



Poetry of Departures

This poem is a defence of conventional morality and ordinary routine life against the attractive romanticism to which most human beings are sometimes prone.

Philip Larkin
The Less Deceived
(1955)

- Sometimes you hear, fifth-hand¹,
As epitaph:
*He chucked up everything*²
And just **cleared off**,
5 And always the voice will sound
Certain you approve
This audacious, purifying,
Elemental move.
- And they are right, I think.
10 We all hate home
And having to be there:
I detest my room,
Its specially-chosen **junk**,
The good books, the good bed,
15 And my life, in perfect order:
So to hear it said
- He walked out on the whole crowd*³
Leaves me flushed and stirred⁴,
Like *Then she undid her dress*
20 Or *Take that you bastard*;
Surely I can, if he did?
And that helps me stay
Sober and industrious.
But I'd go today,
- 25 Yes, swagger⁵ the nut-strewn⁶ roads,
Crouch in the fo'c'sle⁷
Stubbly⁸ with goodness, if
It weren't so artificial,
Such a deliberate step backwards
30 To create an object:
Books; **china**; a life
Reprehensibly perfect.

- 1 **fifth-hand**. Di quinta mano.
2 *He chucked up everything*. Ha lasciato perdere tutto.
3 *He walked ... crowd*. Li ha piantati tutti in asso.
4 **flushed and stirred**. Infiammato ed eccitato.
5 **swagger**. Percorrere a gran passi.
6 **nut-strewn**. Cosparsa di noci.
7 **in the fo'c'sle**. Sotto coperta.
8 **Stubbly**. Ispido.

READING COMPETENCE

- 1 READ** the poem and match the highlighted words with their Italian translation.

- 1 porcellana
2 ciarpame
3 rannicchiato
4 se n'è andato

**2 READ the poem again and do the following activities.**

- 1 Say if the poet is speaking with his own voice.
- 2 What idea is described in the first stanza? The idea of
 - A reading popular news.
 - B leaving.
 - C writing an epitaph.
- 3 What does the poet dislike about home?
 - A His books.
 - B His bedroom.
 - C Its perfect order.
- 4 What leaves the poet 'flushed and stirred' in line 18?
- 5 What do 'nut-strewn roads' in line 25 stand for? They stand for
 - A crowds and freedom.
 - B popularity.
 - C everyday problems.
- 6 Why does the poet decide not to leave?
- 7 Focus on the poem layout. How does it appear on the page? Is it divided into stanzas or does it come in a single block? Why is part of the poem in italics?
- 8 Concentrate on the sound devices. Does the poem have a regular rhythm? Can you identify a rhyme scheme? Are there any examples of alliteration and assonance? If so, where are they? Why do they occur?
- 9 What kind of language does Larkin use in this poem? Tick as appropriate.
 - ☐ Natural.
 - ☐ Colloquial.
 - ☐ Casual.
 - ☐ Rhetorical.
 - ☐ Exalted.
 - ☐ Humorous.
- 10 Identify the different personal pronouns employed in the poem and say who they refer to. Why does the poet use the expression 'We all' in line 10?
 - A He invites the reader to sympathise with him.
 - B He refers to an ordinary routine.
 - C He expresses a feeling common to everyone.
- 11 Recognise the two contrasting semantic areas used in the poem. Then underline the words and expressions referring to them.
 - 1 Consider the list you have obtained. Which idea prevails?
 - 2 What is the connotation of the words 'good' (line 14) and 'perfect' (lines 15 and 32)?
 - 3 Which conclusion does the poet reach?
- 12 The attraction of 'leaving' is underlined by the use of different linguistic registers. Explain why Larkin uses these particular language varieties finding examples of
 - the one typical of 'cheap' fiction;
 - the one evoking adventure;
 - the one typical of conversation.

> COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE CONTEXT OF THE AGE**3 DISCUSS.** Refer to 7.1 and 7.2 to say which feelings and moods of the 1950s and 1960s this poem mirrors.