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QUENCHED LIGHT, OR SEEING THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY – A COLLOCATION-BASED VIEW OF LARKIN'S ATHEISM AND DEPRESSION

Abstract

This paper uses computational collocation-based analysis to examine Philip Larkin's reputation as a depressive atheist.¹ After a brief discussion of the term 'collocation', a complete corpus of Larkin's poetry will be analysed for key symbols. This will be compared with a passage from 1 Corinthians 13 describing the transition from an incomplete human state to that of maturity, self-knowledge and perfection. Both will be checked against a reference corpus in the form of a newspaper corpus of 44.5 million words. The nature of transitions in Larkin's poems (whether from day to night, from dissatisfaction to inability or from love to disappointment) will shed light on several questions surrounding his verse, finally showing his persona as a rebellious, doubting and immature Christian.

Key words: corpus stylistics, collocation, poetry, Larkin, atheism, depression

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¹ I remain grateful to Bill Louw, University of Zimbabwe, for introducing me to the field of corpus stylistics. I am also grateful to Professor Boris Hlebec, University of Belgrade, for discussing with me the theoretical implications of dynamic collocation, as well as for commenting on this paper.

Since the paper proposes a collocation-based view of Larkin's poetry, let us consider first what we mean by collocation. J.R. Firth considered collocation as being abstracted at the level of syntax:

Meaning by collocation is an abstraction at the syntagmatic level and is not directly concerned with the conceptual or idea approach to the meaning of words. One of the meanings of night is its collocability with dark (Firth 1957: 181).

If we look at the definition by John Sinclair, we shall see that he usually looks for a word's collocates within the limit of four words to the left and four words to the right:

Collocation is the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of one another in a text. The usual measure of proximity is a maximum of four words intervening (Sinclair 1991: 170).

Since both our sources agree that collocation is not syntax bound but determined by proximity, and one states that collocates influence the word's meaning, then we may agree that in the world of a poet collocates may indeed throw light on the meaning of the word that the poet tends to attach to it.² Williams' statements that "meaning is negotiated by use of contextual features" (Williams 2010: 405) and that collocation "is, as Firth and Sinclair showed, an area central to language" (Williams 2010: 403) is in accordance with Louw's view that 'collocation is instrumentation for literary or fictional worlds and is fairly easily supplied' (Louw 2010: 90).

² This view of collocation is best summarized by Williams and Millon (2011):

...[T]raditional phraseology, and much pre-corpus lexicography, and corpus linguistics developed on parallel lines. Those lines were effectively drawn together in the Cobuild initiative[...]

Phraseologists and lexicographers seek to tame language so as to list and classify for inclusion in published works. This requires an essentially static vision of collocation where phraseological units are treated as if created *ex nihilo* and are simply found and classified on purely linguistic grounds as to what may and what may not be termed as a collocation.

The NeoFirthian approach developed by John Sinclair within the context of corpus linguistics is very different in that it places collocation at the very heart of language as an essentially dynamic process in which meanings are created and exploited within textual contexts. The advantage of corpus linguistics is that it allows an analysis of dynamic collocation whilst providing the material for more reductive phraseological or computational exploitation of the data.

(Williams and Millon 2011: 151)

Look at the following concordance from a corpus of complete poetry by Philip Larkin (1922-1985), where the search word 'light' is sufficiently explained by its collocates:³

MicroConcord search SW: light
80 characters per entry
Sort : 1L/SW unshifted.

