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**TRAPPED BETWEEN  
MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM:  
A CRITICAL STUDY OF  
PHILIP LARKIN'S POETRY**

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
SAURASHTRA UNIVERSITY, RAJKOT  
FOR THE AWARD OF

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

IN  
ENGLISH

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation, TRAPPED BETWEEN MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF PHILIP LARKIN'S POETRY, is submitted by Ms. Swati S. Kapadia for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the faculty of Arts of Saurashtra University, Rajkot. No part of this dissertation has been submitted for any other degree or diploma.

Place: Porbandar

Date: / /2010

Supervisor

(Anupam R. Nagar)

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research work in the thesis is prepared by me after studying various references related to the thesis. The analysis and the critical interpretations in this thesis are entirely original. Hence, I state that I am responsible for the critical opinions and other details found in this thesis. I further declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any other university or institution for the award of any degree.

Place: Ahmedabad

Date: / /2010

Swati S. Kapadia

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Swati S. Kapadia

Given below is a list of abbreviations used in this thesis:

Cp: Philip Larkin: Collected Poems. London: Marvell Press, 1988. Print.

RW: Required Writing: Miscellaneous Essays – (1955-1982). London: Faber, 1983. Print.

The N.S.: The North Ship. London: Fortune Press, 1945; Rev. ed. Faber, 1966. Print.



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**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

The dissertation aims at studying Philip Larkin's poetry as trapped between Modernism and Postmodernism, hence, before studying Larkin's poetry it will be necessary to discuss what Modernism and Postmodernism are. It will also be fruitful to study the socio - cultural conditions of the early and the later 20<sup>th</sup> century English history, broadly defined as the Modern and the Postmodern era respectively. In addition, it will be most appropriate to discuss the transition from Modernism to Postmodernism - how Modernism and Postmodernism are related to each other and how Postmodernism grows from Modernism.

Larkin's poetry embodies the transition from Modernism to Postmodernism. Larkin grew to manhood in the era of Modernism and unconsciously, rather than with conscious effort, drew towards postmodern directions. His poetic career also, which begins under modernist influence, matures towards postmodern directions. Thus, Larkin's poetry, belonging mainly to the period of shift from Modernism to Postmodernism, reflects, from time to time, modern as well as postmodern tendencies. The subject of the present research is selected on the basis of the above stated hypothesis. Out of six chapters building up the argument, the present chapter will discuss Modernism and Postmodernism, especially as prevalent in the modern and the postmodern eras of English history. It will attempt to justify the assumption that Postmodernism grows from Modernism. It will also attempt a comparative analysis of Modernism and Postmodernism.

## 1.1 MODERNISM:

### 1. DEFINITIONS:

Many critics have attempted to define and discuss Modernism. Most of them introduce it as a break away from traditional (especially nineteenth century) ideas and ways of thinking. The following are a few definitions which may be helpful in the analysis of various aspects of Modernism in the chapter.

Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack in their book *Key Concepts of Literary Theory* define Modernism as a:

term referring to the literary, artistic and general culture of the first half of the twentieth century. Modernism is distinguished by its general rejection of previous literary traditions, particularly those of the late nineteenth century and of bourgeois society.

(Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack 56)

J A Cuddon defines Modernism as:

A comprehensive but vague term for a movement (or tendency) which begins to get under way in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which has had a wide influence during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term pertains to all creative arts, especially, poetry, fiction, drama, painting, music and architecture.

(Cuddon 551)

In *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* Modernism is defined as under:

A general term applied retrospectively to the wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in the literature and other arts of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. . . .

(Boldick 160)

According to *Britanica Concise Encyclopedia*:

In the arts a radical break with the past and concurrent search for new forms of expression, Modernism fastened the period of experimentalism in the arts from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century... .In an era characterized by industrialization, rapid social change, advances in science and social sciences (eg. Darwinism, Freudian theory), Modernists felt a growing alienation, incomparable with Victorian morality, optimism and convention.

([www.answers.com/topic/modernism-248k](http://www.answers.com/topic/modernism-248k))

In her article 'Postmodernism' published online Mary Klages describes Modernism as follows:

Modernism has two facets or two modes of definition, both of which are relevant to understanding postmodernism. The first facet or definition of modernism comes from the aesthetic movement broadly called 'modernism'. The movement is roughly coterminous with twentieth century western ideas about art. Modernism, as you probably know, is the movement in visual arts, music, literature and drama which rejected the old Victorian standards of how art should be made, consumed and what it should mean. ...

([www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012K/ages/pomo.html](http://www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012K/ages/pomo.html))

Thus, Modernism in England set in as a reaction against the Victorian ideals and conventions and deepened its roots with the progress of the century as a composite of several experiments in expression in the writings of eminent modernists like Eliot, Pound, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Samuel Becket. The modernist writing was deeply influenced by the existing general trends as well as social, political, religious, economic changes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, as such the aesthetic movement, called Modernism must be studied at two levels: 1. concerning various movements in philosophy and creative arts and 2. concerning the general trends and events in the first half of the twentieth

century, both of which led the early twentieth century period to be named as Modern Age in England.

## **2. A BRIEF HISTORY:**

The first half of the nineteenth century for Europe was marked by a number of wars and revolutions, which reveal the rise of ideas and doctrines, now identified as Romanticism. There was an emphasis on individual subjective response, the supremacy of 'nature' as a subject for art and, above all, individual liberty. By the middle of the century, however, a synthesis of these ideas with stable governing forms had emerged. It was rooted in the idea that reality dominates over impressions that are subjective. It was exemplified by materialist, rationalist and positivist movements in philosophy. Cultural critics label it as Realism. In Great Britain the period was designated as Victorian era.

A series of ideas ran against the current - some of them were continuations of Romantic schools of thought, for example, the Pre - Raphaelite Brotherhood in poetry and painting. In philosophy rationalism also drew responses from anti - rationalists. Hegel's dialectic view of civilization and history, for instance, drew responses from Nietzsche and Kierkegaard who were major influences on Existentialism.

Two major thinkers of the time who played a role in leading Europe to Modernism were, Charles Darwin in Biology and Karl Marx in Political science. Darwin's theory of evolution undermined the religious certainty of people and the sense of human uniqueness of the intelligentsia. Marx seemed to present a political version of the same proposition. He asserted that problems with the

economic order were not transient or the result of temporary conditions, but were fundamentally contradictions within the capitalist system.

In arts two schools of ideas - Impressionism and Symbolism had a particular impact in establishing Modernism. All these, together, shaped Modernism in Europe. As Clement Greenberg says:

What can be safely called Modernism emerged in the middle of the last century and rather locally, in France, with Baudelaire in literature and Manet in painting and perhaps with Flaubert, too, in prose fiction.

([www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/postmodernism.html](http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/postmodernism.html) -)

In England Modernism began with the turn of the nineteenth century. The early twentieth century period in England was called the Modern age.

### **3. AGE OF ANXIETY:**

The Modern Age in England came to be known as an Age of Anxiety for its unfulfilled and frustrating gap between the ideal and the real. Modernity had delivered just the opposite of what it promised. Society was passing through an unprecedented crisis. To quote A G. George:

Anxiety is the central experience of modern consciousness . . . . Anxiety is the result not only of social crisis but also the crisis in the theoretical approach to life, confusion in intellectual matters and the absence of a sustaining faith.

(George 15)

Here is an analysis of some of the major factors leading to anxiety. The factors will also throw light on the modernist era and even literature.

## A. GIVING UP OF TRADITIONS:

Describing the breaking away from past and heading towards the 'new' at the end of the Victorian era Mathew Arnold writes in his 'Bacchanalia':

See on the cumbered plain 84  
Clearing a stage,  
Scattering the past about,  
Comes the new age/  
Bards make new poems,  
Thinkers new schools,  
Businessmen new systems,  
Critics new rules/  
All things begin again;  
Life is their prize:  
Earth with deeds they fill,  
Fill with their cries. 95

<http://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/html/1807/4350/poem85.html>

The close of the nineteenth century was marked by an extraordinary social and intellectual ferment. People were no longer satisfied with the old, orthodox assumptions. The age witnessed a strong reaction against the accepted standards of conduct and belief. In religion, in social relations as well as in domestic life men grew contemptuous of the old ideals. The questioning spirit fostered a sense of disillusionment, skepticism and destroyed the certainties of the Victorian faith in the way of life. There was an extraordinary enthusiasm for speculation and experiment. In short, there was a complete breakdown of an established and settled way of life. This became a cause of anxiety as giving up of conventions disappointed the older generation and the new way of life

disillusioned almost all - the old as well as the young generation for its inability to fulfill their dreams of supremacy of man in the universe.

### **B. DYNAMISM AND PROGRESSIVENESS:**

Modern age was an age of change and progress. Everything was changing. Because of scientific and technological advancement, there was a remarkable change in the pattern of life in general. People were conscious of living in a world of rapid change. Anthony Toyne describes the rapidly changing English life in the early twentieth century as follows:

England was hanging, and changing too fast for the people to realize what was happening. There was change everywhere. Bicycles or 'bikes' were followed by motor-bicycles and 'motor-bikes'. Telephones were put in many houses. Cheap books, costing no more than six pence each, were sold from the railway bookstalls.

(Toyne 317)

To quote Toyne again:

The modern age was an age of science and technological progress. Adventure and romance were gone, and even the peaceful things seemed lost. Being modern meant hurrying through life.

(Toyne 335)

However, this too much of speeding up with life, dynamism resulting in over-ambitiousness, excess of faith in the capacity and efficiency of man to achieve the best, for its unrealized ideals in reality, led to anxiety. In the following passage David Lyon, writing about the achievements and discontents of the modern age, comments how the former led to the latter:

The modern world is marked by its unprecedented dynamism, its dismissal or marginalizing of tradition, and by its global consequences.



Time seemed to speed up and space open up. Modernity's forward - looking thrust relates strongly to belief in progress and the power of human reason to produce freedom. But its discontents sprang from the same source: unrealized optimism and the inherent doubt fostered by post-traditional thought. These, along with unintended effects of classifying, ordering and rationalizing modern life, clipped freedom's wings.

(Lyon 25)

Thus, while the old generation lamented the loss of traditions and too much of speeding up with life, the new generation became a victim of its own dynamism, progressiveness and zeal for experiments. In both the cases the result was – anxiety.

### **C. THE WORLD WARS:**

The two World Wars shattered not only the political and economic balance but also the social structure of European culture. The deaths and destruction of the First World War shook all the romantic and patriotic notions of war. Patriotic fervour of Tennyson and Kipling was found to be hollow. Fighting was no longer an act of duty, nor was dying in war a sacrifice for a noble cause. In the preface to the planned book of poetry Wilfred Owen wrote:

This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion or power, except war. After all, I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is war and the pity of war.

([www.illyria.com/poetryhttp:](http://www.illyria.com/poetryhttp:).11)

In his poem 'The Strange Meeting' Wilfred Owen brings out the horror and pity of war. As the title suggests, the poem describes a strange meeting -meeting of two

dying soldiers. The speaker - one of the two soldiers, wounded in the war, is breathing his last, lying along with many dead soldiers around him. He takes a fancy that it was an escape from the battle 'down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped / Through granites which titanic wars had groined.' Escaping from one hell, he reaches another. There, from among soldiers lying around (dead or dying), one smiles at him. The speaker notices the 'thousand pains' on his face. His helpless, piteous smile confirms that they are in 'Hell'. The speaker addresses him as 'strange friend' and says that now, outside the battlefield 'there is no cause to mourn; the harm is done; there is no fear, no other reason to grieve. The stranger also agrees to it and, out of helplessness engendered by war, out of bitterness as a victim of war, ironically asks him to 'save the undone years.' (Irony because there is little time left before death) He grows nostalgic and remembers his old days when he too, like the fellow being 'went hunting wild / After the wildest beauty in the world'; he also lived like a youth throbbing with energy, hopes, enthusiasm and aspirations; like a normal being he has had his joys and sorrows but the war has abruptly put an end to all these. For the dying man the bygone days, it seems, are a fantasy for the truth must unfold now- death is the ultimate truth. The dying soldier, then, ironically brings out the futility and hopelessness of war in the following lines:

Now men will go content with what we spilled.  
They will be swift with the swiftness of the tigress.  
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.  
Courage was mine, and I had mystery,  
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:  
To miss the march of the retreating world

Into vain citadels that are not walled.  
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels,  
I would go up and wash them with sweet wells,  
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  
I would have poured my spirit without stint  
But not through wounds not on the cess of war.  
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.

(Strange Meeting 28-39)

The irony is heightened at the end of the poem with the revelation of the soldier to the speaker that he is the enemy whom he had jabbed the previous day. He addresses him as 'my friend' as, outside the battlefield there is no enmity between them; they are two human beings, suffering and dying as victims of war.

The Great War had not only political consequences but also economic and social ones. The following comment taken from Wikipedia Encyclopedia perfectly describes the social consequences of the World War I:

The experiences of the War led to a collective trauma for all participating countries. The optimism of the 1900s was gone and those who fought in the War became known as the lost generation. For the next few years much of Europe mourned. Memorials were enacted in thousands of villages and towns. The soldiers returning home from World War I suffered greatly from the horrors they had witnessed.

The social trauma caused by years of fighting manifested itself in different ways. Some people were revolted by nationalism and its results. A sense of disillusionment and cynicism became pronounced, with nihilism growing in popularity.

- ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/world\\_war\\_1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/world_war_1)-380)

Hardly had the world recovered from the loss and suffering caused by the World War I, when another War erupted, just within twenty years of the World War I. It

was a great shock for people. It spread the feeling of disgust and fear among the common men. W. H. Auden beautifully describes the anger and fear of the ordinary people because of the war in his poem 'September I, 1939':

I sit in one of the dives  
On Fifty-second street:  
As the clever hopes expire  
Of a low dishonest decade  
Waves of anger and fear  
Circulate over the bright  
And darkened lands of the earth,  
Obsessing our private lives  
The unmentionable odour of death  
Offends the September night.

(1-10)

Thus, as A. G. George writes:

...on account of two world wars in half a century, a highly disastrous economic depression (the depression of the thirties of this century) coming between them, the possibility of the total annihilation of the world, the rapid increase of population and a number of major and minor socio-political developments- all intensify the complex of fear and anxiety in the minds of modern man.

(George 2)

Frequent occurrence of wars was an indication that with the political, social and economic stability threatened and even shaken, the structure of civilization was crumbling. Arnold Toynbee demonstrates that "there exists a direct relation between the fall of civilization and an increase in military technique." (qtd. in George 3)

#### **D. URBANIZATION:**

Another setback to idealism was the continuing effect of the Industrial Revolution right from the previous era {the Victorian Age} transforming the Agrarian economy into an Industrial one. The growing distinction between the rich and the poor, between the exploiters and the exploited led to a sense of hopeless urbanization. Describing life in industrial cities of England Anthony Toyne writes:

The industrial cities were slums. A million miners lived in thousands of rows of black little cottages near the coal-pits of Durham, Yorkshire and South Wales. Thousands of more cottages stretched for miles along the banks of the oily river Tyne near Newcastle factories towered high above the roof-tops in the wool - towns of Leeds . . . . Store - houses were mixed among the dirty mass of cottages in the cotton towns of Bolton . . . .The chimneys of the pottery towns . . . produced great clouds of black and white smoke. The slums here were endless. In all the mid - lands of England, there was dirt, heat and smoke. The roar of factory - fires, the crash of machinery and the clatter of trains and trams, all mixed together and sounded like thunder in a storm.

