.” But it also insinuates “the ‘otherworldly blue’ of the vault of heaven, lavished on the Virgin’s robes, in religious painting, as expensive as gold, in the Renaissance.” (Pinkstein, 2003: 75). The religious symbolism of the blue works well with the image of high windows mostly found in churches and which trigger the ensuing indulgence in abstractionism.

Metallic Colours

Gold, silver, and even bronze, the metallic colours, which are said to “stridently repel the darkness” by virtue of their brightness as Cronin (1988: 70) illustrates, have their share in Larkin’s poetry. In “Winter” from *The North Ship*, the “winter sun throws back” gold, which appears again in “Solar”. In “XVII”, grave stones oddly enough “would shine like gold / Above each sodden grave” (p. 13). The prominence of death is thus pronounced, yet the use of gold makes the finality of death disputed since gold proclaims a promised “transcendence” that defeats death (Messenger, 2003: 307). Contrarily, in “XX”, the “golden horn” bestowed on the speaker by “a snow-white unicorn” (p. 16) stands for creativity, youth, energy, and passion which the weary speaker seems to be in want of. “Gold” modifies the river which the stellar view seems to form before the upward gaze of the businessman in “Livings I” in a gesture that hints at an upcoming transcendence false or true. It is a mirage image that rehearses the idea of adventurous expeditions to find gold dust in riverbeds and the dreams of success, wealth, and glory in their wake. In “Essential Beauty” both golden and silver appear to sum up the false attractiveness of advertised commodities “A

silver knife sinks into golden butter” (p. 69). Truth and good faith are traded for sham and deceit as commercial tenets dictate. Shakespeare’s “all that glitters is not gold” is casually rehearsed.

Silver is reserved to the description of the charlatan priest’s hair in “Faith Hailing” which makes the picture perfect along with “rimless glasses”, “Dark suit”, and “white collar” (p. 53). “A silver birch” appears in “Breadfruit” (p. 111) when the speaker abandons exotic dreams and fantasies to confront headlong the dictates of the pragmatic world. It defines maturity, knowledge, and practicality in opposition to naivety and youthful indulgence in imaginary sexual conquests. As to “That bronze in the breath” which “XXIX” instructs to throw away along with “that youth” and “That jewel” stands between the living and the dead (p. 20).

The upward turn of the eye liberates the mind and clears the vision in “Livings ” I and III. In “Livings I”, the businessman who has grown bored and weary of the family business he inherited from his father looks at the big night sky which “drains down the estuary like the bed / Of a gold river” (p. 77). Meanwhile, he contemplates breaking out of the mould and finding fresh grounds. The vastness of the nightscape and the gold river of opportunities it promises are found pungent and sardonic, giving false hopes in view of the Great Crash to take place in 1929. In the same vein, with the awareness that ‘Heat is the echo of your / Gold’ (p. 90) in “Solar” (*High Windows*), perceptions spill over one another. The metaphorical mapping places the sun on top of the existential pyramid and at its very centre and origin as invaluable and matchless.

Final Remarks

In Philip Larkin’s poetry, colours feature in various and different modes. As a motif, colour is charged thematically so as to become a poetical and philosophical agent. In other poems, colour plays a subsidiary role as a catalyst or accessory to complement the picture, intensifying the visual effects intended. Occasionally, colour dominates the atmosphere that the poem creates as in “Symphony in White Major”; or else it appears sparsely as a surprising turn, an ecstatic mystery, and an element of marvel and wonder as in “Here” and “High Windows”. In the same vein, though colour is powerfully present in the poems, it is not necessarily quoted favourably. The same exact colour may acquire positive or negative attributes as fits and in reliance on the overall thrust of the poem’s argument. Hence, in Larkin’s poetry, colour is a flexible, and resilient element which serves to perfect the effect intended.

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موشور الألوان في شعر فيليب لاركن

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الخلاصة

أغنى فيليب لاركن (١٩٢٨-١٩٨٥) الصور الشعرية التي ابتدعها بألوان متعددة و لهذا تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على موشور لاركن الشعري و الكشف عن عناصره التي وظفها الشاعر بدءاً من محاولاته الشعرية المبكرة مروراً بمجموعاته الشعرية و صولاً إلى قصائده الأخيرة و حتى تلك التي نشرت بعد وفاته. يركز البحث على تلك القصائد التي كان اللون فيها عاملاً "حيوياً" للوعي و الوضوح او الغموض و الرجاء و اللهو و غير ذلك. جاءت النتائج لتؤكد الدور الفعال الذي تلعبه الألوان بدرجاتها المختلفة النمطية و غير المألوفة في بناء النص الشعري فكان موشور لاركن متنوعاً و غنياً و ذا أبعاد فلسفية وفكرية و نفسية و اجتماعية.