

D E N N I S   O ' D R I S C O L L

*Heat Wave*

Heat brought the day to its senses.  
We are not used to such direct  
expressions of feeling here  
with our wishy-washy weather,  
our dry intervals and showers,

our clearance spreading from the west;  
rain and shine—ham actors—  
mixing up their lines.  
But there it was, the real thing,  
an unstinting summer day,

not rationing its reserves of heat,  
not squeezing out its precious metal  
between cracks in cloud.  
Poppy dishes tracked the sun's path  
across the radar screen of sky.

Apples swelled but still fell  
short of breaking point.  
The taut skin of black currants  
would spurt open at a touch.  
Ripening grain was hoarded

in the aprons of corn stalks.  
A bee paused as if to dab its brow,  
before lapping up more gold reserves.  
Tar splashed the ankles of cars  
as they negotiated honey-sticky routes.

Foxglove, ox-eyed daisy, vetch  
jostled for attention on the verges.  
Spiders hung flies out to dry.

A coiled snake—puff adder  
or reticulated python—would

have thrived in that environment,  
peaches supplanting gooseberries.  
Were the river not reduced  
to a trickle of juice between  
reed-bearded banks, it might

have furnished cover for a crocodile  
with sloped back patterned  
like heat-soaked patio bricks.  
A sudden low-lying cat dashed  
between houses like a cheetah.

If that sun had made itself heard  
it would have sounded like the inner  
ferment of a cask of vintage wine,  
the static on a trunk-call line  
when someone phones out of the blue...

Birds retreated into silence, perched  
deep inside leaf-camouflaged trees,  
having nothing meaningful to add,  
no dry-throated chalk-screeching  
jungle note that would fit the bill.

A day that will say summer always  
to the child, too young to speak,  
who romped outside among flower beds,  
his mother's voice pressed thin and flat  
as she summoned him languidly back

to the cool, flagstoned kitchen,  
ice-cream blotches daubed  
like sun block on his pudgy face.

## *Last Words*

What an absolute creep  
Philip Larkin  
seems to have been.

Have you read  
the letters yet?  
The biography?

Did you hear  
the TV pundit  
cut him down to size?

And, true to form,  
he proved a sleazy  
bastard to the last:

as he was dying,  
he squeezed his  
nurse's hand

(she should,  
strictly speaking,  
have ordered

him to keep  
his filthy paws  
to himself),

while he croaked  
as best the  
throat cancer

(which he'd brought  
on himself with  
smokes and booze)

allowed: *I am going  
to the inevitable.*  
So negative always.

So obsessed with death.  
1.24 a.m., the time.  
Except for the nurse,

he was alone—no  
visitors, of course,  
at that unearthly hour;

no wife or kids  
to line up tearfully  
around the single bed.

A selfish swine  
without doubt;  
and, by all accounts,

no great loss.