(Toyne 324-25)

One of the themes of modernist poetry is this hopeless urbanization. The online Wikipedia Encyclopedia states: "Modernism as a literary movement is seen in large part as a reaction to the emergence of city - life as a central force in society." ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernist\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernist_literature) -) Modern poetry, which is essentially urban poetry, is concerned with the life of man in the urban, industrial set up. It does not glorify or idealize the city life; it depicts its dullness, dreariness, monotony and, above all, its loneliness. T. S. Eliot's 'The Preludes' is a perfect

example of modernist poetry concerned with urban life. Out of the four sections of the poem two focus on the urban landscape and the other two on people living in cities. The following is the first section of 'The Preludes', which, through a description of the urban landscape, brings out the monotony, alienation and dreariness of the urban life:

The winter evening settles down  
With smell of steels in passageways.  
Six o'clock,  
The burnt-out ends of smoky day;  
And now a gusty shower wraps  
The grimy scraps  
Of withered leaves about your feet  
And newspapers from vacant lots;  
The showers beat on broken blinds and chimney-pots,  
And at the corner of the street  
A lonely cab - horse steams and stamps.  
And then, the lighting of the lamps.

(1-12)

There is a weariness, a gloominess in the landscape which reminds one of the evening like 'a patient etherized upon the table' (Eliot) in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. The words and images are very suggestive. Winter, for instance, symbolizes harshness, coldness, weariness. 'The smell of steels in passageways' suggests the mundane, ordinary life. 'The burnt - out ends' of cigarettes, 'the vacant lots', 'lonely cab - horse' are all symbols signifying monotony and dreariness of city life.

## **E. LOSS OF SPIRITUALITY:**

The development of science and technology played an important role in shaping modern thought. Scientists acquired recognition in the Western society from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the rapidity with which scientific discoveries were made was baffling. Dominance of science and technology had changed the view of life. To quote Toyne:

The modern age was an age of science and technological progress. Adventure and romance were gone, and even the peaceful things seemed lost. Being modern meant hurrying through life.

(Toyne 335)

There was a quickening of the general tempo of life and the new generation found it easy to slip away from moorings of traditional morality and beliefs. However, the materialistic advancements and technological progress did not make man happy as per his expectations. As Eliot implies in many of his poems, these advancements led to a loss of spirituality; they, in fact, led the world towards anxiety. As Eliot said somewhere, civilization was advancing, culture was declining. One of the best poems written by W. B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming' beautifully reflects the spiritual vacuum of the 20<sup>th</sup> century civilization:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer!  
Things fall apart, the center cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

(1-4)

'The falcon cannot hear the falconer' because of the distance between the two. The touch is lost. The falcon's loss of contact can be seen as man's separation from every ideal of himself that has enabled him to control his life and live with an integrity, all traditions and conventional values that have sustained him. He has left behind all traditional ties and hence, there is disruption. The word 'loosed' finally conveys both, the ebbing power of coherence at the centre and unleashing of destruction as an active force. 'The blood-dimmed tide' of violence is 'loosed' on the world. The poem describes the filthy modern tide of an anarchic civilization; it also conveys the terror of a coming antithetical civilization.

Above all, the greatest shock was experienced when the implications of scientific theories affected Christian beliefs, religious faith. Comte's theory of the three stages of knowledge {theological, metaphysical and positive}, making for an originality of thought promoted positive philosophy and religion of humanity as the solution of various problems of the industrial society of the Victorian era. But the positivism proved to be superficial for several reasons like skepticism, technological advancements and the rise of conflicting political ideologies and states. This led to a depression in the modern era.

Darwin's theory of evolution, brought out in his *Origin of Species*, suggested that the various species of plants and animals (including man) were the result of manifestation of earlier and different species. The scientific temper of the Victorians then, led them to question the truth of religion. Darwin's theory reduced the biblical account of Creation to mythology. This profoundly disturbed complacent Victorians. Because the myth was exploded, they thought that



Christianity was crumbling. Hardy announced the death of God in 'God's Funeral':

VI

'O man-projected Figure, of late  
imaged as we, thy knell who shall survive?  
Whence came it we were tempted to create  
One whom we can no longer keep alive?

VII

'Framing him jealous, fierce, at first,  
We gave him justice as the ages rolled,  
Will to bless those by circumstance accurst,  
And longsuffering, and mercies manifold.

VIII

'And tricked by our own early dream  
and need of solace, we grew self- deceived,  
Our making soon our maker we seem,  
And what we had imagined we believed.

IX

Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing,  
Uncompromising rude reality  
Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,  
Who quavered, sank and now has ceased to be.

(<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/god-s-fyneral/-90k>)

Once the scripture was open to criticism, the Church and its practices made little sense to the modernists. The modernists longed for a faith to survive. They lamented the loss of religious faith. They wanted to believe but they were unable to do so. Life became a dark mystery doomed to death as symbolized by Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle*. Existence became nauseating as in Sartre's

*Nausea* and Camus' *The Outsider*. Thus, the period of Modernism, as Toyne writes, was a time both, of change and of refusal to accept the change.

#### **4. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Apart from its relation to culture and civilization, theoretically also Modernism is related to the art of what Harold Rosebury calls 'the tradition of the new'. {qtd. in Fowler<sup>117</sup>}. It was marked by experimentalism. Breaking away from old views and traditions modern sciences and philosophy were in search for a new context. Modernists experimented with new concepts, ideas and techniques. They tried to replace the old values by their convincing alternatives. Romanticism, for instance, was replaced by Realism and Christianity by Humanism. Instead of abstruse metaphysical speculations, thinkers were interested in practical philosophies such as Conte's and Spencer's Positivism, Bentham's and Mill's Utilitarianism and Hedonism, William James' Pragmatism and John Dewey's Instrumentalism. All of them variously tried to ameliorate the lot of man on the earth, instead of wasting time on future-based questions which can never be answered. Their approach to life had been rational through and through.

There were other philosophers also who were not less rational, but were unable to welcome the findings of reason. They did not entertain illusions but grieved, at the same time, that life and all its spiritual values are an illusion. As thinkers they were emotional rather than rational, in spite of their boldly rational exploration of life. At heart they were religious thinkers who could not accept religion. Such thinkers became known as existentialists. Sartre, Camus and

Kafka are best known of them. They wrote mainly literature rather than philosophy. But it was, decidedly, philosophical literature and they used it as a weapon to fight in the struggle against evil. Some of them wrote even philosophical treatises. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Camus' *The Castle* are instances in point. These anguished thinkers too, like the rationalists, wanted to make the world better. They too, did not want to waste time after the metaphysically unknowable realities.

## **5. MODERNISM IN LITERATURE:**

The socio - cultural background of the Modern age or the Age of Anxiety and the theoretical implications of Modernism, as discussed above, together shaped the modernist writing. (Most of the points discussed are illustrated from literature.) Along with those, here are a few specific characteristics of modernist literature.

Modernist literature was experimental and innovative. The Stream of Consciousness novel for instance, was an experiment in the English novel, while in drama Becket came up with the Theatre of the Absurd. Genre distinctions were challenged as poetry became prosaic and prose poetic. There was an emphasis on Existentialism, Impressionism and objectivity in writing. Objectivity created by traditional third person narration in fiction was slowly replaced by fragmented, first person, yet detached narration as in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Literature was marked by fragmentation. To quote Walmsley:

Fragmentary impressions 'rejecting the 'God's eye' stability of omniscient narrative that had dominated the 'classic realism' of the Victorian period were preferred.

(walmsley 410)

But literature did not celebrate ephemeral impressions. Modernist literary artists like T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and James Joyce implied that fragmentary nature of modernity is painful. Thus, as Walmsley rightly puts it: “Modernism is a literature of mourning, forever lamenting the profound and tragic loss of the golden age of unity and belonging.” (Walmsley 410) The following characteristics of Modernism, as stated in *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* are discernable in the literature of the Modern Age i.e, the early twentieth century:

Formal characteristics:

1. Open form
2. Free verse
3. Discontinuous narrative
4. Juxtaposition
5. Intertextuality
6. Classical allusions
7. Borrowings from other cultures and languages
8. Unconventional use of metaphor

Thematic characteristics:

1. Break down of social norms and cultural sureties
2. Dislocation of meaning and sense from a moral context
3. Valorization of the despairing individual in the face of an unmanageable future
4. Disillusionment
5. Rejection of history and the substitution of a mythical past borrowed without chronology
6. Product of the metropolis, of cities and urbanscapes
7. Stream of consciousness

Modernist literature is defined by its move away from Romanticism. Modernist literature often features a marked pessimism, a clear rejection of the optimism apparent in Victorian literature.

(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/**Modernist\_literature** -)

## **1.2 POSTMODERNISM:**

### **1. DEFINITIONS:**

In time there are always unsteady adulations. Romanticism, for instance, was a wave which was never still; critical labeling made it a stable concept. The same is true of Victorianism, of Modernism or of any other -ism. Change is constant and continuous. When we say that we are in postmodern era, what we actually mean is that the wave called Modernism is no longer discernable anywhere in the modern world in the simple shape as before. The modern is no longer postmodern in that it is no longer modernist in the newly established sense of the term. For want of a proper name of our truly modern age, we call it postmodern. The label is largely, if not altogether, negative. It is other than Modernism and critics are trying to define it from various perspectives.

The term Postmodernism has been a very debatable one ever since its first use. Unlike Modernism which has raised little controversy about its meaning, Postmodernism has led to different opinions regarding its existence as well as meaning. Critics also differ in stating when exactly does Postmodernism begin. In its widest sense, the term has been used to describe the socio-cultural currents in Europe and America since the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his article 'Postmodernism' in *The Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism* Robert Ray

suggests fourteen different landmark years which may be taken as the beginning of Postmodernism. This, as he says:

suggests the single most important thing about postmodernism: unlike impressionism, cubism, expressionism, and even modernism; it cannot best be understood as simply another movement in the arts. Thus, the standard typological moves of literary criticism do not work very well to distinguish postmodernism from its predecessors

(Ray, "Postmodernism", *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*).

Postmodernism is applied to various disciplines ranging from culture to architecture and mass communication. Thus, it has different implications for sociologists, anthropologists, art critics, architects, film - makers, philosophers and linguists. This makes it difficult to define Postmodernism. The following are a few definitions attempting to explain the term 'Postmodernism'.

The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines Postmodernism as under:

In its simplest and least satisfactory sense, it refers generally to the phase of 20<sup>th</sup> century Western culture that succeeded the reign of 'high' modernism, indicating products of the age of mass- television since the mid 1950s. More often, though it is applied to a cultural condition prevailing in the advanced capitalist countries since the 1960s, characterized by a super-abundance of disconnected images and styles-most noticeably in television, advertising, commercial design, and pop video.

(Baldick 201)

J. A. Cuddon defines Postmodernism as:

A general {and sometimes conventional} term used to refer to changes, developments and tendencies which have taken place {and are taking

place} in literature, art, music, architecture, philosophy, etc. since 1940s or 1950s.

(Cuddon 733-734)

According to Wendell V. Harris Postmodernism is “The complex of dominant cultural characteristics of the period from World War II to the present.” (Harris 291)

A definition found online is as under:

The term is used in many areas: history, art, architecture, literature, literary criticism, philosophy, science and technology. It can mean quite different things in these different fields although it usually has some aspects in common.

At first, it seems to have been a term used by some historians to describe the twentieth century or some part of it.

In the arts and literature postmodernism is a style that appropriates, and also parodies all that has gone before.

It has been adopted as a philosophical term and used as a ...tool to examine science and culture. Here it is a movement that rejects the notion of an ultimate, objective truth.

([www.toronto-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/postmodernism.htm](http://www.toronto-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/postmodernism.htm))

Thus, as the definitions suggest, postmodernism is the label given to the conditions, ideas and attitudes at multi-disciplinary level in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2. A BRIEF HISTORY:**

Among the thinkers who anticipated Postmodernism is Nietzsche who announced in 1888 that “nihilism stands at the door.” (qtd. in Lyon 11) Nietzsche’s concept of nihilism closely corresponds to the postmodern belief in the multiplicity of realities and the inauthenticity of absolute truth. It is an attack

on rationality, whether in art, philosophy or in science. As Lyon explains, “when the restless doubting attitude of modern reason turns on reason itself, nihilism results.” (Lyon 11)

Nietzsche gave the slogan, ‘the death of God.’(qtd. in Lyon 11) The slogan may be taken as anticipating the postmodern sense of uncertainty. It may be taken as implying, if God is dead can we be sure of anything? There is nothing like morality; truth is fiction.

The next significant scholar leading towards postmodern thought is Martin Heidegger. Like Nietzsche he too, attacked modern reason and rationality. To quote his words: “when we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought.” (Chagami [www.geocities.com.Athens/Ahora/9095/postmpdernism.huml-13k-](http://www.geocities.com.Athens/Ahora/9095/postmpdernism.huml-13k-)) Other major names associated with the history and development of Postmodernism are Michael Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and Baudrilard.

The term ‘Postmodernism’ was first used in the 1940s. On its first use in the 1940s and then in the 1960s the term signified only special aesthetic practices. Gradually it was used in several disciplines like Architecture, Politics, Economics, Art, Culture and Sociology. Peter Brookner in the following lines and Patricia Waugh, in the quotation that follows it, describe the increasing range of the applicability of the term ‘Postmodernism’ since its first use:

The terms “postmodern” and “postmodernism” surfaced briefly in the 40s and 60s and were then employed, in the next decade, as organizing terms in critical essays regarding tremors in cultural values.

(Brookber 2)



By the early 80s the term shifts from the description of a range of aesthetic practices . . . to a more generalized thought and pervasive cynicism than the progressionist ideals of modernity. Postmodernism now expresses the sense of a new cultural epoch.

(Waugh, "Stalemates" 348)

Harry Levin and Irving Howe were perhaps the first to apply the term 'postmodern' to literature written after World War II. However, it was Ihab Hassan who popularized the term in relation to literature. As Kelly points out: "Ihab Hassan popularized the term by using it to characterize emerging trends in the literature in the 1960s." {Kelly, "Postmodernism", *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* Vol. 4}.

### **3. GROWING FROM MODERNISM:**

If we go with the literal meaning of the word 'postmodern' - taking 'modern' as 'contemporary', the term 'Postmodernism' may not have any meaning. Can there be anything after the present or the contemporary? Thus, it can be maintained that the word 'modern' in the term 'postmodern', or the word 'Modernism' in the term 'Postmodernism' is related to the critical term 'Modernism. Postmodernism then, cannot be studied in isolation from Modernism. It grows from Modernism. It is related to Modernism not simply as that which succeeds it like Romanticism succeeding Neo - classicism in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century English literature. Anthony Cascardy explains Postmodernism as follows:

Postmodernism may be understood in a dual sense; first, postmodernism represents the consequences of tendencies embodied within the paradigm of modernity and second, postmodernism is the site of those

transformations that remain open to us through a reinterpretation of the modern age.

(Cascardy 14)

Here Postmodernism is perceived from two angles - 1.It follows modernity, {modernity meaning 'following Enlightenment'}) and 2.it develops from the modern age. Thus, from either perspective it is clear that Postmodernism grows from Modernism. Diame Elam is right when he observes:

Postmodernism does not simply happen after modernism, but is a series of problems present in modernism in its continuing infancy. It might be understood as popular modernism.

(Elam 9-10)

Peter Brookner also writes: The term Postmodernism is: "a name for the series of social and cultural tendencies provoking the definition of modernism." (Brookner 3) Another scholar, Mary Klages also begins her study of Postmodernism with a detailed discussion of modernism. According to her:

Perhaps the easiest way to start thinking about postmodernism is by thinking about modernism, the movement from which postmodernism seems to grow or emerge.