1 patterned groove, Who **do not need** a light to save Or cheer when they lie down.
2 ack None of the glances they absorb. Light **glossy grey**, arms on a plaque, They c
3 go anywhere. I roll a cigarette, and light A **spill** at the stove. With a lungful
4 to grey By imperceptible degree And light and curtains drawn allay The vastness
5 e the walls have **killed the sun**, And light is **cold**. Now a giant whitewashed D Co
6 ridal London bows the other way, And light, **unanswerable** and tall and wide, Forb
7 dense Solar And spot-light-fingered **glut** Of never-resting h
8 n the west, perhaps, where the **angry** light is. Then **rain** starts; the year goes s
9 Where any-angled light Would congregate endlessly. 6 April 1
10 lligent face; never, **walking away** As light **fails**, to notice the first star Pulsi
11 ed, **Stupefied**, by **inaction** - and, as light Begins to ebb outside, by **fear**; I set
12 now everywhere, Snow in one **blinding** light. Even snow **smudged** in her hair As she
13 that can be **Unnoticed** in the **casual** light of day, **Lying in wait** for half a cent
14 y done, The **night drawn in**, electric light switched on, Your name breathed round
15 t rooms still burning their electric light: I thought: **Featureless** morning, feat
16 te attic. Coming On longer evenings, Light, chill and yellow, Bathes the serene
17 watched from windows in the **failing** light For his world that was always just ou
18 t your maiden name disused. Its five light sounds no longer mean your face, Your
19 silver goblet of the moon A **ghostly** light spills down on arched trees, And filt
20 rning is pushing back hair with **grey** light Memories **strike home**, like **slaps** in t
21 In time the curtain-edges will grow light. Till then I see what's really always
22 day Night in the Royal Station Hotel Light spreads **darkly** downwards from the hig
23 hadows where undriven the dawn Hunts light into nobility, arouse us noble. 13 Ma
24 this same **death** Hangs everywhere its light. Unsheathe The life you carry and die,
25 . Cobblestones were wet, But sent **no** light back to the **loaded sky**, **Sunk** as it wa
26 ach morning, **shelled** upon A sheet of light that paves The palaces of sight, and
27 light upon sleep' At the chiming of light upon sleep A picture **relapsed** into th
28 tember 1946 ITGOL 'At the chiming of light upon sleep' At the chiming of light u
29 ntensely far, that **padlocked cube** of light We **neither define nor prove**, Where yo
30 d there with my jacket off. Seeds of light were sown on the **failure** of evening.
31 t Converts it to a **flattened cube** of light. Whichever's shown, the symbol is the
32 less sky **Black** as a bridge: the **only** light Gleams from the little railway That r
33 line the rail With trousers ripped, light wallets, and lips bleeding. Yes, gone
34 was And water trickles; **dark ruinous** light, **Scratched** like old film, above wet s
35 il-stiffening air, The **birdless** sea. Light **strikes** from the **ice**: Like one who ne
36 f breathing **tightened** into a **shroud**. Light **cringed**. The door swung inwards. Over
37 ent whined at than withstood. Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape
38 Rarely exhumable: not in a sleep So light they can awake and occupy An absent m
39 defined against the brickwork. Soon, Light from a small intense **lopsided** moon Sh
40 smoke to stand apart (**Stone-coloured** light sharpening the roofs below) High and
41 a statue, **Irrevocably**: thereby such light is freed That all the **dingy** hospital
42 ad the dead Become untroubled In the light soil. There were no mouths To drink o
43 Branches that fling Leaves up to the light - Every one thing, Shape, colour and
44 racle of glass, whose every hall The light as music fills, and on your face Shin
45 urn is **twisted** in a double **warp**: The light is waking and the dark is sleep And t
46 [55] The march interrupted the light afternoon. Cars stopped dead, childre
47 round the lawn Scan my approach. The light has almost **failed**, And the faint thud
48 uld stick in my nose like bread, The light swell up and turn **black** - so I shamme

³ The concordances of 'light', 'God', 'day' and 'night' were given to me by Bill Louw, University of Zimbabwe, as well as the complete corpus of Larkin's poetry, based on Anthony Thwaite's edition (Thwaite 1988).

49 peace, **but** other things. Beyond the light stand **failure** and **remorse** Whispering
50 ? Colonel Sloman's Essex Rifles? The Light Horse of L.S.E.? March ? 1969 'Black
51 old, And the red clubhouse flag. The light, the turf, and all that grows now urg
52 ts **indecision**. If once it **blocks** the light, I **die**. If I could make a single wish
53 finished faces **Sink** further from the light. **No one pretends To want to help** you
54 rice of stock. **Smoke** hangs under the light. The pictures on The walls are comic
55 readths Of time. Snow fell, undated. Light Each summer **thronged** the glass. A bri
56 elf looped with the **creep** of varying light, **Monkey-brown, fish-grey**, a string of
57 lay Asking the open door Why it was light outside, Since nobody had put on The
58 of thin continuous dreaming Watching light move? If they don't (and they can't),
59 esque Down stucco sidestreets, Where light is **pewter** And afternoon **mist** Brings l
60 tall ships, wind-mastered, **wet** with light, Break from an estuary with their cou

Data from the following files:

ZARKIN.CTX

This is how light is seen in the world of Larkin's poetry.⁴ If the reader were to search for lines in which light is shown with more optimism, he/she would find but a few. However, 31 lines out of the 60 found in the corpus are expressly negative. A comparison with John 1:5 may prove relevant: "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." Unsurprisingly, this 20th century English poet is widely regarded as a pessimistic atheist. The concordance with 'God' as the node is no less conclusive:

MicroConcord search SW: god
80 characters per entry
Sort : 1L/SW unshifted.

1 that inspired it all, And made him a god. No, he would never fail. Others, of c
2 ortraits of Sex Sun. Tree. Beginning. God in a thicket. Crown. Never-abdicated c
3 e, **musty, unignorable silence, Brewed God knows** how long. Hatless, I take off My
4 the sky, Asking **to die**: 'To die, dear God, before a **scum of doubt Smear** the whol
5 pausing, goes into a prayer **Directing** God about this eye, that knee. Their heads
6 any nights, as many dawns, **If finally** God grants the wish. ~2 February ~950 Dece
7 go on before us, they Are sitting in God's house in comfort, We shall see them
8 ey need; And famous lips **interrogated** God Concerning **franchise** in eternity; And
9 And thought, That'll be the life; **No** God any more, or **sweating** in the dark About
10 ' Let it be understood That '**somehow**' God plaits up the threads, Makes 'all for
11 , and lips bleeding. Yes, gone, thank God! Remembering each detail We toss for h
12 tor **clenched his fists** And **swore** that God exists, **Clamping** his features **stiff** wi
13 adio's altarlight The **hurried** talk to God goes on: Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be
14 mit with his gown and dish Talking to God (who's **gone too**); the big wish Is to h

Data from the following files:

ZARKIN.CTX

⁴ Collocation-based analysis is not restricted to English. For an analysis of Alexander Pushkin in the Russian original, see Milojković (2011: 48-9).

