

# Twelve River RIPPLES

## Favourite Poem



To celebrate the centenary of the birth of Philip Larkin on 9 August – here is one of his poems chosen as a favourite by Margaret Seymour:

### **The Trees**

by Philip Larkin

The trees are coming into leaf  
Like something almost being said;  
The recent buds relax and spread,  
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again  
And we grow old? No, they die too.  
Their yearly trick of looking new  
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh  
In fullgrown thickness every May.  
Last year is dead, they seem to say,  
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

## Favourite Poem cont.

*The trees are coming into leaf* is one of the most cheering sentiments we share with all inhabitants of temperate climates. How ironic that it is the great poet of pessimism, Philip Larkin, who has given us this most vibrant evocation of Spring, however downbeat the sentiment turns out to be: *looking new* is a *trick* he tells us, *they die too*.

However, Larkin's final stanza begins with *Yet*. Has he had second thoughts? The *fullgrown* trees, powerful and stalwart as *castles*, share their brisk message – forget the past: *Last year is dead, Begin afresh*. But is the poet convinced? Or made melancholy, as some people are, by the contrast of our own ageing and torpor with the renewed vigour of nature?

But the reason I have always returned to this poem is not primarily to do with philosophical sentiments about coming to terms with the facts of death and renewal. It is the way Larkin evokes the sheer vitality of trees! From spreading buds to *greenness* (what a juicy word!), the energy and sound effect of *thresh* to the windblown, rainswept, sun-warmed onomatopoeic presence of that final triplet, *afresh, afresh, afresh*.

A contemplative poem maybe, but one full of life and immediacy and the great outdoors.

*Margaret Seymour*