([www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012klages/pomo.html](http://www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012klages/pomo.html))

Thus, Postmodernism grows from Modernism. It can be well understood and studied only with a proper understanding and analysis of Modernism.

#### **4. SIMILAR TO YET DIFFERENT FROM MODERNISM:**

There is no clearly perceptible departure from Modernism to Postmodernism. Many general as well as literary tendencies of Modernism, discussed earlier, are those of Postmodernism as well. There is yet, a basic difference between Modernism and Postmodernism. The world - view of both is

identical; their reactions to it are different. While some anguished scholars of Modernism lament the loss of faith, discontinuity, etc, all postmodernist scholars accept modernist lights without demur. Differentiating between Modernism and Postmodernism from a literary perspective Mary Klages writes:

Most of the characteristics of modernist literature are followed by postmodernism as well. . . . But while postmodernism seems very much like modernism in these ways, it differs from modernism in its attitude towards a lot of these trends. Modernism, for example, tends to present a fragmented view of human subjectivity and history {think of *The Waste Land*, for instance, or of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*}, but presents fragmentation as something tragic, something to be lamented and mourned as a loss. . . . Postmodernism, in contrast, doesn't lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionality or incoherence, but rather celebrates that. The world is meaningless? Let's not pretend art can make meaning then. Let's just play with nonsense!

[www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012klages/pomo.html](http://www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012klages/pomo.html))

To quote from Prof. John Lye's updated version of the article "Some attributes of postmodernist literature":

Postmodernism is a broad range of response to modernism, especially, refusals of some of its totalizing premises and effects, and of its implicit or explicit distinction between high culture and commonly lived life.

[www.brocku.ca/english/courses/2F55/post-mod-attrib.php](http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/2F55/post-mod-attrib.php))

Frederic Jameson describes Modernism and Postmodernism as cultural formations which accompany particular stages of Capitalism. He outlines three stages of capitalism in the Western history, citing particular cultural practices:

1. Market Capitalism: (occurring in the Eighteenth through the late Nineteenth century) This is associated with particular technological

developments, namely, the steam - driven motor and with a particular kind of aesthetics, namely, realism.

2. Monopoly Capitalism: (occurring in the late Nineteenth century and continuing till the mid Twentieth century) This is associated with electric and internal combustion motors and the aesthetics called modernism.
3. Consumer Capitalism: (occurring in the second half of the Twentieth Century and continuing till this date) The focus is on marketing, selling and consuming commodities and producing them; nuclear and electronic technologies and with aesthetics of postmodernism.

Note: The above discussion is based on analysis of Jameson's *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* at

<http://www.newinfluencer.com/mediapedia/frederic-jameson/-26k->

According to Jameson right from the year 1700 culture has corresponded to capitalism. As Kenneth Thompson points out: 'he rejects the idea of conservative sociologist Daniel Bell . . . that class conflict has ended.' (Thompson 231) Thus, according to Jameson both, Modernism and Postmodernism are stages of capitalism with the difference that in each the nature of capitalism is different.

## **5. REJECTION OF AUTHENTICITY, TOTALITY:**

Postmodernism reacts against totality and seems to revel in fragmentation, ephemerality,, discontinuity. As Marshall says: "The postmodern moments resist totalizations, absolute identity, absolute truth." (Marshall 4) To quote from 'Some attributes of postmodern literature': "Postmodernism is a broad range of fragmentation, of discontinuity, of reality as a pastiche rather than as a whole." (<http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/2F55/postmodattrib.html>)

There is no longer belief in one absolute, universal truth. As a renowned sociologist Baudrillard suggests, “we have now moved into an epoch . . . where truth is entirely a product of consensus values . . . .” (qtd. in Shannon and Wesley [Http://www.as.ua.edu/ant/faculty/murphy/436/pomo.htm-52k](http://www.as.ua.edu/ant/faculty/murphy/436/pomo.htm-52k)) For postmodernists there is no authentic, ultimate truth. No system is reliable or authentic. In place of system – building, phenomenological explanation of universe has come into being. As system - building is totalizing, Postmodernism challenges the authenticity of systems. It rejects all totalizing theories like Marxism and Psychoanalysis. Derrida challenges Saussure’s assumption that the signifier dignifies the signified. He establishes the identity of both, the signifier and the signified and argues that language originates from languages and can have no meaning beyond itself to enigmatic frame; all culture is composed of signs. It is just language, the reality of language and no reality apart from languages. It is this illusion of reality and the illusion itself is the ultimate reality.

## **6. REJECTION OF META NARRATIVES:**

One of the eminent scholars of Postmodernism, Lyotard defines Postmodernism as ‘incredibility towards meta narratives.’ (Lyotard XXIV) In his distinguished study *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Lyotard attacks and rejects all philosophies as Grand {meta} narratives which are just linguistic formulations, having little to do with what may be called objective reality. They reduce life, history, reality to language. Every system of philosophy is a linguistic formulation. But we are the creatures of language. We live in the world of words. Beyond language we cannot reach, beyond language we cannot think.

Some modernists bemoaned this perception. Postmodernists have little to complain against it. They, on the contrary, enjoy the game of bursting our bubbles and dispossessing us of our illusions. They kill truth and are not sorry that it dies. They are content with linguistic formulations which differ from reading to reading of different persons and differ even from reading to reading of an identical person at different times. That is how we live in language and change in language in all our seeking to go beyond language. Thus, they gleefully argue and now there are no modernists around to be grieved at their arguments.

Foucault restates the feature in the context of Sociology. He tries to show that the basic idea about how people think of permanent truths of human nature and society change throughout the course of history. He argues that “everyday practices enable people to define their identities and systematize knowledge. Foucault’s study of power and its shifting patterns. Is a fundamental concept of Postmodernism.” (Shannon and Wesley) He rejects history as ‘a chronology of inevitable facts’ and depicts it as ‘underlayers of suppressed and unconscious knowledge in and throughout history.’ (Shannon and Wesley) Thus, Postmodernism rejects all kinds of Grand or Meta narratives.

## **7. FRAGMENTATION IN LITERATURE:**

Like Modern literature Postmodern literature also reflects fragmentation and loss of omniscient, absolute truth. Mahesh Dattani’s *Tara*, for instance, is a text in fragments both, thematically as well as technically. There is no linear progression of time. There are frequent and sudden shifts from present to past and vice versa. Soon after the audience and the readers learn that Tara has

been dead before six years, Tara appears on stage and converses with her brother Chandan. The story is revealed in fragments through discontinuous conversational pieces, abrupt suggestions and soliloquies. There are two different fragments put together at one time in the play when two sets of characters - Roopa, and her friends outside Tara's house and Tara, Chandan and their father in the house - speak on different subjects at a time: Roopa challenges Tara from back stage (outside the house) in order to settle accounts for her insult and humiliation. At that time, Tara, Chandan and their father are discussing an extremely emotional family matter on the stage (in the house). And yet, both the fragments are meaningful parts of the text.

A postmodernist is not tied to any ideology. He lives in a state of uncertainty. This often leads to texts very different in form. Such texts are open-ended, offering no one, perfect final end.

#### **8. SCHIZOPHRENIC PERSONALITY:**

Postmodern personality is fragmented. There is no one, unified self but a fragmented self who has lost the sense of time.

A postmodern personality often has no rational outlook; it is tossed between past and present and has no sense of linear progression of time. It ends up being not a distinct individual but a mass identity. Such a self is unable to make a satisfactory choice in life; he is always in a state of dilemma, confusion. Such a fragmented identity is called schizophrenic. A schizophrenic postmodern persona lives in a world of illusion, rather a world of hallucination; he is in a state of doubt; his behaviour, then, tends to be abnormal. According to Frederic

Jameson the stylistic features of postmodernist culture are a fondness for pastiche, collage of styles, retreat from the idea of the unified personality to the schizophrenic, split personality with a lost sense of linear progression of time.

## **9. POSTINDUSTRIAL MASS SOCIETY:**

Sociologists have observed some sea - changes in the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century social world. These changes have led the period to be called by different names by different sociologists focusing on its various aspects. To quote David Lyon:

Today we are confronted by a plethora of new names for these transformations - the risk society, the global age, the information society, post industrialism, the communicative era, the second media age; plus those that simply add a prefix to what has gone before, producing late modernity, high modernity, meta - modernity, hyper - modernity, super - modernity, and, of course, post modernity.

(Lyon 46)

Some socio - cultural aspects of the post war, postmodern culture and society are as under:

### **A. MASS CULTURE:**

Irving Howe rightly calls the postwar, postmodern society 'the mass society'. Unlike the modernist culture, clearly divided in high culture and low culture, there is only one culture and that is the popular culture, the mass culture. One could rather say that what earlier was called culture has now relegated into background. The distinction between high art and low art no longer exists. The important distinction now is between popular art and art which is not so popular.



## **B. CONSUMER CULTURE:**

Society is marked by consumer culture. Consumer lifestyle and mass consumption are peculiarities of the major part of society. Everything is commodified. Everything is connected with the market. What is central is production out of needs and wants. As Baudrillard suggests, the postmodern spills away from the modern when the production on demand of consumers becomes central. (Baudrillard in Thompson)

Art also, has become a commodity in the consumer society. It is evaluated not according to its aesthetic or intellectual qualities. Evaluation is done on the basis of consumerism, commercialism and money - making capacity of art. The distinction now is between successful and money - making art and art that is not so successful and makes little money. That which sells best is considered to be good. Success is measured in terms of market value of a product. (The word 'product' is used for art.) The new norms of judgement are different from those of the preceding times. Value judgement, it is true, was given up long ago. In the mass society a writer is either successful or a failure. The transition from expressions like 'creation' to 'product' used for art is suggestive of the socio - cultural bent of the postmodern society. Kenneth Thompson, with the help of Frederic Jameson's view, describes the postmodernist culture as against the modernist culture as follows:

Whereas modernist culture could be judged against certain dominant standards. . . and might even be oppositional or shocking, postmodernist culture is totally commodified and tends to be judged in terms of what gives immediate pleasure and money.

(Thompson 232)

Thus, according to Jameson, in the phase of postmodernism the culture itself is commodified. It has become integrated into commodity production.

### **C. THE ROLE OF MEDIA:**

Media like television and films play a very important role in consumer society. Television advertisements shape public thought and promote demand.

As David Lyon writes:

Consumer objects are actually a system of signs that differentiate the population. Signifiers like TV ads, 'flow' freely with only the loosest connection with actual objects.... Their purpose is only to incite desire.

(Lyon 73)

On the other hand, radio and television programmes as well as films are, more or less, productions as per demand. Media has played a significant role in promoting commercial art. Commercial art has an access to common man's drawing room through mass media.

### **D. PLURALITY OF CULTURES:**

The mass society is marked by a plurality of cultures. To put in the words of Richard Gott: ". . . while modernism was the product of a particular western culture, postmodernism heralds the recognition of a plurality of culture." (qtd. in Thompson 222) There is no clear boundary or water - tight compartmentalization of culture in consumer, mass society. Culture is diversified.

### **E. EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION:**

The world has now become a narrow place. Distances have disappeared on account of speedy transport, communication and computer technology. The gap among various cultures has been bridged. People of different cultures have

come nearer. Man, who has lost his identity since the modernist period, has now stopped grieving over mass identity. He is no longer an isolated recluse but a part of community. In this plurality of cultures man seeks his identity in his own cultural group, thus, having a group identity. Consequently, while on one hand, all dividing lines are getting blurred in the sweep of globalization, on the other hand, nativism in various forms is seeking to perpetuate itself; Architecture prefers local styles. As Kenneth Thompson writes: "In architecture postmodernism prefers the popular and vernacular styles...." (Thompson 229) Literature tends to be provincial; Different marginalized groups have come up with their specialized writings which emphasize their group identity. Dalit literature, Afro – American literature are examples of literature about and by marginalized groups.

#### **F. DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGY:**

In postmodern society science survives mainly as technology. Man has concentrated on developing technology for his material gains as well as luxuries. Information technology, the latest achievement of man, has changed the world. Information has replaced knowledge and wisdom.

#### **G. POST INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY:**

Modernist, postindustrial society was divided mainly in two broad classes of factory workers and factory owners. In postmodern society also the class distinctions remain, but a whole class of educated working or service class is added to the older division. With multi - national and media culture a whole class of educated and even intellectual class of employees is added to the working

class. Money plays an important role in building up the social image of man. In fact, Larkin has written an ironic poem on money.

#### **10. POSTMODERNISM IN LITERATURE:**

Postmodern literature is influenced by the existing socio - economic, cultural system. The consumer mass culture has affected literature also. With the changed standards of evaluation, literature, in order to be popular and best - seller, on the whole, ceases to be profound and very serious in nature. Unlike modernist literature, it often plays on the surface, i.e, avoids exploring the painful, existential realities of life. It presents even serious things in a playful manner.

It is often in vain to look for a coherent meaning in a postmodern text. It resists coherence; it resists interpretation; it resists meaning. Postmodern texts are often open - ended with no one, clear meaning or conclusion.

“Postmodern texts refer parodically to traditions, conventions and genres....”, says Wendell V. Harris (293) Unlike modernist literature it shows little interest in experimenting with form. Irony, parody, pastiche, etc., are devices used frequently in postmodern literature. A postmodern text is a collage of styles as well as themes.

Literature produced in the changing environment ceases to be profound. It no longer has the high seriousness or the depth of Modernism. Mass has no special, aesthetic taste. This does not mean that postmodern society has, altogether, no space for the elite. The elite still continue to exist, but only as a small part of the mass society, sometimes as a group in seclusion. With an increase in literacy, readership has grown enormously. What pleases most of the

readers is appreciated and written more than what pleases only a few of them and has, perhaps, literary and aesthetic qualities.

The following is a table differentiating Modernism from Postmodernism, using expressions peculiar to each:

<u>Modernism</u>	<u>Postmodernism</u>
Emotions	Random intensities
Subjectivity	Decentred subject
Character	Caricature
Plot	Labyrinth
Parody	Pastiche
Art Object	Text
Autonomy	Intertextuality
Temporal organization	Spatial organization
Original	Copy
Closed-form product	Process
Individual Style	Free-Floating Codes
Order	Chance
Readerly	Writerly
Metaphor	Metonymy
Freud	Lacan
Marx	Baudrillard
Sartre	Derrida

[www.wsu.edu.8080/-amerstu-/573/pomochart.html-6k-](http://www.wsu.edu.8080/-amerstu-/573/pomochart.html-6k-)

It must be noted that all the characteristics of either Modernism or Postmodernism may not be discernable in Larkin's poetry. Larkin consciously followed neither Modernism nor Postmodernism. He was never a complete modernist or a complete postmodernist poet, chronologically, temperamentally and stylistically. Every literary artist is, after all, a unique, individual artist, free

from -isms. Labels are given by critics and readers. Thus, it can be maintained that Larkin's poetry while reacting against Modernism, unconsciously leads towards postmodern directions; it still retains, from time to time, a modernist streak too, from where it begins, in the early stage of the poet's career. In other words, Larkin's poetry with all its uniqueness, swings between Modernism and Postmodernism. Having discussed Modernism and Postmodernism in this chapter, the succeeding chapters will attempt to develop the above stated argument in the light of the discussion.

The second chapter will discuss Larkin's early poetry as a bundle of influences including modernist influences.

The third chapter will consider a very important phase of Larkin's poetic career during which he was associated with several contemporary poets who, together formed an unofficial and debatable yet a significant group called the Movement. The Movement and Larkin's association with it is important for the present research as some of the features of the Movement suggest modernist and postmodernist elements.