This concordance is more helpful than the previous one in establishing the meaning of the node with greater precision. The first negative line is line 4 (collocates in 8 lines out of 14 have been singled out), where light collocates with ‘scum of doubt’. Three more lines express doubt, containing ‘if finally’, ‘somehow’ and ‘hurried’ (if the conversation with God is hurried it loses in dignity somewhat). Since the ‘scum of doubt’ line may not seem conclusive at first sight, the wider context was opened: “To die, dear God, before a scum of doubt / Smear the whole universe, and smudge it out.”

The aim of this paper is to present the support or lack of it for Larkin’s reputation as an atheistic pessimist. This will be done by checking the complete corpus of Larkin’s poetry against the 44.5 million word corpus of the Times newspaper,⁵ as well as against the famous Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, in particular the following passage:

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.
10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.
11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
12 For now we *see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face*: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.
13 And now abideth *faith, hope, and charity*, these three; but the greatest of these *is charity*.

(*The Bible*. Cited from Carroll and Prickett 1998: 217-218, emphasis in bold italics added)

If we search for ‘faith’, ‘hope’ and ‘charity’ in Larkin’s verse, that will not leave much hope for our attempt to redeem his reputation of an atheist. The word ‘charity’ is not to be found. The word ‘faith’ is to be found twice:

⁵ What will be referred to as the Times corpus refers to a newspaper corpus (44.5 million words of running text) of the Times of London for the year 1995 created and distributed informally by the late Tim Johns.

MicroConcord search SW: faith
80 characters per entry
Sort : 1R/SW unshifted.

1 ten in the palm. g February ~960 TWW Faith Healing Slowly the women file to wher
2 than roots, This chiselled, flung-up faith Runs and leaps against the sky, A pra

Data from the following files:

ZARKIN.TXT

In the first concordance line, 'faith' appears as part of the title 'Faith Healing', a practice that Larkin considered doubtful. The second line is from the beginning of the poem 'A Stone Church Damaged by a Bomb': "Planted deeper than roots,/ This chiselled, flung-up *faith*/ Runs and leaps against the sky,/ A prayer killed into stone/ Among the always-dying trees..."

The word 'hope' does not leave us much more hopeful. There are nine concordance lines, out of which two are from a jocular last will and testament and two from a birthday poem to a friend. The remaining five lines are all negative: "the last of hope" (line 2), "that long and sickly hope" (line 5), "through doubt from endless hope to hate and terror" (line 7), "all we can hope to leave them now is money" (line 8). Line 2 does not contain obviously pessimistic collocates but the wider context shows that Hope is used in a far more sinister context than in any other poem ("The house on the edge of the serious wood...')

MicroConcord search SW: hope
80 characters per entry
Sort : 1R/SW unshifted.

1 reports we l~v ~ To give them, as we hope, a hearty laugh; And Kipling's 'If' t
2 signalled in attics and gardens like Hope, And ever would pass From address to
3 claims The **end** of choice, the **last** of hope; and all Here to confess that somethi
4 our ears To the Musical Society, and hope It finds out why they loathed the pan
5 what I desired - That long and **sickly** hope, someday to be As she is - gave a fli
6 it - Admiration; friendship too; And hope that in the future you Reap ever rich
7 e Through **doubt** from endless love and hope To **hate** and **terror**; Each in their dou
8 it's a different country. **All we can** hope to leave them now is money. 10 lanuar
9 , The feeble and the downright bad. I hope you have a splendid day, Acclaimed by

Data from the following files:

ZARKIN.TXT

So far, 1 Corinthians 13 supports the view that Larkin was not a Christian. After all, even if faith does not need to be mentioned explicitly, hope is the foundation and the lighthouse of the religious. Seeing that the collocates of 'light' are very different from what an average person might expect ('angry', 'failing', 'grey', 'dark ruinous'), we know what to anticipate when it comes to the collocates of 'day':

MicroConcord search SW: day
80 characters per entry
Sort : 1R/SW unshifted.

