NEXT, PLEASE

1   Always too eager for the future, we
pick up bad habits of expectancy.
Something is always approaching; every day
Till then we say.

5   Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear,
Sparkling armada of promises draw near.
How slow they are! And how much time they waste,
Refusing to make haste!

    Yet still they leave us holding wretched stalks
10   Of disappointment, for, though nothing balks
Each big approach, leaning with brasswork prinked,
Each rope distinct,

    Flagged, and the figurehead with golden tits
Arching our way, it never anchors; it's
15   No sooner present than it turns to past.
Right to the last

    We think each one will heave to and unload
All good into our lives, all we are owed
For waiting so devoutly and so long.
20   But we are wrong:

    Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
No waters breed or break.

PHILIP LARKIN

line 5: *bluff*: high, steep bank or cliff
line 9: *stalk*: stem (of a plant)
line 10: *balk*: to stop or intentionally get in the way of
line 11: *prink*: to adorn (oneself) in a showy manner
line 13: *figurehead*: a carved figure (as of a woman) on a ship's bow
line 17: *heave to*: to stop moving, come to rest

Answer the following questions:

A) In stanza one, what does the speaker say about our attitude to the future and what does he think is wrong with this attitude? (10)

B) Explain and contrast the ship metaphors in lines 11 - 14 and lines 21 - 24. (10)

C) What does the poem say about hope, patience and fulfilment? (10)

D) How does the poet use formal elements to convey the meaning of the poem? (10)

E) How would you interpret the title of the poem? (5)

F) *Carpe diem - seize the day -* is the only alternative to despair.' Discuss. (15)

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