The next chapter will consider postmodern tendencies in the poetry of Philip Larkin.

The fifth chapter will bring out Larkin's stand as a unique literary artist whose poetry, swinging between the two major critical perspectives - Modernism and Postmodernism, - adheres completely to none.

The concluding chapter will state the findings of the research.

## CHAPTER - 2

### EARLY LARKIN AND MODERNISM

Having begun the research with a discussion of the two terms used in the title of the present study – Modernism and Postmodernism – it is, now, time to study Larkin's poetry in the light of these terms. Every literary artist, in some degree, is sure to be affected by the prevalent ways of writing. Philip Larkin lived through the modern as well as the postwar, postmodern periods. His poetry reflects influences of both from time to time. The present chapter will attempt to bring out modernist influences along with several others, especially, in the early poetry of Larkin.

#### **2.1 EARLY YEARS:**

Larkin was born in 1922 in Coventry. He did not have an extraordinary, distinguished childhood. He refers to his childhood as a 'forgotten boredom' (*CP* 33) in 'Coming' and as 'unspent' (*CP* 81) in 'I Remember, I Remember'. He took school education in King Henry VIII School. Remembering his uneventful childhood Larkin notes:

My father was a local government official and we lived in quite respectable houses and had a succession of maids and that sort of thing, as one did before the war. It was all very normal. I had friends whom I played football and cricket with and Hornby trains and so forth.

(*RW* 47)

This description of what one considered all very 'normal' before the war establishes bourgeois parameters. His was not an under – privileged childhood

of hardship. But, as the tone of the passage suggests, young Larkin did not find his childhood stimulating or satisfying. He had a sister, ten years elder to him but 'he always felt like an only child.' (Lerner 1) His occasional comments on his family are startling. At twenty one he wrote once: "Marriage seems a revolting institution unless the people have enough money to keep reasonably distant from each other." (Lerner 1-2) When he was thirty he wrote an autobiographical fragment in which:

he describes his childhood as dominated by fear and boredom and gives a bleak picture of his parents' marriage ('there was a curious tense boredom about the house') claiming that it had left him with the conviction 'that human beings should not live together, and that children should be taken from their parents at an early age.'

(Lerner 2)

Larkin's father, a city Treasurer, was dominating by nature. The child Philip Larkin was profoundly influenced by his love of literature. His strong views had a different kind of influence on him. He (Larkin's father) was a devotee of D.H Lawrence's right-wing political theories and was deeply impressed by Fascism. He took his children twice to Germany during Hitler's rule. Larkin did not say much about these visits in his later life but whatever little he said, it is clear that he did not feel comfortable in Germany. "... he took us there twice, I think this sowed the seed of my hatred of abroad – not being able to talk to anyone or read anything", (RW 47) he says. This shows that Larkin did not share his father's enthusiasm for Germany. However, his father's ideas had such a dominating impact that he did not reveal his disagreement or distaste until he was twenty. At twenty as a young man he once expressed his doubts when he



wrote: 'I think Fascism is a bad thing – I think it is.' (qtd. in Booth 11) However, on the whole, he developed a detachment towards politics, at least, in the early phase of his career. As he himself notes, lacking a 'conceptual or ratiocinative mind', (RW 60) he did not assert strong political views of his own against those of his father. He chose, in that case, perhaps, not to speak of politics at all. Thus, his early poetry and novels, written quite close to the modernist era, do not deal with politics or seem to bring out, at any point, directly or indirectly, his views on politics. It should be noted that modernist poetry of the 30s especially, was coloured by politics. But Larkin's early poetry, though taking modernist inspiration from time to time, does not seem to have political implications found in modernist poetry.

## **2.2 LITERARY CAREER:**

Larkin started writing poetry at quite an early age. As James Booth suggests, Larkin's 'literary career falls into three phases of unequal length.' (Booth 9) The first phase runs from his teens until the publication of *The North Ship* - his first volume of poems and his two novels - *Jill* and *A Girl in winter*. This phase covers mainly the years of Larkin's school, University education and his first job at Wellington library.

The second phase begins with Larkin's move to Leicester University Library in 1946 and lasts until he became an assistant librarian in Queen's University, Belfast in 1950. After struggling in vain to find a publisher, Larkin published *XX Poems* at his own cost in this phase. During this period, Larkin's personal life remained much disturbed. It was, more or less, a period of

disappointment and frustration. His father passed away in 1948. For the next two years he lived with his mother who did not keep well. His engagement ended up without a happy relationship. All these led to a sort of defedence at the literary level - he could not complete his third novel; he could not find a publisher for his next collection of poems. He bore the cost of publication and reduced the collection to XX Poems. It was, however, during this phase that Larkin put his foot down with a determination on poetry, giving up novel writing for ever. His earliest mature poems, away from a mere shadow of modernist poetry, were written during this time. Poems like 'At Grass', 'Coming', 'Wants' and 'No Road" were composed in 1950.

The third phase of Larkin's literary career begins with his becoming an assistant librarian in Queen's University and lasts till the end of his career. This is the most fruitful phase in Larkin's career. He drew attention of critics and readers with the publication of *The Less Deceived* in 1955.

Faber & Faber published *The Whitsun Weddings* in 1964 and ten years later *High Windows* in 1974. Larkin was at the peak of his popularity when he was offered the honour of Poet Laureate which he humbly refused.

### **2.3 VERY EARLY POETRY – POETRY AT SCHOOL:**

The first phase of Larkin's literary career, which is mainly the focus of discussion in the present chapter, begins with Larkin's days at school. He was involved in literary activity at school. He had adopted from his father a disbelief in Christian values, yet his creativity began with his composing choruses for a passion play for the Holy Week at school. This was in 1937. His first published

poems appeared in the School magazine in 1938 and 1939. These early poems were 'Winter Nocturne', (CP 225) 'Summer Nocturne', (CP 227) 'Fragment from May' (CP 226) and 'Street Lamps'. (CP 230) Commenting on these poems James Booth writes. "Their style slips between Keatsian mellifluousness, a formal artifice reminiscent of Gray and extravagant conceits in imitation of early Eliot." (Booth 12)

The first three poems appear, more or less, to be nature poems. All of them describe the season suggested in their title. The description is done with the help of many visual images which do not seem to be intended for a serious implied meaning. This seems to be the influence of Ezra Pound's Imagism. In 'Fragment from May' there is a description of spring. The visual images involve a mention of many colours:

Spring the flowers-a host of nodding gold,  
Leaping and laughing in the boist'rous wind,  
Tinged with a yellow as yet not grown old,  
Green and yellow set against the soil.

Flowers...

Heaped with pink and white.

(CP 226)

The poem, with the help of such visual images, celebrates spring - a season of freshness and youth. Thus, the poet celebrates youth.

The poem 'Summer Nocturne' also has visual images. The poem describes a summer night:

Night perfumes lie upon the air,  
As rests the blossom on the loaded bough;

And each deep-drawn breath is redolent  
Of all the folded flowers' mingled scent  
That rises in confused rapture now,  
As from some cool vase filled with petals rare.

(CP 227)

This poem slightly touches upon the theme of the passage of time – one of the chief concerns of the poet in his later poems. After describing the night, the poet wishes that 'now time would sleep'. But he knows that this beautiful cool weather and the sweet night wouldn't last for ever. 'The East must yellow with tomorrow's sun!' (CP 227) Time must pass leaving even the sweetest things behind. However, typical Larkinesque tone of sadness is not evident as yet. There is no sadness in the poem. Most of the mature nature poems of Larkin like 'Aubade' bring no joy; rather, nature appears as dreary and the dreariness upsets the poet. In 'Summer Nocturne', under the influence of the Romantics, the poet sees beauty, tenderness, coolness and freshness (all positive qualities) in night.

The poem 'Winter Nocturne' presents the night as 'dark' and as leaving 'the world alone.' (CP 229) but the description of nature, on the whole, leaves little scope for sadness or symbolic implications of images. Winter is beautifully described in the poem. There seems to be an influence of Thomas Gray's famous elegy on the poem:

Marked in grey, the dusk steals slowly in,  
Crossing the dead, dull fields with footsteps in cold,  
The rain drips drearily; night's finger spin  
A web of drifting mist o'er wood and wold,  
As quiet as death. The sky is silent too,

Hard as granites and as fixed as fate.

(CP 229)

The similes 'as quiet as death' and 'as fixed as fate' anticipate the later, mature Larkin. The metaphysical conceit – night as a person stepping in – seems to be an influence and, rather, an imitation of Eliot.

'Street Lamps' is an ordinary poem. A street lamp, on in the morning, tries to rival the sun, 'to cast shadows contrary to the sun'. (CP 230) The poem shows the supremacy of nature, man's aspiration to challenge and conquer even the supreme nature as well as his attempt and his failure to do so. The poem may be read as reflecting a modern, especially the early 20<sup>th</sup> century man's ambition to be at the top of the world, to conquer even nature.

#### **2.4 OXFORD YEARS:**

Soon after the Second World War broke out, Larkin went to Oxford to read English. He spent three years as an undergraduate at Oxford between 1941 and 1944. These were the War years. Students from universities, especially those students who had gone to the Universities on a scholarship basis, were summoned now and then, by the British government to give services in the British army. Not being a scholarship boy unlike many of his friends, and because of a weak eye - sight Larkin was spared from this compulsion. It was:

a strange period of subdued austerity for the university, a strangeness reflected in Larkin's first novel Jill (1946) which he wrote in the months following his graduation.

(Booth 13)

'Oxford terrified me', (qtd. in Motion, *A writer's Life* 36) said Larkin as an undergraduate. In *Jill* the hero Kemp is pale with fear as he takes a train from his home Midlands for his further studies. Andrew Motion, with the help of Larkin's own comments, describes Oxford in the time of the War as under:

This autumn there were 'no more than sixty undergraduates at St. John's overall,' most of whom were taking truncated 'war degrees' before joining the services and several college buildings had been requisitioned by the Ministry of food. It was, literally and metaphorically, a life on rations.

(Motion, *A Writer's Life* 37-38)

In his letter to Sutton - a close friend – Larkin reacted to the War as under:

The enormous impact of war has given Oxford a fundamental shock.... Army lorries thunder down Commander Street in an endless procession.... I gain the impression of being at the end of an epoch. Will the axis ever return to its normal position?

(Motion, *A Writer's Life* 38)

Commenting on Larkin's detachment from the War, Lerner also refers to Larkin's own comments:

His whole career as a student was in wartime, yet the war made curiously little impression on him. "Without being a conscientious objector", he wrote, "I did not want to join the Army on moral grounds. However, I was fundamentally – like the rest of my friends – uninterested in the war."

(Lerner 2)

Thus, on the whole, Larkin seems to be a little affected directly by the War. In fact, as he himself mentioned, he always wanted to remain detached from the war. To quote his words:

Perhaps you think I am being a bit selfish but I just don't want to go into the army. I want to pretend it isn't there, that there's no war on. When I get

into it, it will be a hell of a struggle of readjustment. I dare say I shall get over it in about 3 months. But they'll be a dose of Hell.

(Booth 16)

While he was at Oxford, there was a massive bombing on his home - town Coventry where his parents lived. There was no contact with them for quite some time. This emotional stress does not seem to have affected his writing. There are no poems about War or its horrors in Larkin, except for a few references here and there.

## **2.5 FIRST JOB AND THE NOVELS:**

After graduating, Larkin spent some months in the new Warwick home with his parents. He wasn't very sure what he wanted to do. He was writing his novels. He wanted to be a novelist. He tried the Civil Services. Failing to avail an employment as a Government servant, he, quite unwillingly, accepted job as a librarian in Wellington library, Shropshire. To quote his own words:

I tried twice to get into the Civil Service but the Civil Service didn't want me and I was sitting at home, quietly writing *Jill* when the Ministry of Labour wrote to me asking very courteously what I was doing exactly. This scared me and I picked up and saw that an urban district council in Shropshire wanted a Librarian, so I applied and got it.

(RW51)

His first novel *Jill* was published in 1946. Soon after he shifted to Leicester as assistant librarian, Faber and Faber published his second novel, *A Girl in Winter* in 1947. He started writing his third novel but could not finish. Finally he settled on poetry. He said in 1982: "I wanted to be a novelist in a way I never wanted to be a poet." (RW 63)

But I could never write a third novel, though I must have spent about five years trying to. . . I still think novels are much more interesting than poems – a novel is so spreading; it can be so fascinating and so difficult. I think they were just too hard for me. I've said somewhere that novels are about other people and poems are about yourself. I think that was the trouble, really, I didn't know enough about other people, I didn't like them enough.

(RW48)

Giving up his struggle to finish his third novel, finally, Larkin made up his mind to concentrate on writing poetry.

## **2.6 THE NORTH SHIP AND OTHER EARLY POETRY:**

The school years, years at Oxford, and the time spent in the first job record the first phase of Larkin's literary career. Despite a full - time job and part - time study in order to qualify as a professional librarian, he continued to write. His ten poems were published in *Poetry from Oxford in Wartime* in 1945. He managed to find a publisher for his first collection of poems. The Fortune Press, a small publishing house, brought out his first volume of poetry. Many of his poems which he had written so far – mainly, those written at Oxford and those published in *Poetry from Oxford* - were collected by Larkin in this volume, titled after a major poem in it – *The North Ship*. The poems are written by one person but they include voices of several like Pre - romantic, Romantic, Victorian and Modern Poets. The poems seem to be influenced mainly by W. B. Yeats, W. H. Auden and Dylan Thomas. The poet appears to follow their style more than their subjects. In the preface to the second edition of *The North Ship* Larkin himself writes:



Looking back, I find in the poems, not one abandoned self but several – the school-boy for whom Auden was the only alternative to old - fashioned poetry, the undergraduate whose work a friend affably characterized as Dylan Thomas... and the immediately post – Oxford self isolated in Shropshire with a complete Yeats stolen from a local girls' school. This search for a style was merely one aspect of a personal immaturity.

(*The N.S* 8)

Thus, the poet himself admits influences on his early poetry. To put in the words of Salem Hassan:

This statement directs the reader's attention to the extent of influences of the said poets on the young Larkin. However, reading through these poems reveals that he does not only adopt their poetic strategies but also their rhythm and music, especially, that of Yeats.

(Hassan 7)

Commenting on *The North Ship* Lawrence Lerner writes:

Much of *The North Ship* sounds like a pastiche of Yeats; the poems have little to offer save a clearly derivative music. Not only are they thinner and less interesting than Larkin's mature works, they are arguably less interesting than some of his earlier poems, written when he was still an undergraduate, where the dominant influence is Auden.

(Lerner 10)

*The North Ship* has 32 poems and 3 songs. Larkin's literary output of poetry during this phase is much more exhaustive than the poems collected in *The North Ship*. After Larkin's death, Anthony Thwaite published collected poems of Larkin under the title *Philip Larkin: Collected Poems*. The book has a separate section called 'Early Poems – 1938-1945'. There are 80 poems in this section. The more recent collection of Larkin's apprentice work appeared in *Early Poems*

and *Juvenilia* edited by A. T. Tolley. The volume runs into 352 pages. It is bulkier than Anthony Thwaite's *Collected Poems*. In addition to 80 early poems printed by Thwaite, it adds more than 170 others, derived from manuscripts, typescripts and notebooks. Of these, Larkin saw only two poems, 'Wedding Wind' and 'Going' fit to be included in his first mature collection, *The Less Deceived*.