1 [219] 'By day, a lifted **study-storehouse**' By day, a
2 By day, a lifted **study-storehouse**' By day, a lifted **study-storehouse**; night Conv
3 right bad. I hope you have a splendid day, Acclaimed by wheeling gulls at play A
4 ng I got up and it did **not**. The first day after a **death**, the new **absence** Is alwa
5 lack The happiness I had. Now **in the** day All's **ravelled** under the sun by the wi
6 oss for half the night, but find **next** day All's **kodak-distant**. Easily, then (tho
7 d for her own attending, And there **by day** and night With her blithe bone mending
8 s thunderstorms, Holds up **each** summer day and shakes It out **suspiciously**, lest s
9 With shovel and spade; That **each dull** day and each **despairing** act Builds up the
10 her getting away Now she's there **all** day, And the money he gets for wasting his
11 e time, Half-past eleven on a **working** day, And these **picked out of it**; see, as t
12 6 May 1977 [207] Aubade I **work all** day, and get **half-drunk** at night. Waking a
13 ss of **night Swamps** the bright **nervous** day, and **puts** it out. In other times, when
14 and twist, and the pubs Wide open **all day**; And the countryside **not caring**: The p
15 es. Wedding-Wind The **wind** blew **all** my wedding-day, And my wedding-night was the
16 ing and the **dark** is **sleep** And **twice a day** before their gate We kneel between the
17 words Then parts out **the rest of the day** Between bathing and **booze** and birds Is
18 s in our summer wear Brother, and the day Breathes **coldly** from fields far away A
19 ing provides for. What can it do **each** day But **hunt** that **imminent** door Through wh
20 osite) **won't** achieve. That's **clear as day**. But come back late at night, You'll h
21 4 February 1965 [160] Administration **Day by day** your estimation clocks up Who d
22 rotics **No one gives you a thought**, as **day by day** You **drag your feet**, clay-thick
23 g, but **futile**, ' said his diary, Where **day by day** his movements were recorded And
24 to join us? **In a pig's arse**, friend. Day **comes to an end**. The gas fire breathes
25 ng steers become old cattle from that day, Electric limits to their widest sense
26 mothers. And so, while summer on this day Enacts her dress rehearsals, Let us fo
27 ess faces: Gold surf of the sun, **each** day **Exhausted** through the world, gathers a
28 ld mingle, and the **night** would not Be day's **exhaustion**; there would drift about
29 9 February 1973 HW Show Saturday **Grey** day fcr the Show, but cars jam the narrow
30 ghs up **failure**, Carries the night and day, fetches Profit from sleep, from skies
31 winds crying for that unbroken field, Day having **lifted**) Black flowers burst out
32 tempt of good and bad; But one Spring day his land was **violated**; A bunch of hors
33 **futile**, ' said his diary, Where **day by day** his movements were recorded And nothin
34 ves and domes travel The **slow** sky all day. I land to stay here; And the windows
35 ife come along And pour out tea, **each** day. I don't know what was said; Just hosp
36 -lifting arms. She was **slapped up** one day in March. A couple of weeks, and her f
37 al memory. So it was **stale** time then, **day in, day out**, Blue fug in the room, not
38 n to face the way That led me to this day. Instead of fields and snowcaps And fl
39 screamed. 'Lift through the breaking day' Lift through the breaking day, Wind t
40 cancy, **Empty inside and out**, **replaces** day. (Like a **fuse** an impulse busily disint
41 n be **Unnoticed** in the **casual** light of day, **Lying in wait** for half a century To s
42 and sillier; Much we buy **each market day**, More still obtain: All, all is carrie
43 lways there: **Unresting death**, a whole day nearer now, Making all thought impossi
44 7 1969 HW [174] The Explosion On the day of the **explosion** Shadows pointed towar

45 y. So it was **stale** time then, **day in, day out**, Blue **fug** in the room, nothing to
46 yond the glass The **colourless** vial of day painlessly **spilled My world** back after
47 I'd've thought. Must finish now. One day **perhaps** I'll know What makes you be so
48 Above the sea, the yet more **shoreless** day, **Riddled by wind**, trails lit-up galler
49 ents, naturally. Thereafter **night and day** She came both for the sight Of his slo
50 the bed was a **hospital** bed. Then one day she **fell** Outside on the **sad** walk And h
51 xx '**Sinking** like **sediment** through the day' **Sinking** like **sediment** through the day
52 lither - Creatures, I cherish you! **By day**, sky builds **Grape-dark** over the salt U
53 r's impressive lie - Upon whose **every day** So many **ruined** are May could not make
54 ove and money Ways of **slow dying**. The day spent **hunting pig** Or holding a garden-
55 h observed Celestial recurrences, The day the flowers come, And when the birds g
56 arture: only **shadows** Move when in the day the sun is seen **for an hour**, Yet to me
57 omething is always approaching; **every day** Till then we say, Watching from a bluff
58 ay' **Sinking** like **sediment** through the day To leave it clearer, onto the floor of
59 like long hills, a range We ride **each day** towards, and **never** reach. 17 NorJember
60 nripe day you bore your head, And the day was **plucked** and tasted **bitter**, As if s
61 airborne Did I recall the date - That day when Queen and Minister And Band of Gu
62 g to catch my Comet One **dark November** day, Which soon would snatch me from it To
63 with adult enterprise, And on another day will be the **past**, A valley **cropped** by
64 eaking day' Lift through the breaking day, Wind that pursues the dawn: Under nig
65 between felt-hatted mums Whose **weekly** day-excursion yields Baby-sized parcels, b
66 W, TNS, ITGOL 'So through that **unripe** day you bore your head' So through that un
67 ore your head' So through that **unripe** day you bore your head, And the day was pl
68 No one gives you a thought, as **day by day** You **drag** your feet, **clay-thick** with mi
69 till might trace **Uncalled-for** to this day Your person, your place. 10 Oc~ober 19
70 ry 1965 [160] Administration **Day by day** your estimation clocks up Who deserves
71 hame out of hiding. **All** the **unhurried** day Your mind lay **open like a drawer** of kn

Data from the following files:

ZARKIN.TXT

The overall impression is that of routine, often frustrating. This is certainly a sign of depression. All the seemingly ambiguous contexts were opened to confirm the initial impression, and it was confirmed in each case. For instance, line 40 comes from 'Sinking like sediment through the day': "Sinking like sediment through the day/ to leave it clearer, onto the floor of the flask/ (Vast summer vessel) settles a bitter carpet -/ Horror of life."

