

The Emptiness in Death in Philip Larkin's "Aubade"

by Amrita King

Amarita King writes on Philip Larkin's thoughts on death while commenting on his style as well.

In "Aubade" by Philip Larkin a man describes his perception of death as he lies in his bed staring into deep darkness on anticipation of the sunrise. He does not look forward to the oncoming day because it is only a step in the road leading to death. The speaker in "Aubade" fears death because he believes that it is an inescapable fate that is not only the end of physical existence but spiritual life as well.

The speaker drinks heavily ("getting half-drunk at night") to block out his constant thoughts of dying; his attempts are futile. Death is at the fore - front of his mind as illustrated in:

"Unresting death, a whole day reacer now,
Making all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die." (lines 5-7)

The speaker would like to escape death but knows that is the fate he shows with everyone. "The sure extinction that we travel to " (line 17) and "most things may never happen: this one will" (line 34) demonstrate the assured fate.

Death offers nothing but "total emptiness forever" for the speaker. There is no destination to reach once one dies as Larkin points out: "And shall be lost in always. Not to be here, not to be anywhere," (lines 18-19)

The speaker feels there is no consolation that can be offered for dying. "Death is no different whined at than withstood." (line 40) He also believes that religion was conjured up to mislead people's perceptions of death.

Philip Larkin uses many elements of style that straighten his ideas of death and leave a profound picture in the reader's mind.

Larkin chooses the metaphor "The anesthetic from which none come round." (line 30) to stress his point that there is no feeling in death. He makes sure the reader sees that he will be deprived of all senses once dead:

 "...no sight, no sound,
 No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
 Nothing to love or link with," (line 27-29)

Describing religion as a "vast moth- eaten musical brocade" (line 23) magnificently depicts the speaker's belief that religion is just an elaborately woven blanket made to deceive people about the consequences of death. The reader visualizes religion as a veil with holes eaten through it so he can see the truth.

A paradox is found in religion being a brocade. People usually look to religion as a light that will lead them from darkness. Larkin depicts religion, however, as a barrier from the truth of death.

He strengthens the reader's picture of death by using sensual images. Death is "a small unfocused blur, a standing shill: (line 32). The metonymy used by referring to death as a "grave" also contributes to the visualization of death. Synesthesia is found in "soundless dark". This aids the reader in identifying with the speaker's surroundings.

Larkin's poem about death succeeds in painting a candid picture of the speaker's belief that there is no afterlife. Death is final.