As a teenager Larkin developed a habit of sewing together his latest poems into small pamphlets and commenting on them in accompanying prefaces. These prefaces are presented by Tolley in his book as an appendix. In the prefaces Larkin is, most of the times, critical of his own poems. For one poem, for instance, he says: "The emotion is trite, the verse sloppy." His comments include expressions like 'pseudo-Yeats Babble', 'unforgetably bad', 'slobber', 'sentimentality', 'silly, private, careless or just ordinarily bad'. A few positive words for the poems include comments like '...every poet should like his poems (not necessarily think them good)'; the poems are 'of interest to the psychologist, if not to the literary critic'.

[Note: The information about Tolley's book and Larkin's prefaces is derived from the following source:

([www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/mar26/poetry.philiplarkin](http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/mar26/poetry.philiplarkin) )

As a school - boy Larkin was greatly influenced by Auden. He says in one of the prefaces, published by Tolley: "Almost any single line by Auden would be worth the whole lot put together."

The Audenesque makes itself feel through references to capitalists, nylons, 'trodden workers', cinemas, searchlights, factories, aerodromes, express trains and the 'sewer of reality'.

([www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/mar26/poetry.philiplarkin](http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/mar26/poetry.philiplarkin) )

There is a reference to railway stations, trains, tickets etc. in a number of early as well as later poems of Larkin. Among the early poems 'Like the Train's Beat', 'One man walking a deserted platform', 'So you have been, despite parental ban' are a few poems referring to trains and railway platforms. The obscurity of the poems like 'Conscript' and 'Ultimatum' resulting mainly out of the use of metaphoric language marks the influence of Auden and Eliot.

## **2.7 INFLUENCE OF YEATS:**

Yeats was a major influence on Larkin's poetry not simply in the formative stage of his literary career but also in his mature poetry for a long time. Yeats' influence on Larkin was, as he himself says, the result of an inspiring visit of the poet Verman Warkins to the Oxford University English Club in 1943. Larkin was fascinated by his lecture on Yeats. Thenafter, to put in Larkin's own words, "I spent the next three years trying to write like Yeats." (RW 29) Larkin's gift of pastiche helped him to echo Yeats' rhythm, music and some times, subjects. He was, as he himself says, fascinated by Yeats' music. To quote his own words: he wrote like Yeats "not because I liked his personality or understood his ideas, but out of infatuation with his music". (RW 29)

The active imitation of Yeats and the similarities between them are seen in between the lines; there are attempts to have hard diction, a romantic spectacle of life and poetic depth.

([www.yunus.hacettepe.edu.tr/berkan/thedevelopmentinphiliplarkin.htm](http://www.yunus.hacettepe.edu.tr/berkan/thedevelopmentinphiliplarkin.htm))

In the first poem of *The North Ship*, for instance, there is a recurrence of a Yeastsian refrain: 'A drum taps, a wintry drum.' (*The N.S* 11) The poem is about spring. As spring sets in, 'all catches alight'. (*The N.S* 11) There is excitement;

there is zest for celebration of life; there are enthusiasm, vigour and energy everywhere. 'Bull, grass and girl' in their respective places:

Gather up and hurl  
Far out beyond the dead  
What life they can control -

*(The N.S 11)*

There is so much excitement everywhere that, as the poet says:

Every one thing.  
Shape, colour and voice,  
Cries out, rejoice!

*(The N.S 11)*

The poem is in four stanzas. The refrain follows every stanza. The poem ends with the refrain. In between the stanzas the refrain - 'A drum taps: a wintry drum' keeps reminding one of the impermanence, temporariness of the spring. In the last stanza of the poem the poet says, 'Let the wheel spin out'. It brings out one of the recurrent themes in Larkin's nature poetry – the seasonal cycle and natural recurrence. Many of Larkin's early poems refer to seasons or the cycle of day and night. 'Fragment from May', (*CP 226*) 'summer nocturne (*CP 227*) 'Midsummer Night', (*CP 244*) and a few more like these are poems about nature. Thus, Salem Hassan rightly points out that "the seasonal process and night and day cycle are recurrent statements in Larkin's poetry." (Hassan 9) In 'One man walking a deserted platform' the 2nd and 3rd lines reveal the poet's reaction to the cycle of seasons and of day and night in nature:

Dawn coming and rain  
Driving across a darkening autumn;

*(The N S 35)*

'Dawn' suggests the lapse of night just as 'darkening autumn' implies the end of summer.

The expression 'Let the wheel spin out' introduces Larkin's interest in the theme of time which he takes up and develops indigenously in his mature poetry. In this expression, as Salem Hassan points out: "Larkin seems to borrow Yeats' view of time, of evolution, and the second coming, his wheel another version of the 'Yeatsian gyre'." (Hassan 8) In 'The second coming' the Yeatsian cycle of time becomes evident. In the very first line of the poem a gyre is mentioned - 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre'. The 'Gyre' is the Yeatsian cycle of two thousand years of civilization at the end of which there will be second coming. Not adopting implications of Christianity, in his poem Larkin also speaks of destruction and then rebirth:

Let the wheel spin out  
Till all the created things  
With shout and answering shout  
Cast off remembering;  
Let it all come about  
Till centuries of springs  
And all their buried men  
Stand on the earth again.

(*The N.S* 11 – 12)

Another poem in *The North Ship* to bear Yeats' influence is poem XX. The poem 'seems closest in the technique and stanzaic form to Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium'.' (Hassan 11) There are no rhetorical statements as found in some

poems of Larkin and Yeats. Here the poet borrows Yeats' famous scarecrow imagery:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a sack . . . . .

(Sailing to Byzantium 10-11)

In Larkin's poem:

---Knowing that I can  
Never in seventy years be more a man.  
Than now – a sack of meal upon two sticks.

(*The N.S* 32)

Thus, "Larkin is successful in adopting archetypal melancholy, romantic sentimentality, mystical and neo-graphic atmosphere of Yeats. "

([www.yunus.hacettepe.edu.tr/~berkan/thedevelopmentinphiliplarkin.htm](http://www.yunus.hacettepe.edu.tr/~berkan/thedevelopmentinphiliplarkin.htm))

Archaic words, romantic diction and gothic element can be found in the title poem 'The North Ship', which is a typical poem, giving one an idea of Larkin's early poetry:

The first ship turned towards the west;  
  
Over the sea, the running sea,  
And by the wind all possessed,  
And carried to a rich country.

The second turned towards the east;  
Over the sea, the quaking sea,  
And the wind hunted it like a beast  
To anchor its captivity.

(*The N.S* 44)

The two ships sailing westward and eastward respectively, meet their destiny. Both are possessed by the wind. The ship going towards the west reaches a rich country; the ship sailing eastwards manages to save itself. Expressions like 'running sea'; 'quaking sea', 'hunted it like a beast' are remarkably suggestive of the gothic atmosphere and colloquialism.

The very beginning of the poem VII in *The North Ship* also strikes the readers as Yeatsian for its description of the morning in the gothic, romantic pattern:

The horns of the morning  
Are blowing, are shining;  
The meadows are bright with the coldest dew.

(*The N.S* 18)

The influence of Yeats can be seen in poem XI also. The poem is a description of late midnight. It contrasts the motion, force and livingness of nature with stagnancy, stillness and deadness of the living as well as the dead world. The wind blows at one o'clock in the dark night and the stars shine brightly holding the wide heaven. But:

There were no mouths  
To drink of the wind,  
Nor any eyes  
To sharpen on the stars  
Wide heaven – holding.

(*The N.S* 23)

Here, the use of the metaphor drinking of the wind recalls Yeats' metaphor in 'Among school children':

Did quattrocento fingers fashion it  
Hollow at cheeks' as through it drank the wind  
And took a mess of shadows for the meat?

(26-28)

The language and atmosphere of another poem (poem XIV) 'Nursery Tale' also resemble those of Yeats. The tale described in the first stanza of the poem, is set in the gothic background:

The horseman, the moonlit hedges,  
The hoof beats shut suddenly in the yard,  
The hand finding the door unbarred;  
And I recall the room where he was brought,  
Hung black and candlelit . . . .

(*The N.S 26*)

In the second stanza the poet finds himself becoming the horseman that always led to a "new ambush", a 'fresh mistake'. As stated in a study on the development of Larkin:

A parallel could be drawn between Yeats' likening himself to a wild colt and Larkin who becomes a horseman in XIV... the medium of artful likening; the diction and the atmosphere of the poem do remind Yeats.

([www.yunus.hacettepe.edu.tr/~berkan/thedevelopmentinphiliplarkin.htm](http://www.yunus.hacettepe.edu.tr/~berkan/thedevelopmentinphiliplarkin.htm))

Larkin's 'Born yesterday' draws for subject matter on Yeats' well known poem 'A prayer for my Daughter'. In his poem Yeats, out of an apprehension of an uncertain, even perhaps hostile future, prays for his little one. He wishes ordinary looks, reasonable intelligence and a normal, undistinguished life for her so that she may have the protected life of domestic bliss; she may not make wrong decisions and find life miserable as it happens with beautiful women:



May she be granted beauty and yet not  
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught.

(A Prayer for my Daughter III 17 - 19)

---

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house  
Where all's accustomed ceremonious:  
For arrogance and hatred are the ware  
Peddled in the thought fares.

(VII 73 – 76)

Larkin's 'Born yesterday' is written for sally Amis. The poet says that he has wished for her:

Not the usual stuff -  
Being beautiful  
Or running off a spring  
Of innocence and love -

(CP 84)

These qualities are rare. If the girl, by chance, happens to have them, 'well, you are a lucky girl', says the poet. But not having these rare qualities, let her, the poet says, be ordinary and average; if happiness comes out of dullness, let her be even below average, dull.

(It needs to be noted that 'Born Yesterday', discussed above, is included in Larkin's second volume of poetry, considered as the first volume of his mature poems. As Thwaite's *Collected Poems* suggests, it was composed in 1954. The poem has been discussed here for two reasons:

1 The similarities between Larkin's 'Born Yesterday' and Yeats' 'A Prayer for my Daughter' are too obvious to be neglected,

2 The poem shows the continuance of Yeats' influence even in Larkin's mature poetry.)

## **2.8 INFLUENCE OF OTHER MODERNISTS – ELIOT:**

Apart from Yeats and Auden Larkin, at times, shows the influence of Eliot as well in his poems. Among the modernist poets, the most scorned one by Larkin is T.S Eliot. Still, like many of his contemporaries and successors, Larkin too, is not free from his influence. In Larkin's 'The bottle is drunk by one', for instance, there is a use of the device of showing time by the clock.

The bottle is drunk by one;  
At two the book is shut;  
At three the lovers lie apart  
--- after four o'clock. . .

(CP 227)

The device recalls Eliot's poem 'The Rhapsody on a Windy Night' in which the same technique is used.

Larkin's early poetry is often marked by the use of metaphors – some times even extended metaphors – efficiently and profusely used by Eliot.

In one of the earliest poems 'Winter Nocturne', Larkin describes winter night with the help of a metaphysical conceit. He describes the oncoming shadows of night as a person stepping in:

Marked in grey, the dusk steals slowly in,  
Crossing the dead, dull fields with footsteps cold,  
The rain drips drearily; night's fingers spin.

(CP 229)

Darkness is personified in the poem. The shadow of night enters the world silently and slowly. It crosses the graveyard and the dull fields. It is cold. The dreariness, dullness and coldness, together, are metaphorically described as 'cold footsteps' of the night.

As has been mentioned earlier, the obscurity in Larkin's early poetry seems to be a direct influence of Eliot. (The point has been touched upon in 2.6. Obscurity in Larkin's poetry will be discussed in the chapter in 2.9.4.)

## **2.9 LARKIN'S POETRY REFLECTING SOME FEATURES OF MODERNIST POETRY IN GENERAL:**

### **1. ALLUSIONS:**

As a Movement poet and then after, Larkin outrightly opposed the use of allusions in poetry. However, his early poetry does casually allude to allusions. It must be noted that unlike Eliot Larkin's allusions are not complex. They do not require any scholarly reading for their understanding. They are simple references like references to his personal life, to the war, to contemporary life of England. And the most significant thing about these references is that they never obstruct readers' understanding and enjoyment of the poem i.e, readers are able to understand the meaning of the poem and enjoy it even if they do not follow the allusions. In 'Out in the Lane I Pause' for example, there is a faint reference to war - an unusual feature in Larkin's poetry. The poet alludes to war not to talk about destruction or even about the fear of war; he focuses on the impermanent relationships as an after – effect of war. There is also a reference to Eden in the poem:

Each in their double Eden closed  
They fail to see the gardener there  
has planted error;

(CP 253)

Allusion to Larkin's personal life seems to be there in his 'Last Will and Testament':

Anxious to publicize and pay our dues  
Contracted here, we Bernard Noel Hughes  
And Philip Arthur Larkin, do desire  
To require and reward those whom we choose,  
To thank our friends before our time expire,  
And those whom, if not our friends. We yet admire.

(CP 251)

Larkin's famous poem 'MCXIV', included in *The Less Deceived* has been read as a nostalgic poem regretting the loss of the pre - War English way of life. The detailed descriptions evoke pictures of the care – free, relaxed, peaceful English life. Directing attention to allusions, Brother Anthony writes: "Some of the details are so specific that footnotes will be needed outside of Britain (or even inside, now)." (Anthony, "Without Metaphysics" [www.hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/Larkin-hm-37k-](http://www.hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/Larkin-hm-37k-)) The foreign readers, I suppose, would not even realize the presence of allusions without the help of English critics.

## 2. IMAGISM:

Another important feature of modernist poetry is imagism, propounded and developed by Pound. Terry Whalen in his article "Philip Larkin's Imagist Bias" speaks of the influence of imagism in Larkin's poetry. Larkin, he argues, is a poet

of observation and misses no detail of the observable world which he describes; his visual images take him close to imagist poetry. This feature, found even in Larkin's mature; latter poetry can be noticed in his early poetry as well. The beginning of 'Midsummer Night, 1940' for example, reminds the reader of the imagist modern poetry:

The sun falls behind the Wales, the town and hills  
Sculptured on England, wait for night . . . .

(CP 244)

The visual details of the sun - set in Wales and the towns and hills of England waiting for the night is a description for its own sake, i.e, it does not seem to carry a symbolic implication in it.

In 'The Night Puts Twenty Veils' also the description of the night in the beginning of the poem is in the imagist fashion:

When the night puts twenty veils  
Over the sun, and the west sky pales  
    To black its vast sweep  
    Then all is deep  
Save where the street lamp gleams upon the rails.

(CP 232)

'Life through the breaking day' is another nature poem which describes the breaking of the day in an imagist manner:

Climb the long summer hills  
    Where the wide trees are spread,  
Drown the cold shadowed wood  
With noise of waterfalls  
    And under chains of clouds

Play on towards the sea:

(CP 308)

In 'Like the train's beat', one of the well known early poems Larkin describes a Polish girl in 'the corner seat' in the train. The first stanza gives out visual details which seem to be imagist. Even her language, which the poet does not understand, is described as 'Swift' and the swiftness is measured by the fluttering of her lips. Here the poet gives both, audio and visual images:

Like the train's beat  
Swift language flutter the lips  
Of the Polish air girl in the concern seat.  
The swinging and narrowing sun  
Lights her eyelashes, shapes  
Her sharp vivacity of bone.

(CP 288)

Here, the speech of the girl and the train's beat are audio images while the fluttering of lips, 'the swinging and narrowing sun' lighting her eyelashes etc., are visual images.