If this is Larkin's vision of day, the source of light, what is then his view of night?

MicroConcord search SW: night
80 characters per entry
Sort : 1R/SW unshifted.

1 cape, or perish saying no. **Midsummer** Night, 1940 The sun falls behind Wales; the
2 and choose wrong; And so we rise. At night again they sound, Calling the travell
3 e it ploughs up **failure**, Carries the night and day, fetches Profit from sleep, f
4 t Outpatients, naturally. Thereafter night and day She came both for the sight O
5 , And reads the Modern Boy in bed at night. And when, upon the cricket field, he
6 among the wealthy sneered, On such a night as this **twilight** and **doubt** Would ming
7 culptured on England, **wait** again for night As a **deserted** beach the tide that smo

8 d last bun: How you had **laughed**, the night before you **left**; All your potentialit
9 patterns on the curtains, drawn The night before. The milk's been on the step,
10 rs sang in their sockets **through the night**: '**Blow bright, blow bright** The coal o
11 ing each detail We **toss for half the night**, but find next day All's kodak-distan
12 disperses. But We, on this **midsummer** night, can sneer In union at mind that coul
13 afternoons. New strong **Rain-bearing** night-**winds** come: then **Leaves** chase warm bu
14 alk on this or that excuse, Till the night comes to **rest** While some high bell is
15 home existed) letters of **exile**: Now Night comes on. **Waves** fold behind villages.
16 ' By day, a lifted study-storehouse; night **Converts** it to a flattened cube of li
17 till: bowing, the woods **bemoan**; **Dark** night **creeps** in, and leaves the world alone
18 about it when the meal lay done, The night drawn in, electric light switched on,
19 ht' Or resolution's aid. Around, the night drops **swiftly** down Its **veils**; does no
20 steps cold. The **rain drips drearily**: night's **fingers spin** A **web** of drifting mist
21 disregard their **blowing**, Or if, this night, **happiness too is going**. He Hears tha
22 small blunt footprints come and go. Night has left **no more to show**, Not the can
23 **Black flowers burst out** wherever the night **has knelt**. 15 December 1945 ITGOL
24 hey burn on, **impersonal**, through the night, Hearing the hours **slowly** topple past
25 y, Wind that pursues the dawn: Under night's **heedless stone** Houses and river lay
26 treet Of tramways and bells. But one night I **heard the feet**. Step after step the
27 ur version' of 'these **incidents** last night'? I try the door of where I used to l
28 e walls of my room rise, it is **still** night, I have **woken again** before the word w
29 hours pass: if I'd gone by boat last night I'd be there now. Well, it's too late
30 pause' Out in the lane I pause: the night **Impenetrable** round me stands, And ove
31 . 24 Novemoer 1965 HW [162] Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel Light spre
32 my heart. 12 October 1944 TNS, ITGOL Night- M usic At one the **wind** rose, And wit
33 users Spread the stands of Modes For Night: **Machine-embroidered**, thin as blouses
34 ht: Featureless morning, **featureless** night. **Misjudgment**: for the stones slept, a
35 thankful springs' Coming at last to night's **most thankful** springs, I meet a run
36 runken boatswain. 'Coming at last to night's **most thankful** springs' Coming at la
37 ve no proper names: Men out **alone** at night Never look up at them For guidance or
38 Hearing this last word, There was no lambing-night, No **gale-driven** bird Nor fros
39 h industrial shadows And traffic **all** night **north**; swerving through fields Too th
40 m back, and how it will end ? Not at night? Not when the **strangers** come? Never,
41 night?' Why did I **dream of you** last night? Now morning is pushing back hair wit
42 ng-day, And my wedding-night was the night of the high **wind**; And a stable door w
43 ait But for the coming of the **winter** night Of **deep** December; **blowing** o'er the gr
44 reeze That wanders through the **quiet** night of **June**. Now time should stop; the w
45 u have your **innocent-guilty-innocent** night Of **switching partners** in your own sad
46 done, Produce our lives beyond this night, **Open** our eyes again to **sun**. Unhinder
47 ar the feet Of **lonely** walkers in the night Or **lingering pairs**; Girls and their s
48 things back to when they **danced** all night, Or went to their wedding, or sloped
49 ber 1938 [226] Summer Nocturne Now night **perfumes** lie upon the air, As rests t
50 he night puts twenty veils' When the night **puts** twenty **veils** Over the sun, and t
51 so many years ago. 1 231] 'When the night **puts** twenty **veils**' When the night put
52 les for a **cancer**; or on some **Advised** night see walking a **dead** one? Power of some
53 I was sad That any man or beast that night should **lack** The **happiness** I had. Now
54 **death** has merely made **beautiful**, And night skies so **brilliantly spread-eagled** Wi
55 x. beforelune Iy39 Street Lamps When night **slinks**, like a **puma**, down the **sky**, An
56 g sea-pictures - Keep it all off! **By** night, **snow** swerves (O loose moth world) Th
57 r the carrying, for its own sake, Is night so **gifted**? Mind never met Image of de
58 And everywhere the **stifling mass** of night **Swamps** the bright nervous day, and pu
59 t fraying cliffs of water Or late at night **Sweet** under the differently-swung sta
60 ll as a **veil**; But I have watched all night **The fire** grow **silent**, The grey ash so
61 work all day, and get **half-drunk** at night. Waking at four to **soundless dark**, I
62 wind blew all my wedding-day, And my wedding-night was the night of the high win
63 nds Show after four o'clock, Time of night when **straying winds** **Trouble the dark**.
64 [230] 'Why did I **dream of you** last night?' Why did I **dream of you** last night?
65 land. Are you **prepared** for what the night will **bring**? The **stranger** who will nev
66 me To walk on the chilled shore Of a night with **no memory**, Till your voice forso
67 That, unopposed at last, return **Each** night with **cancelled** promises They want ren

