

MOLLY KEANE'S *GOOD BEHAVIOUR* AND PHILIP  
LARKIN'S *COLLECTED POEMS* : SOME ASPECTS OF  
POETIC MEMORY

By

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Dedicated to my daughter  
Katja

## Abstract

How can we speak of the action of the mind under any divisions, as of its knowledge, of its ethics, of its works, and so forth, since it melts will into perception, knowledge into act? Each becomes the other. Itself alone is. Its vision is not like the vision of the eye, but is union with the things known.

(Ralf Waldo Emerson, 'Intellect' 1841 in Stephen Wilson, *The Bloomsbury Book of Mind*, 2004:60)

This study is a comparative study of the term "poetics of memory" and its psychological, linguistic, socio-cultural or metaphysic interpretation, applied to Philip Larkin's poetry in *Collected Poems* and Molly Keane's *Good Behaviour*.

It also focuses on the exploration of some parts of the development of aesthetic thought – such as the categories of beauty, or the sublime, seeing them as an integral part of various literary theories. They are again linked to the term 'poetics of memory' as a complex of the aspects in the interpretation of the particular literary genre, style, or even a period.

The meaning of the term "memory" is questioned, in its application to the presented literary genres of poetry and novel, particularly its use in the contexts of a selective memory. The study includes a discussion of Plato's anamnesis, antique divine possession, catharsis, Proust's involuntary memory, and the nature of a literary text as such, (with all its semiotic and stylistic characteristics).

Larkin and Keane's poetics deal with memory, recollection and time in relation to consciousness, linking these concepts to the influences of the same general historical and cultural climate under which the writers developed their own literary styles and personal messages, chosen to express a variety of ideas. Having as a background a history of Western thought, particularly the modern aesthetic streams of the second half of the twentieth century – ranging from modernism to the deconstruction of post-structuralism, Larkin and Keane share a common ground of feelings of negativism, nihilism, alienation and atheism. These aspects are explored.

The applied term of the "poetics of memory" may be a key aesthetic term of understanding the history and essence of humanity and keeping it alive.

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