### **3. SYMBOLISM:**

Like the symbolist modern poetry, Larkin's early poetry is also often marked by symbolism. In 'The North Ship' the journey image is extended with the use of the symbol of ship. The poet sees three ships sailing. The first two ships sail towards the west and the east respectively. Both face obstacles but both manage to survive. Both symbolize life with its challenges. The third ship which sails northwards, succumbs to 'an unforgiving sea /under the fire spilling star/

and it was rigged for a long journey'. (*The N. S.* 44) The ship's 'long journey' symbolizes death.

The poems 'Conscript' (*CP* 262) and 'Ultimatum' (*CP* 243) are symbolic. 'Conscript' symbolically brings out man fighting and getting defeated against his own ego; indulging in conflict even with others because of ego:

The ego's country he inherited  
From those who tended it like farmers  
-----  
But one spring day his land was violated;  
A bunch of horsemen curtly asked his name,  
Their leader in a different dialect stated .  
A war was on for which he was to blame.

(*CP* 262)

Symbols like country, housemen and leader make the poem obscure. One of the earliest poems, written in 1944, titled as 'songs' (*CP* 303) describes the fear of death symbolically:

My sleep is made cold  
By a recurrent dream  
Where all things seem  
Sickeningly to poise  
On emptiness, on stars  
Drifting under the world.

(*CP* 303)

In 'Portrait' (*CP* 309) man's limitedness against the power of nature and destiny is brought out with the help of symbols like candle and its flame and winds:

Her hands devote themselves  
To sheltering a flame;  
Winds are her enemies  
And everything that strives  
To bring her cold and darkness.

But wax and wick grow shoot;  
These she so dearly guards  
Despite her care dies out;  
Her hands are not strong enough  
Her hands will fall to her sides  
And no wind will trouble to break her grief.

(CP 309)

In early poetry (sometimes in the latter as well) Larkin often uses sun as a metaphor to give a new dimension to time. In the introduction to *The North Ship* Larkin writes: "In early 1946 I had some digs in which the bedroom faced east, so that the sun woke me inconveniently early. I used to read . . . ." (qtd. in Hassan 16) Salem Hassan relates this comment to the modernist Existentialism. To quote his own words:

It is as if the sun awakes him to the true nature of existence, a world which is a mere 'trick'. The moment one awakes is the time when all senses starts activity - it is the moment of discovery which Franz Kafka describes when he writes: 'It requires great presence of mind to find everything in the room in exactly the same place that one left it the evening before.

(Hassan 17)

Sun as a symbol is used in early poems like 'street lamps' 'Heaviest of flowers, the head', 'Past days of gales', 'Spring Warning' and 'May Weather'. The following lines are taken from 'Heaviest of flowers, the head':



Heaviest of flowers, the head  
Forever hangs above a stormless bed;  
Hands that the heart can govern  
Shall be at last by darker hands unwoven;  
Every exultant sense  
Unstrung to silence –  
The sun drift away.

(CP282)

Here the drifting of the sun not only indicates the night time; it symbolizes the decay of human relationships in the darkness that follows in the memory of the 'fallen apples'.

In 'May Weather' the sun, with its increasing light, establishes the 'May whether', i.e, summer:

A month ago in fields  
Rehearsals were begun;  
The stage that summer builds  
And confidently holds  
Was floodlit by the sun  
And habited by the men.

(CP261)

Here the 'floodlit' sun indicates the changing season.

#### **4. CAREFUL CRAFTSMANSHIP:**

Larkin, like modernists, remained careful about the language and technique of his poetry from the beginning of his literary career. His craftsmanship in his later, mature poetry will be discussed in succeeding chapters in the present study. At this point, it is worth observing that his early poetry, though a bundle of influences, also, like his mature one, shows glimpses

of his successful innovations in style. In the poem 'Schoolmaster' for instance, the first line has three complete sentences in it:

'He sighed with relief. He had got the job. He was safe'

(CP 246)

'All Catches Alight' – a poem with Yeatsian music has four rhythmic Stanzas. Each eight – line stanza follows the rhyme scheme a b a b a b cc (CP 272) 'This was your place of birth, this day time palace' (CP 265) has one line between two stanzas. 'The clouds cast moving shadows on the land.' The first stanza describes the present and the past; the second brings out apprehensions of future. The demarcating line seems to separate past and present from future apprehensions.

In many poems Larkin significantly uses present participle. Hassan observes: "Larkin makes extensive use of participles in his poetry." (Hassan 20) In 'Dawn' present participles like 'going' 'flowing' add to the suggestion of continuous flow of time in the poem. The infinitive 'to wake' also seems to hint at the infiniteness of time.

In 'One man walking a deserted platform' also, present participles are used. In a poem of six lines there are eight present participles – 'walking', 'running', 'driving', 'waiting', 'beating', 'trading', 'journeying' and 'riding'. These participles help in building up the meaning of the poem. To put in the words of Salem Hassan:

The events focus not on one continuous movement; the distinct situations suggested by these participles indicate the present moment in its time –

span stretching for an unlimited present into the past and into the future  
(Hassan 10)

Obscurity, though not a regular feature of Larkin's poetry, is noticeable in his early poetry. This relates him, indirectly also, to modernist poetry. 'The house on the edge of the serious word', for instance, with the use of metaphors leading to symbolic reading of the poem and figures of speech like transferred epithet and personification strike as obscure:

The house on the edge of the serious  
Was aware, was aware  
Of why; he came there,  
And the reticent load never told what  
When from the wet bracken it knew saw him pass through;  
And round the next corner the tree joked  
'He's coming be careful pretends its head to the dead.'

(CP 258)

Similarly, symbolism in the poem 'Conscript' makes it obscure:

The ego's country he inherited  
From those who tended it like farmers had  
-----  
A war was on for which he was to blame -----

(CP 262)

Such obscurity in Larkin's early poetry may be studied as relating the poet to the modernist poetry in general and to Eliot in particular.

## **2.10 OTHER INFLUENCES:**

Apart from modernist influences and some features of modernist poetry; several other influences also can be located in Larkin's early poetry. Along with Yeatsian romanticism, there seems to be an influence of Romantic poetry in

Larkin's early poems. Nature often is the subject of his poems. In poems like 'Summer Nocturne', 'Fragment from May' there is a description of spring with its freshness, brightness and colourfulness. The poems, at once, strike the readers as Romantic nature poems. However, Larkin's treatment of nature in these poems is often that of a modernist. Unlike Wordsworth Larkin often feels no solace, company or comfort in the midst of nature. In 'The moon is full tonight' the full moon, rather than comforting, 'burns the eyes'. (*The NS* 14) Sometimes, like 'The Preludes' of Eliot, Larkin records the dull, the dreary and the weary nature in his poems. In 'Dawn', for instance, there is a brief description of dawn. The loss of love and warmth of heart in modern man is revealed in the dawn which is 'cold':

To awake and hear a cock  
Out at the distance crying;  
To pull the curtain back and see the clouds flying –  
How strange it is  
For the heart to be loveless and as cold as these.

(*The NS* 15)

The description of winter in 'Winter Nocturne' recalls Gray's elegy on one hand and Eliot's description of the winter evening in 'The Preludes' on the other.

Marbled in grey, the dusk steals slowly;  
Crossing the dead, dull fields with footsteps cold,  
The rain drips-drearily, night's fingers spin  
A web of drifting mist o'er Wood and Wold,  
As quiet as death. The sky is silent too,  
Hard as granite and as fixed as fate  
The pale pond stands:

(CP 235)

Like Gray's elegy the winter evening slowly sets in with its dreariness and dullness and so falls the shadow of darkness. Both the poems describe churchyard symmetry. In Larkin's poem the dusk sets in with dreary footsteps 'Crossing the dead' as in Gray's elegy 'The curfew tolls the knell of the parting day' (l 1) As in Larkin's poem the fields are dull, the pond is pale and rain drips drearily, in Gray's elegy the weary ploughman proceeds on a weary path. Eliot too, records weary and isolated nature in 'The Preludes'. (Poem quoted in Ch. One)

Hardy's influence was yet to show itself in Larkin's poetry but Larkin's bent of mind, his reference to fate are evident in the early poems as well. In 'Winter Nocturne' he compares the stillness of the pale pond with fate. Another poem composed in 1939 also shows Larkin's interest in the role of fate in man's life:

So let me accept the rule and call  
Myself circumstances' tennis-ball.

(CP 232)

At the mature stages of this career, Larkin tends to be melancholic. Sadness, as will be discussed in the subsequent chapters, is one of his favorite moods. However, the early poetry often marks the negative imagery typical of the modernist poetry. In 'The hills in their recumbent postures', as in the above discussed poem, the imagery is negative:

The hills in their recumbent postures  
Look into the silent lake:  
The bare trees stare across the pastures,  
Waiting for the wind to wake.

(CP 234)

The lake is 'silent', still; there are trees but they are barren. It's a hilly area. There are pastures but there is no wind. Thus, the imagery is clearly negative.

### **2.11 LARKINESQUE ELEMENT:**

Larkin's early poetry which, as established in the present chapter, is mainly an outcome of several influences; at the same time it has, at some points, the seeds of being Larkinesque poems. From the beginning of his career for instance, he realizes time as 'echo of an axe in a wood'. (CP 295) Larkin's favourite themes of time and death do appear, at least apparently, if not with deep sadness which he associates with them, in early poetry as well. 'The North Ship' brings out the theme of death. Out of the three ships sailing in the sea the third ship which 'drove towards the north' becomes a prey to 'the proud unfruitful,' 'unforgiving sea/ Under a fire-spilling star' and sets out for a 'long journey' – the journey of death. (*The NS* 44)

In 'To write one song' Larkin realizes the necessity of the mood of sadness and closeness to the experience of death while writing a poem:

To Write one song, I said,  
As sad as the sad wind  
That walks around my bed,  
Having one simple fall  
As a candle-flame swells, and is thinned,  
As a curtain stirs by the wall  
- for this I must visit the dead.

(CP 292)

The poem 'One man walking a deserted platform' is on the theme of time. The poem suggests man's hopeless struggle against time and his imprisonment in it. The sound of the clock on the deserted platform suggests the interference of time in man's life, his mechanical daily journey and his inability to escape the imprisonment in time.

Humour, which is a frequently noticeable feature of Larkin's mature poetry, is found in his early poetry and his comments on poetry made at the early stage as well:

His great poems of the 1950s and 60s accommodate humour and sadness simultaneously. Here he's uncertain how to do that or whether it should be done at all: "Nothing like comedy / Can ever be admitted as poetry." But even at 18 he couldn't kill off an instinct to clown around. Irreverence breaks in with silly sign-offs ("This MS has been badly gnawed by Flemish rabbits," one poem ends), rude pastiches of classics ("I don't like March; / It's stiff like starch, / And the fucking snow / Doth blow, doth blow"), and obscene squibs:

Afetr a particular good game of ruggier  
A man called me a bugger

Merely because in a loose scrum  
I had my cock up this bum.

[www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/mar26/poetry.philiplarkin](http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/mar26/poetry.philiplarkin)

Poem XXXII in *The North Ship* seems to be the central statement of the volume. In the introduction to *The North Ship* Larkin says that he has included the poem as the core of the book. Larkin's critics consider it as a transition point in Larkin's development as it establishes what later becomes Larkinesque peculiarity. In the poem, while the beloved is 'brushing her hair', the speaker is waiting for

breakfast in a hotel. It is early morning. In the quietness of the dawn the speaker experiences 'my world back after a year', his creative impulse returning to him after a year. Now he must choose between the two – the beloved and the world of creativity. The poem appears to be quite mature:

Waiting for breakfast while she brushed her hair,  
I looked down at the empty hotel yard  
Once meant for coaches. Cobblestone were wet,  
But sent no light back to the loaded sky,  
Sunk as it was with mist down to the roofs.  
Drainpipes and fire – escape climbed up  
Past rooms still burning their electric light;  
I thought: featureless morning, featureless night.

(*The N.S* 48)

These lines have concrete images. They bring out, to put in the words of Salem Hassan:

an assumed movement of verse, a mastery of the eight - line stanza, a consistent picture of everyday reality, urban yet simple: - 'coaches' 'drainpipes', 'fire-escape' and 'electric light; a remarkable handling of concrete details of the land found in late poetry. Love is viewed within the context of real time and real place. There is a genuine statement rather than romance: 'Towards your grace / My promises meet....'

(Hassan 21)

In short, in the first phase of his career as a literary artist Larkin, in this growing stage, resembles many poets. He is yet to acquire an individual unique poetic voice. The influence of Yeats, Auden, Eliot etc. takes him close to modernist poetry and thereby, to Modernism. The chapter has attempted to analyse the early poems of Larkin in the light of these and other influences. More



than that, it has pointed out some prominent features of modernist poetry, like use of allusions, imagism, symbolism and obscurity as reflected in Larkin's early poems. The chapter has also focused on Larkin's individual poetic voice, though in infancy at this stage, bearing its marks in the midst of all influences.

## **CHAPTER - 3**

### **LARKIN AND THE MOVEMENT: A GROUP IDENTITY**

Chapter two assessed the early poetry of Larkin written under a bundle of influences, mainly that of the modernist poetry and some modernist poets like Yeats. A very important phase of Larkin's literary career was his association with an informal group of contemporary writers known as the Movement. The Movement in general, seems to have played an important and significant role in leading English poetry from Modernism to Postmodernism. The present chapter attempts to study the origin and development of the Movement and its major features with Larkin as the central figure of the group; thus, the chapter will also consider Larkin as a Movement poet and his role as a Movement poet as significant with reference to the subject of the present research.

Group identity of literary artists is not a new phenomenon in the history of English literature. Writers of the 1950s are given a group identity – though for a short period of time - as the Movement writers. The University Wits in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Pre - Raphaelites in the 19<sup>th</sup> century etc. were also literary groups but there was something peculiar, new and unprecedented about the Movement. It connoted the socio - cultural as well as literary identity of the group. Socio - cultural group identity, not necessarily of literary artists, was soon to become a prominent feature of postmodern mass society with plurality of culture.

### 3.1 THE DEBATE OVER THE EXISTENCE OF THE GROUP:

The Movement, as such, was a 'loosely connected group' (King 3) with no official foundation. This group identity of the writers of the 1950s, i.e, Larkin and his contemporaries, has been widely debated. It has often been challenged not only by critics but also by writers themselves. Thus, the readers are left to wonder and decide whether the writers really constituted a group, whether there were common objectives and a common platform for the writers.

Some commentators have dismissed the Movement as a mere journalistic approbation. Anthony Thwaite calls the Movement 'a complex phenomenon' and raises a question – "Was it a true literary beginning in the 1950s or an invocation by journalists?" (Thwaite, *Poetry* 40) Howard Sergeant calls the Movement an 'extremely well-mannered, not to say well-established, publicity campaign.' (qtd. in Morrison 3) Christopher Logue also dismissed it as a conspiracy by which fame-seeking poets 'presented themselves by means of a group name.' (qtd. in Morrison 3)

The Movement poets themselves often tended to be apprehensive about the identity of their disposition as a group. They were probably not ready to reduce their individuality to a common identity. Thus, many of them rejected their group identity in favour of a recognition as individual literary artists. Larkin, for instance, found 'no sense at all' (In Hamilton, 'Four Conversations' 69) in belonging to a movement. In an essay written in 1950 Kingsley Amis referred to the Movement as the 'phantom movement.' (qtd. in Morrison 4) Playing ignorance about the existence of the Movement and his association with it Thom

Gunn said: "I found I was in before I knew it existed and I have a certain suspicion that it does not exist." (Gunn 661) D.J. Enright, another eminent Movement poet, also shared the same view when he said: "I don't think there was a movement back to those days, or, if there was, I don't know about it." (qtd. In Morrison 4)

In spite of the attempts to degrade the Movement and to challenge its existence, the present research, with the help of mainly Blake Morrison's view, will show that the Movement identity of the poets is not as arbitrary as it is often thought to be. In his book *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s* Blake Morrison asserts not only that the Movement existed but that it was a literary group of considerable importance.