68 own attending, And there **by** day and night With her blithe bone mending Watched
69 pleasures I would give, **if** this **sweet** night Would ever **stay**, **cooled** by the pale m
70 ight and **doubt** Would mingle, and the night would **not** Be day's **exhaustion**; there
71 we meet How can I tell you that Last night **you** came **Unbidden**, in a **dream**? And ho
72 clear as day. But come back late at night, You'll hear a **curious counter-whispe**

Data from the following files:

ZARKIN.TXT

One can hardly claim that the image of night is optimistic or hopeful, but it is certainly less uniform than that of day, and also gentler and softer. The images are more varied, fire and light are sometimes mentioned, as well as dreams of 'you' which the poet does not find unpleasant. Rain, wind, snow and leaves are involved, but also the quiet summer night of lingering pairs. Night often becomes an active agent, it converts, creeps, fingers, spins, kneels, puts twenty veils over the sun, slinks like a puma down the sky. The general impression is that of mystery. Line 17's wider context may at first sight seem baffling. The poem 'Winter Nocturne' deals with the advent of night, an event often mentioned in Larkin's verse. Finally it arrives:

The rain falls still: bowing, the woods bemoan;
Dark night creeps in, and leaves the world alone.

The whole poem is about the period of transition between day and night, culminating in its arrival. How then can it at the very moment of arrival leave the world alone? It is unlikely that Larkin, who is known to have written 500 words a day after homework as a teenager, could have left in such an inconsistency. Apart from the meaning of 'leave something in a particular state' (which implies that the world is alone now night has entered it), Larkin must also have had in mind the meaning 'not bother or interfere with, leave be'. The word 'leave' co-selected with 'alone' was searched in the Times corpus. 150 concordance lines were found. In 15 of them the context was literal (e.g. leave a child alone, i.e. without adult supervision). Out of the remaining 135 lines 99 pointed to the conclusion that leaving something or someone alone in the sense of not interfering with it is a good idea, because of the unwelcome consequences of not leaving alone. Therefore, the poem about the advent of night describing the unrest felt in nature prior to its arrival states clearly that night, by leaving the world in the state of loneliness, does a good thing.

Indicatively, the number of occurrences of ‘day’ and ‘night’ in Larkin’s poetry is equal: 71 and 72. This must mean that they played an equal part in his world and were taken equally seriously. What is the nature of their relationship in his world and does Larkin perceive night as more favourable? Let us open the context of line 58 to see the relationship between day and night:

And everywhere the stifling mass of night
Swamps the bright nervous day and puts it out.

It comes from the poem ‘Midsummer Night’ which again deals with transition between day and night. The phrase ‘it out’ was searched in the Times corpus. 195 lines were found. ‘Out’ was mostly a particle belonging to a phrasal verb, with ‘it’ as its direct object, like ‘carry it out’, ‘pull it out’, ‘sort it out’. Mostly the underlying argument in the concordance lines was that the action described by the phrasal verb was intended to solve a problem. Four concordance lines contained ‘put it out’. In all four lines, what needed to be put out was a great fire. Thus, night, “swamping” bright nervous day, may be interpreted as doing the poet a favour, extinguishing the great calamity – day. The day is nervous because it may be put out but also because it might be making the poet nervous too. This is, of course, an allusion to St John: “And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not”. In Larkin’s world, night quenches the calamitous day. Why does it need quenching? The poem answers the question.

The poet proceeds to explain that in the past night did not use to be “day’s exhaustion” because it continued to distress the minds of men. Stories of the supernatural were told at night, he says. Now we may laugh, but we have thought of our own monstrosities, the dynamite and “Fire!” of war:

The angels yawning in an empty heaven;
Alternate shows of dynamite and rain;
And choosing forced on free will: fire or ice.

This ending to the poem at first leaves us in doubt of Larkin’s choice. We know that fire in this poem’s world means ‘day’. ‘Ice’, therefore, must mean ‘night’. This is confirmed by another poem – ‘The North Ship’, in which the ship sailing to the north goes “into the unforgiving sea”. The north–death parallel combined with the fire–ice opposition must mean that ice,

in all its undemanding perfection, means 'death'. Larkin laments the fact that his free will is limited by such a choice. Heaven is empty because it does not admit the undecided (remember "guarda e passa" in Canto III of Dante's *Inferno*). Larkin's forced choice must exclude the doubt which is so characteristic of him. Is he choosing ice? Paradoxically, by choosing fire (day) in the poem one chooses death which is a door to heaven. By choosing ice one chooses death which is the death of the north ship lost in the unforgiving sea. The logic of the poem demands that Larkin should choose fire. We are dealing with a rebellious and complaining poet and a Christian.