In spite of his reluctance to admit a 'dilution' (CP 117) of individual identity by being considered as one among the group, Larkin too, discernibly exhibits the group identity, though for a limited period of time. P.R. King admits the existence of the Movement but refuses to associate Larkin with it. To quote his own words:

But it would be a mistake to see Larkin as one of those. Although he had sympathy with many of the attitudes to poetry represented by the Movement, his work is generally more robust and wider - ranging from most of the poetry of *New Lines*.

(King, P. 4)

Ian Hamilton admits the vastness of Larkin's genius along with the Movement sensibility when he writes:

At one level it could be said that Philip Larkin's poems provide a precise model for what the Movement was supposed to be looking. But having noted his lucidity. . . and other such typical attributes, one would still be

left with the different and deeper task of describing the quality of his peculiar genius.

(qtd. in Thwaite, *Poetry* 40)

It is true that the Movement was only a temporary phase for the writers including Larkin. After 1956, though the writers continued to write, they could no longer be grouped as Movement writers. It is also true that Larkin's talent cannot be restricted to a group identity only. He always had much more to say than the Movement in general yet Larkin's association with the Movement cannot be denied. Some of his poems do represent the traits of the Movement. Some poems in *The North Ship* and many in *The Less Deceived* as well as *The Whitsun Weddings* can be read as typical Movement poems. For some time, at least, the group identity was Larkin's own identity as well. To refer to the introduction published online by Academy of American Poets:

With his second volume of poetry *The Less Deceived* (1955) Larkin became the preeminent poet of his generation and a leading voice of what came to be called the Movement...

([www.todayinliterature.com/biography/philip.larkin.asp-](http://www.todayinliterature.com/biography/philip.larkin.asp-))

*Poetry of the 1950s* edited by D.J. Enright (1956) and *New Lines* edited by Robert Conquest (1960) gave a clear picture of the Movement and of the writers sharing the Movement sensibility. These writers were Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Donald Davie, D.J. Enright, Robert Conquest, Elizabeth Jennings, John Halloway and Thom Gunn.

### **3.2 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT:**

The ground for the Movement was prepared in Oxford. The Movement took its first breath in Oxford and then in Cambridge in the 1940s when the young

writers came close to one another. They were not mature scholars with serious concern about life. They were all undergraduate students studying at Oxford or Cambridge. Their interaction with one another influenced their writing, at least, in the beginning of their career as literary artists. A number of key friendships were made among these undergraduate students. The friendship between Larkin and Amis, bearing each other's influence, was perhaps the most significant one. Both shared a sense of humour. At one place Larkin recalls how Amis' imitations made him 'incapable with laughter.' In Larkin's first novel *Jill* the protagonist Jill meets Patsy who "could make Jill sick with laughing. She could imitate almost anybody. Together they had formed an alliance against the rest of the world." (qtd. in Morrison 11) Larkin and Amis also shared an interest in Jazz. In his introduction to *Jill* Larkin says: "I suppose we devoted to some hundred records that early anatomizing passion, normally reserved for the more established arts." (qtd. in Morrison 11) (Larkin in a letter to O'Connor 2 April 1958) In Amis's *Lucky Jim*, written and set in the early 1950s, Amis' projection of Jim is much influenced by his association with Larkin. There are:

comparisons to be drawn between Dixon's attitudes, and those expressed in the poetry of Philip Larkin. Larkin and Amis were friends at university, and their voluminous correspondence reveals their shared love for Jazz and beer, and their instinctive suspicion of 'high culture', as well as the flashes of stylistic brilliance which would emerge more fully in their writing (www.britishfiction.suite101.com/article.cfm/lucky\_jim\_by\_Kingsley\_amis-35k-)

Two other contemporaries, John Wain and Montgomery, also absorbed the influences of Larkin and Amis and influenced them in their turn.

The Movement writers found a common platform to express themselves. *Mandrake*, an Oxford based magazine edited by Wain and Boyars, brought out poems by the Movement writers. The third issue of *Mandrake* published Larkin's 'Plymouth'. It looked forward to anti modernist poetry – one of the most significant bindings of the Movement writers. Towards the end of the poem the poet betrays the romantic influence of Dylan Thomas and of Yeats. He looks forward to poetry, free from modernist influences:

A box of teak, a box of sandalwood,  
A brass-tinged spyglass in a case,  
A coin, lead-thin with many polishings,  
Last kingdom of a gold forgotten face,  
These lie about the room and daily shine  
When new-built ships set out towards the sun.

If they had any roughness, any flow;  
An unfamiliar scent, all this has gone;  
They are no more than ornaments, or eyes,  
No longer knowing what they looked upon,  
Turned sightless rivers of Eden, rivers of blood  
Once blinded them, and were not understood.

The hands that chose them vast upon a stick,  
Let my hands find such symbols, that can be  
Unnoticed in the casual light of day,  
Lying in wait for half a century  
To split chance lives across, that had not dreamed  
Such coasts had echoed, or such sea birds screamed.

(CP307)

The fourth issue of *Mandrake* announced the aim of the periodical 'to oppose sham and cant....' (Morrison 20) in poetry.

In 1949 Amis, along with James Machie edited *Oxford Poetry* which promoted the Movement poetry.

The Movement came into limelight through media as well. John Lehman edited a series of radio broadcasts under the title "New Soundings" on the BBC radio between March 1952 and 1953. Poems by several new writers like Davie, Gunn, Halloway, Jennings and Wain reached the masses through this programme. It was an unusual phenomenon. Never before, was media used in this manner. Newspapers and periodicals had promoted many writers in the past. It was for the first time that the radio media gave a platform to contemporary poetry. After Lehman's "New Soundings", the BBC Radio broadcasted a similar programme called "First Reading" prepared by a leading Movement writer, John Wain. The programme, as Morrison records: "has been seen as a crucial break through for the Movement writers." (Morrison 42) Larkin also remarked that "...the Movement, if you want to call it that, really began when John Wain succeeded John Lehman on that BBC programme." (qtd. in Morrison 42-43) John Wain also noted that "'First Reading' was a chance to move a few of the established reputations gently to one side and allow new people their turn...." (qtd. in Morrison 43)

Anthony Hartley's reviews of the Movement poetry also popularized the Movement among the reading public. Two of these reviews – "Critics Between the Lines" and "Poets of the Fifties" – are of prime importance.



With all this, by 1950 the Oxford friendships of the early 40s had flourished as mature Movement poetry denoting the socio - cultural and literary group identity of the writers.

In the postwar period, after England became a welfare state, the social revolution changed the image of a poet. The Movement writers constituted a distinct social image. To quote Halloway:

The poetry of the 1930s was upper class. The chief poets learnt at public schools. The recent social revolution, gentle though real, in England has changed this. The typical Movement writer's childhood background appears to be lower middle class and suburban.

(Halloway 593)

On the basis of the social background and also the literary writings of the Movement writers, critics identified a new postwar type. Speakers of Larkin's 'Church Going' and Amis' *Lucky Jim* are such postwar types. In *Lucky Jim* Amis presents the protagonist Jim Dixon as an educated, working class, provincial hero. He is a lecturer in history but gets frustrated with the banality of his job. He thinks too much. He is impatient with other characters like Bertrand. He gets into a hopeless and unwanted relationship with his boss' daughter. In Larkin's 'Church Going' also the speaker is a thinking being who enters the church only after making sure that 'nothing is going on.' (CP 97) Martin Green defines this type as the "decent man – as opposed to the gentleman a grammar school teacher with leather-patched shoes." (qtd. in Morrison 53) To put in the words of Blake Morrison:

By the middle of the 1950s the image of the typical Movement writer as a provincial, lower middle - class, scholarship – winning, Oxbridge educated university teacher was firmly established...

(Morrison 56)

The Movement writers tended to accept this image. Amis, Davie and Halloway shared a lower middle - class social background. Larkin and Wain had several things in common between them. Both came from industrial towns in the north and from well-placed middle-class families; both came to Oxford, not as scholarship - boys; both failed the army medical test so both were spared from giving services in the English army during the Second World War. Amis, Davie and Enright came from a non - conformist background. Larkin, Davie, Enright, Wain, Halloway and Jennings studied in local grammar schools. Davie, Enright and Halloway went to the university after winning a scholarship.

Another common feature of the group was age. The writers belonged, more or less, to the same age group. The eldest of the group, Robert Conquest was born in 1917, the youngest, Thom Gunn, in 1929. Larkin, Amis and Davie were born in 1922. Thus, the Movement writers shared not only a social background but also similar experiences due to class and age group. These writers represented a spirit of change in the postwar British society. Commenting on the sociological importance of the Movement, Davie, in a letter to O'Connor, written on 31 December, 1957, remarked:

The Movement's sociological importance is very great and it consists in this – that for the first time a challenge is thrown down, not by individuals like Lawrence, Arnold, Bennet, Dylan Thomas, but by a more or less coherent group, to the monopoly of British culture sustained for

generations by the London bourgeois.

(qtd. in Morrison 58)

Thus, the Movement, as such, never had any official ground yet it was a well – formed group on socio – cultural as well as literary grounds.

### **3.3 CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOVEMENT LITERATURE:**

The following are a few major characteristics of the Movement literature.

Some of them appear to bear the mark of Postmodernism.

#### **1. PROVINCIALISM:**

In his book, *Rule and Energy*, John Press defines a provincial poet. According to him the term ‘provincial’ describes a poet as one:

. . . who is primarily concerned with the values of his own cultural society, and who is largely indifferent to what lies beyond the world that he knows first hand. Thus, he cares very little for the poetry and the civilization of the other ages and other countries. . . .

(qtd. in Day, R. 85)

One of the main features of the Movement literature is its provincialism, Englishness. The postwar socio – cultural, political and economic climate in England fostered a prejudice for anything foreign. The Movement writers seemed to consider ‘foreign’ as ‘absurd’. When asked in an interview if he liked foreign poetry, Larkin strongly replied: ‘Foreign poetry? No.’ (In Hamilton, ‘Four Conversations’ 77) In his poem ‘Like the train’s beat’ (*CP* 286) Larkin focuses on the lack of appeal and meaninglessness of the Polish girl’s language to him.

The Movement was preoccupied with postwar, postindustrial England - its landscapes, government, society and culture. To quote Robert Conquest: “The

British culture is part of our experience and for that no one else's experience, howsoever desirable, can be a substitute." (Conquest 32)

England's decline as a world power after the World Wars and the government's encouragement for everything 'at home' gradually led to insularity. Writing for one of his novels Amis remarked: "In *Like It Here* people thought I was attacking Europe. But I was attacking people who like it." (qtd. in Morrison 50)

Artistic as well as social prejudice of the Movement writers is noticeable in the following comment by Amis: "Nobody wants, anymore, poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries of mythology or foreign cities." (qtd. in Morrison 61) Thus, the Movement is essentially English in spirit as well as in subject and background. Many writers like Larkin and Wain came from provincial background and shared their experiences through their writings.

The Movement's provincialism does not glamorize provinces. In fact, there is nothing fascinating about the provincial or the suburban towns. In 'I Remember, I Remember' of Larkin, for instance, the speaker has to travel by 'a different line' (CP 82) to pass through his home - town. He has to recollect that 'I was born here'; (CP 82) his childhood, 'a forgotten boredom' (CP 33) was passed in that town. The speaker describes his dull and uneventful childhood spent, or, rather, 'unspent' (CP 81) in the provincial town, Coventry in the poem:

Our garden, first: where I did not invent  
Blinding theologies of flowers and fruits,  
And wasn't spoken to by an old hat;  
And here we have that splendid family

I never ran to when I got depressed,

The boys all biceps and the girls all chest,  
Their comic ford, their farm where I could be  
Really myself. I'll show you, come to that;  
The bracken where I never trembling sat,

Determined to go through with it; where she  
Lay back, and 'all became a burning mist'.  
And in those offices my doggerel  
Was not set up in blunt ten-point,  
Nor read by a distinguished cousin of the mayor ,....

(CP 81-82)

Finally, the speaker concludes by noting the uneventfulness of the place. 'Nothing, like something happens anywhere', he says at the end of the poem. Very often in the Movement texts the provinces are ugly and repulsive. In 'An English Reverent' Davie writes:

You that went north for geysers or for grouse,  
While Pullman sleepers lulled your sleeping head,  
You never saw my mutilated house  
Flame in the north by Sheffield as you fled.

(qtd. in Morrison 62)

Commenting on provincialism in Larkin's poetry Robert Conquest writes:

This insularity is one of the strengths of Larkin's poetry, signifying to resolve to base himself firmly upon the experience, the language, the culture which have formed him, in which he is rooted.

(Conquest 32)

Considering provincialism in Larkin's poetry, it can safely be maintained that his poetry has traits of the Movement as well as of Postmodernism. In his book

*Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* Donald Davie shows an interest in Larkin as a representative figure in postwar English poetry. He recognized him as a poet of 'wholly urbanized and industrialized society.' (Davie 71) Larkin's landscapes are essentially post-war postindustrial landscapes. Bruce Martin writes:

For one thing the Larkin world is a recognizably postwar British world. Larkin chooses to specify a demonstrably British and demonstrably contemporary background for his poems. His settings are usually those of large town or city, heavily trafficked streets, urban parks filled with mothers and playing children, the hospital in the midst of a business district making much of the British suburbia.

(Martin B 31-32)

Roger Day reiterates the same thing when he says:

Many of Larkin's poems have an urban setting. Larkin writes about places and situations which are familiar to most people.... He writes of English towns, high-street stores and sights familiar to all.

(Day, R. 11)

Larkin is completely at home in urban setting. It has produced him and he celebrates it. Urbanization and industrial landscapes are found in Modernist poetry also. Eliot's 'The Preludes', *The Waste Land*, for instance, describe urban landscapes and the industrial, the advanced world. What makes Larkin's depiction different from that of his predecessors and much like his successors is that he does not sadly complain about or lament over the loss of the rural world of 'unfenced existence'. (CP 137)

In one of Larkin's major poems 'The Whitsun Weddings' the speaker, during his journey to London, records some pictures as the train passes by different sights:

We ran  
Behind the backs of houses, crossed street  
Of blinding wind screens ,....

(CP 114)

'Blinding wind screens' indicates the sound - proof, locked doors and windows of offices. The pictures in the poem describe the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century England. The series of pictures continues:

A hothouse flashed uniquely; hedges dipped  
And rose: and now and then a smell of grass  
Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth.

(CP 114)

There is a mixing, here, of the rural and the urban images. It seems that the rural world is struggling to preserve itself; the smell of grass struggles to 'displace the reek of buttoned carriage - cloth' but succeeds only 'now and then'. The imagery refers to the fading out of the rural world. The tone of the poem, however, seems neutral, not condemnatory and only occasionally nostalgic.

At the very outset, the poem 'Here' makes it clear that the landscape belongs to the 'rich industrial shadows'. (CP 136) What the poet describes about the industrial world is a shadow, but a rich shadow. The man – made world has a mark of its own and the speaker doesn't appear to be dissatisfied with this world.

'Here' describes an urban landscape. The urban town is sandwiched between two non - urban settings. The imagery seems to develop out of a more or less, unbiased and balanced mind.

An industrial town is described in the poem. The first stanza gives out its surprises:

... fields, ...  
...skies and scarecrows',  
haystacks hares and pheasants,  
And the widening river's slow presence,  
The piled gold clouds the shining gull-marked mud.