The question why 'day' is perceived as a calamity is perhaps best answered in 'After-Dinner Remarks'. It appears to have been written on an evening (again):

And now the evening ambles near,
Softly, through the scented air,
Laying by the tautened fear:

Peace sliding from above.

The "tautened fear", of course, belongs to day, and the evening is a welcome transition from day to night. Why? The poem answers the question: "... living is a dreadful thing, and a dreadful thing it is". Perhaps when an Englishman uses the words 'dreadful thing' he does not really mean it? The Times corpus showed seven concordance lines:

Line 1 – rain combined with very bad depression.

Line 2 – unexpected death of an adolescent's parent.

Line 3 – a negative critique of an unprofessionally done book.

Line 4 – a murdered young woman.

Line 5 – the mental breakdown of a young girl.

Line 6 – a badly beaten woman.

Line 7 – torture.

Thus, when Larkin says that living is a dreadful thing he obviously means it. Why does he find it dreadful?

On this day, previously to the soliloquy, the persona, "in the face of time", seems to have missed an opportunity to make his feelings and desires known to the woman he loves, or failed to take steps that may have brought them closer together. That makes him take an all-encompassing

look at his entire life full of doubt and inaction, and assume that future will bring nothing but loneliness. He wonders if he is

A keyhole made without a key
A poem none can read or say
A gate none open wide to see

The fountains and the trees.

The images of a keyhole and a gate as transitions to fountains and trees are reminiscent of entering Paradise, or the moment in 1 Corinthians when “seeing through a glass darkly” becomes “face to face”. Larkin wishes to be “known” and fails as a result of too much doubting. The ending to the poem explains how night alleviates day’s frustrations:

Around, the night drops swiftly down
Its veils, does not condemn
Or praise the different actions done,
The hour that strikes across the town
Caresses all and injures none

As sleep approaches them.

Day is a source of distress and frustration through inaction and doubt resulting in loneliness and fear that one will never “be known”, but night comforts all and brings peace to all regardless of their mistakes. When we remember the collocates of ‘day’ and ‘night’ in both concordances, we will see how they fit into this interpretation.

That Larkin was aware of the quoted passage from 1 Corinthians 13 mentioning the transition to true perception and knowledge of oneself and others is confirmed by several references. ‘After-Dinner Remarks’ contains one:

I saw my life as in a glass:
Set to music (negro jazz),
Coloured by culture and by gas,

The idea of a kiss...

It is obvious from this example as it will be from others that to Larkin the transition to knowledge, and, therefore, happiness, is the transition to a fulfilled relationship that he, for some reason, fails to achieve. Before proceeding to justify this assumption, another poem is worth quoting. The short ironic piece 'Naturally the Foundation will Bear Your Expenses' contains the following lines: "Perceiving Chatto darkly/ Through the mirror of the Third." The persona, a cynical and successful academic travelling abroad, expresses his ambition to be published, which he might fulfil by previously appearing on the BBC Third Programme. This example is included here to support the assumption that Larkin was fully aware of the passage quoted from 1 Corinthians 13 and it being a transition to happiness (the cynical academic regards self-knowledge and happiness as attainable through publicity and fame). Our notion that the mirror in Larkin represents a transition to a relationship which is never achieved is supported by another poem, 'The Dance'.

The persona of the poem arrives at a dance at which he is to meet the woman he is interested in and immediately glances at his own appearance in the mirror, which leaves him far from happy:

... my equally contemptuous glance
That in the darkening mirror sees
The shame of evening trousers, evening tie.

Indicatively, the persona sees his reflection in the mirror against the background of a jazz band, which reminds us only too well of 'After-Dinner Remarks'. We are to be reminded of the same poem again, when the hero elbows his way through the crowd to the woman he loves. In her gestures he recognises the speech of invitation, and the moment freezes. This timeless situation could become permanent, a transition to eternity (a reminder of 1 Corinthians 13?), but their interaction is rudely interrupted, and the hero allows himself to be led away to join a conversation that does not interest him. The glass, or 'darkening mirror'⁶, has again served

⁶ It is worth noting here that forms of 'mirror' appear in Larkin's poetry five times. Apart from the references to Radio 3 and 'the shame of evening trousers', there is a reference to 'harmless mirrors' in 'I am washed upon a rock' and two references that are sinister: in 'A house on the edge of a serious wood' and in 'Time and Space were only their disguises'.

as transition. To what? A frustrated love experience. Happiness and self-knowledge are again refused him.

“Face to face” appears twice in Larkin’s corpus. Once in the poem ‘Explosion’ (we have to infer that it is about coal-miners as they are, characteristically, never mentioned as such):

The dead go on before us, they
Are sitting in God’s house in comfort,
We shall see them face to face –

Plain as lettering in the chapels...

If we are left in doubt by these lines as to whether Larkin is being serious and respectful in his obvious reference to 1 Corinthians (and this passage shows how well he was aware of it and how he understood it), the last line mentioning the “unbroken eggs” of one of them sets us straight.

The other mention of “face to face” supports our previous speculations. In ‘Reasons for Attendance’ the hero is drawn to the “lighted glass” to watch young dancers (“all under twenty-five”, he says) “shifting intently face to flushed face”. This is another direct allusion. As the persona, characteristically, debates with himself whether to go in:

...Why be out here?
But then, why be in there? Sex, yes, but what is sex?

and goes on to convince himself that sex is not everything, we recognise a familiar pattern. The glass is a marker of transition, the transition being to “face to flushed face” and evoking the thoughts of sex in the persona. This is Larkin’s ‘charity’ and knowledge attainable if the desired transition is accomplished – sexual love. “Face to flushed face” is not the same as “face to face”. It is more physical and might bring about change(s) of partners.

The word ‘charity’ appearing in 1st Corinthians is always rightly understood as ‘love’ meaning ‘agape’, universal love. ‘Charity’ never appears in Larkin’s verse, but ‘love’ does. What kind of love?

Larkin’s corpus gives 49 concordance lines. 34 of them express disappointment. If we open wider contexts, only one optimistic line remains. The wider context of each line was opened to find out what kind of love Larkin means. Only five lines did not mean man-woman love. Two

of these refer to close ties – with family members and close friends (both in the context of hospitals and the possibility of death). These poems are ‘Compline’ (1950) and ‘Ambulances’ (1961). Two lines mean ‘agape’, universal love. The poems are ‘New Year Poem’ (1940) and ‘Faith Healing’ (1960). Both of these poems reveal that Larkin fully understood the concept of ‘agape’. The optimistic line, the only optimistic one referring to love in the whole of Larkin’s poetry, is from ‘When first we faced, and touching showed...’. The years of the poems show that Larkin’s view of love and use of the word did not change with time.

The first 130 concordance lines from the Times corpus featuring the word ‘love’ were studied to see in what meaning the word ‘love’ is used there. If we discard all lines mentioning ‘love affair’ (in more than 50% of the lines used delexically, e.g. ‘the Edwardian love affair with the past’), 57 lines remain. Of these, family love is mentioned three times, romantic love 33 times, and anything close to ‘agape’ once. This one example is a quotation of Samuel Johnson saying: “I am willing to love all mankind, except an American”. So much for universal love and the British newspaper reading audience.

Larkin’s poetry is strictly and candidly autobiographical. A collocational analysis of the complete corpus of his verse shows him as indeed suffering from depression and lack of hope. Night relieves the persona of day’s tortures and leaves him in the welcome state of loneliness after yet another attempt to complete the desired transition to the state of ‘face to face’. Larkin was aware of 1 Corinthians 13 and generally used biblical references in his poetry, in particular the ‘mirror’ episode (‘Naturally the Foundation will Bear Your Expenses’, ‘Explosion’), although the extent to which mirrors or glass seem consistently to appear in his verse at crucial moments of transition is arguably an unconscious parallel. His notion of happiness appears to differ from that of 1 Corinthians 13 in that he viewed it as man-woman physical love. The poems show that the encounters that are reminiscent of 1 Corinthians 13 do not bring the persona the wished-for sense of self-knowledge prophesied in the biblical chapter. The persona does not mature through his encounters. His notion of love never really reaches that of ‘agape’. His source of frustration must also be seen in the fact that he dislikes mirrors and finds his reflection in them dissatisfying, figuratively as well as literally. That is in accordance with the point of view of a man who finds physical love essential to happiness. As for his supposed atheism, he does express grave doubt. The

doubt, however, is of a gnawing nature, as he obviously rather doubts God's justice than his very existence, as poems 'Explosion' (where the reference to 'face to face' is used sarcastically) and 'Midsummer Night' show. When forced to choose between fire and ice, or day and night, he, despite the greatest reluctance, chooses day. Thus, fear of living is overcome by faith, while St Paul still tells us that without charity (Greek *agape*, Latin *caritas*) it will avail us little. And charity, he tells us, never fails.

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СВЕТЛОСТ ОБУЗЕТА ТАМОМ ИЛИ
ПОГЛЕД КАО КРОЗ СТАКЛО У ЗАГОНЕТКИ –
КОЛОКАЦИЈСКА АНАЛИЗА ЛАРКИНОВОГ АТЕИЗМА И ДЕПРЕСИЈЕ

Сажетак

Рад се бави корпусном колокацијском анализом да би потврдио или оповргао популарно мишљење да је познати енглески песник двадесетог века Филип Ларкин био депресивни атеиста. Да би се ова анализа боље фокусирао, кључни симболи у корпусу целокупне Ларкинове поезије се посматрају и на позадини познатог одломка из Прве Павлове посланице Коринћанима који описује прелаз из несавршеног људског стања у стање самоспознаје, зрелости и божанске љубави. Корпусно-стилистичка методологија се огледа и у поређењу Ларкиновог корпуса с референтним корпусом – новина Тајмс за 1995. годину, који садржи 44,5 милиона речи. Транзиције у Ларкиновим песмама приказује његовог јунака као бунтовног, неодлучног и незрелог – кришћанина.

Кључне речи: корпусна стилистика, колокација, поезија, Ларкин, атеизам, депресија