(CP 136)

These are the remains of the rural world which have become surprises in an industrial town. There are fields but 'too thistled and thin to be called meadows'. There is a river but it has only a 'slow presence'. There is mud but it is 'gull - marked'. The second stanza describes the actual town:

Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster  
Beside grain scattered streets barge crowded - water....

(CP 136)

The 'unfenced existence of the rural world towards which the speaker seems to be desiring to move is unattainable, 'out of reach'. However, the speaker, rather than lamenting its unattainability, seems to accept and even, at times, celebrates the reality in 'Here'.

Apart from landscapes Larkin describes the people living in provincial towns. Having described the urban landscape in the first and the second stanzas in 'Here', the speaker, then, describes the people living in the town and their life style. They are 'residents from raw estates'. (CP 136) In this industrial town there doesn't seem to be an isolated, individualistic existence. Such 'unfenced existence / Facing the sun' is 'unattainable', 'out of reach'. (CP 137) The people are 'a cut - price crowd'. The phrase implies the continuity of social classes. The crowd is dependent on technology - 'Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers.'



(CP 136) It is a world which hardly spares time for leisure, a world in which man must work monotonously – work like a ‘toad’ for ‘six days of the week...out of proportion’. (CP 89)

In ‘Aubade’ also the speaker who gets drunk at night works ‘all day’. (CP 208) Every morning:

...telephones crouch, getting ready to ring  
In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring  
Intricate rented world begins to rouse....  
Work has to be done.

(CP 209)

The postindustrial world of ‘Here’ can be, in a small way, described as, to use Frederic Jameson’s explanation of Postmodernism, late phase of capitalism. (The title of Jameson’s book – *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*) After the Second World War, England became a welfare state but the ‘cut - price crowd’ of the urban, industrial set-up is still confined to ‘raw estates’ and it pushes through ‘plate - glass wing doors’ to buy ‘Cheap suits, red kitchen – ware, sharp shoes and lollies....’ (CP 136) However, as Jameson says, most of the times Postmodernism is innocent of any devious satirical impulse and is devoid of such historical memory as must generate bitterness. (Jameson 373-383) There is no cynicism or bitter satire in the poem against the bourgeois culture. The Victorian and even the modernist tendency of criticizing the bourgeois culture and generating a painful sympathy for the working class presented as down trodden, exploited, poor, and unprivileged is generally not to be found in Postmodernism. In ‘Here’ and even in ‘The Whitsun Weddings’, with

all awareness and understanding of class, there doesn't seem to be the strong Marxist provocation with contraries like the exploiters and the exploited. Unlike characters in Dickens' novels, presented as pathetic victims of industrialization, the people in the postindustrial, postwar world of Larkin (living in provincial towns) are busy as in 'Here', happy even in 'jewellery substitutes' and 'nylon gloves' (CP 115) as in 'The Whitsun Weddings'. They are common figures like:

The fathers with broad belts under their suits  
And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;  
An uncle shouting smut;....

(CP 115)

who are overwhelmed by their success (which the speaker finds purely 'farical') in getting their children married. Further, the speaker says that 'The women shared the success like a happy funeral'. (CP 115) Here the use of the phrase 'happy funeral' balances the feelings of joy and sadness, achievement or success and loss.

Here, Larkin differs a bit from his Movement contemporaries in his attitude to bourgeois culture, especially in his poetry. Although, as Morrison points out, the Movement writers have 'tried to discourage critics from thinking of their work as class - conscious and responsive to social change', (Morrison 68/) the Movement texts often appear critical of the South, of the upper middle class. To quote Morrison: "The Movement is provincial not because it idealizes the North but because it resents the South, London especially" (Morrison 62)

It should, however, be noted that this feature seems more evident in novels than in poetry. In Amis' first novel *Lucky Jim* the protagonist Dixon and

other students are prejudiced against the teacher's son Bertrand because he has not only a French name but also a flat in London. London is responsible for his overdressing and for his suggestion that he has come home to find out whether "the touch of culture is still in a state of combustion in the provinces." (qtd. in Morrison 63)

In spite of the criticism of the Movement writers of London and of the London types, 'the protagonists of the Movement texts often tend to measure their success 'in terms of gradation to the capital.' (Morrison 64) Many Movement texts like 'The Whitsun Weddings', *Lucky Jim*, and *Hurry On Down* depict a movement towards and into London, not away from it. In 'The Whitsun Weddings' the speaker catches the train to London and gets off the train at the final destination with the newly wedded couples from the provinces. He celebrates the flourishing of the relationship of those newly wedded couples in London when he says:

I thought of London spread out in the sun,  
Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat;

(CP116)

Upward social mobility is a typical theme of the Movement texts. It often determines the narrative structure in the Movement novels. The plots of Larkin's *Jill*, Amis' *Lucky Jim* and Wain's *Hurry On Down* are concerned with the struggle of a male protagonist to adjust to the values of another class. In each novel the protagonist gets exposed to the class, higher than his. There he meets an attractive woman, desires her but is initially prevented from having her. At a social gathering, he plainly declares his feelings in a state of drunkenness. The

action reaches a climax where the hero finally attains the woman as in *Lucky Jim* or withdraws, after a brief encounter, as in *Jill*. At the end, the successful protagonists get better jobs with good prospects and the unsuccessful ones revert to their original social status.

Larkin is little different here in the sense that there doesn't seem to be a bitter resentment or prejudice towards the South in most part of his poetry. In the introduction to *Jill* he says:

In 1940 our impulse was still to minimize social differences rather than to encourage them. My hero's background, though an integral part of the story, was not what the story was all about.

(qtd. in Morrison 68)

Apart from a few exceptions like 'Money', in which the poet describes a provincial town seen through 'long French windows' (*CP* 198) and feels sad about what he sees, there seems to be, generally speaking, little bitterness, cynicism or negativism towards the South in his poetry.

## **2. ANTI MODERNISM:**

As discussed in the first, introductory chapter of the present study, Postmodernism grows from Modernism - rejecting as well as continuing or improving upon it. In this sense the Movement writers' rejection of Modernism can be analysed as a Postmodern feature too. All the Movement writers agreed on the rejection and condemnation of Modernism and of the modernist poetry of the 30s, and of the 40s in general and poetry of Eliot and Pound in particular. They considered poets of the 1930s as remote historical figures and of the 1940s, as those without a poetic taste.

The anthology of the Movement poetry *New Lines*, edited by Robert Conquest (1956), as Rosenthal says: 'was offered to counter the poetics of modernism.' (Rosenthal 1005)

At an initial stage of his career, Larkin, as discussed at length in the previous chapter, was influenced by modernist poets like Yeats, Auden and Dylan Thomas. But giving up the early influences he finally chose Hardy as his source of inspiration. Appreciating Hardy's poetry in *The Listener*, Larkin wrote:

What I like about him is his temperament and the way he sees life. He is not a transcendental writer; he is not a Yeats, not an Eliot; his subjects are the men, the life of men, time and the passing of time, love and the failing of love.

(*The Listener* 11)

The Movement writers rejected the grand themes of modernist poetry. They were not concerned with remote life of trenches; nor were they preoccupied with meditating over the fate of civilization. They were concerned with day – to – day experiences like working in an office, journeying by a train, visiting college years after graduating and playing cards. There are very few works like 'A Song about Major Eatherley' directly concerned with war. Voicing the prejudice of the Movement writers against modernist poetry, in the preface to his contribution in *Poets of the 1950s*, Amis writes:

Nobody wants any more poems on the greater themes for a few years, but at the same time, nobody wants any more poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries or mythology or foreign cities or other poems. At least, I hope nobody wants them.

(qtd. in Hassan 157)

Commenting on the poetry of Larkin in this context Roger Day writes:  
"Larkin writes about places and situations which are familiar to most people."  
(Day, R. 11)

Modern poetry, especially that of Eliot and Yeats, was full of allusions from classical culture, mythology, *Bible* etc. An Eliot poem cannot be understood without understanding these allusions. 'Journey of the Magi' for instance, is based on the Christian myth of the three wise men going to Bethlehem, guided by a star to see the Masiha –Christ. Many of Eliot's poems begin with epigrams. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', for instance, begins with an epigram taken from Dante's *Inferno*:

If I thought my answer were to one who never could return to the world,  
this flame would shake no more, but since none ever did return alive from  
this depth, if what I hear be true, without fear of infancy I answer thee.

(Trans. Jain 43-44)

Poems like *The Waste Land*, *Ash Wednesday*, 'Byzantium' are full of allusions which often make poems obscure. Revolting against modernist poetry Larkin remarked:

What I do feel a bit rebellious about is that poetry seems to have got into the hands of critical industry, which is concerned with culture in abstract and this I do rather lay at the door of Eliot and Pound...to me...the whole of classical mythology means very little, and I think that using them today not only fills poem full of dead spots but dodges the writer's duty to be original.

(RW)

Movement poetry is quite free from scholarly, metaphysical, Biblical or classical allusions. Occasional allusions are used in such a way that inferring, at

least, the literal meaning of a poem is not hindered even without understanding them. Understanding of such allusions only adds to the interpretation of a poem; at the same time, it is not obligatory for the readers to understand the allusions to enjoy a Movement poem. Larkin's 'MCMIXIV' is a good example of the Movement poetry with allusions which, even though not understood, neither obstruct the meaning nor lessen the charm of the poem:

Those long uneven lines  
Standing as patiently  
As if they were stretched outside  
The Oval or Villa Park,  
The crowns of hats, the sun  
On moustached archaic faces  
Grinning as if it were all  
An August Bank Holiday lark;

And the shut shops, the bleached  
Established names on the sunblinds,  
The farthings and sovereigns,  
And dark-clothed children at play  
Called after Kings and Queens  
The tin advertisements  
For cocoa and twist, and the pubs  
Wide open all day;

And the countryside not caring;  
The place names all hazed over  
With flowering grasses, and fields  
Shadowing Domesday lines  
Under what's restless silence;

The differently - dressed servants  
With tiny rooms in huge houses;  
The dust behind limousines;

Never such innocence, never before or since,  
As changed itself to past  
Without a word – the men  
Leaving the gardens tidy,  
The thousands of marriages  
Lasting a little while longer:  
Never such innocence again

(CP 127-128)

The poem distinguishes between life in England before 1914 and after it. The year 1914 is seen as a turning point. The Movement poets considered the year 1914 as a striking point for modernist poetry. Thus, 1914 is a turning point in literary as well as social history of England. With this understanding, yearning for stability in the poem – ‘established names’, ‘tidy gardens’– is more than nostalgia for a secure social order. It is nostalgia for ‘established’, ‘tidy’ forms of the pre - modernist English poetry as well. The long, unseen lines’ are not just those of enlisting soldiers; they are ‘long, unseen lines’ of Eliot’s and Pound’s poems. Readers familiar with the Movement background, its rejection of modernist poetry can follow the allusions. However, with no familiarity with the Movement background a common reader can still enjoy the poem.

### **3. ANTI ROMANTICISM:**

The typical Movement poetry is anti – romantic. The poets consciously attacked Romanticism and the Romantics. Recalling his Oxford days Amis wrote:



“We paid special attention to the Romantics. Each was brought up and dismissed in two lines in “Revaluation”.(Amis 6)

As Blake Morrison points out, the term ‘Romantic’ was used very liberally by the Movement writers. To continue in his own words:

At times it was applied dismissively, to some postures and attitudes – among them, idealism, rebelliousness, nature – worship and mysticism – which the group detected in life as well as in literature. At other times, the term was used in a literary – historical sense, having reference to the Romantic period of the latter eighteenth century and after.

(Morrison 154)

In their too conscious efforts to reject Romanticism and romantic poetry, Larkin and Amis frequently show influence of the Romantics in their early poems in *The North Ship and Bright November*, though it may be there to reject it. Both, for instance, tend to address and personify heart like romantics but unlike romantic poetry, in their poems heart is ‘loveless’, ‘cold’:

To wake and hear a cock  
Out of the distance crying  
To pull the curtain back  
And see the birds flying-  
How strange it is  
For the heart to be loveless and as cold as these.

(*The N.S* 15)

The heart in its own endless silence kneeling....

(*The N.S* 21)

If hands could free you heart,  
Where would you fly?

(*The N.S* 36)

Heart's injury will not forget us so  
Heart's wealth slide off to zero-

(qtd. in Morrison 29)

The personifying of heart can be related to Yeats.

Poem XVI in *The North Ship* reminds us of the soundless river 'Which ran / Through caverns measureless of man' in Coleridge's *Kublakhan*:

And I am sick for want of sleep;  
So sick that I can half – believe  
The soundless river passing from the cave  
Is neither strong nor deep;

(*The N.S* 18)

There is, again, a clear rejection of romanticism in the following poem in *The North Ship*:

The moon is calm tonight  
And burns the eyes.  
It is so definite and bright,  
What if it has drawn up  
All quietness and certitude of worth  
Wherewith to fill its cup,  
Or mint a second moon a paradise? –  
For they are gone from earth.

(*The N.S* 14.)

In poem XVII the poet says:

There have been too much moonlight and self-pity,  
Let us have done with it.

(*The N.S.* 29)

The affinity with the Romantics, even though to reject them, found in the early poetry of Larkin and Amis, is no longer strongly evident in their mature verse. As against Wordsworth's romanticizing of childhood, ('The child is the father of the man') Larkin recalls his childhood as a 'forgotten boredom'. (CP 33) Larkin once said somewhere that deprivation was to him as daffodils were to Wordsworth. In 'I Remember, I Remember' the speaker recalls his uneventful life spent in his native town and says: 'Nothing like something happens anywhere.' (CP 82)

Another poem 'Going' describes an evening:

There is an evening coming in  
Across the fields; one never seen before,  
That lights no lamps.

Silken it seems at a distance, yet  
When it is drawn up over the knees and breast  
It brings no comfort.

Where has the tree gone, that locked  
Earth to the sky? What is under my hands,  
That it cannot feel?

What leads my hands down?

(CP 3)

It seems the evening 'never seen before' is the expression of a romantic poet who is now about to describe the beauty of that evening, the beauty of nature. But very soon the self – deprived poet's anti – romantic stand is revealed when the rare evening is further described as one that 'lights no lamps.' (CP 4) The darkness seems 'silken' only 'at a distance'; the evening, as it approaches, brings

no comfort'. The poem 'Absences' (CP 49) also describes nature anti – romantically:

Rain patters on a sea that tilts and sighs.  
Fast-running floors, collapsing into hollows,  
Tower suddenly, spray-haired. Contrariwise,  
A wave drops like a wall, another follows,  
Wilting and scrambling, timelessly at play  
Where there are no ships and no shadows.

Above the sea, the yet more shoreless day,  
Riddled by wind, trails lit-up galleries;  
They shift to giant ribbing, sift away;

Such attics cleared of me! Such absences!

(CP 49)

Like a Shelley poem, the poem does bring out the force and power of nature. The first six lines of the poem describe the sea, full of tide, receiving the rainfall. The next three lines mention the human world with the phrase, 'lit - up galleries' as against nature. It is the last line that strikes the climax where the poet sadly brings out the nothingness of man against nature. The title 'Absences' is well justified in the last line which also takes away romantic implications of the description.

Larkin takes a realistic stand. He claims and is often claimed by the critics to be a realistic writer:

A major poet of the post – World War II period, Larkin attempted to capture ordinary experience in realistic and rational terms. Larkin's poetry,

both, avoids romanticizing experience and moves away from the abstract, experimental language of Eliot and the modernists.

[www.Enotes.com/poetry\\_criticism/larkin\\_philip\\_arthur](http://www.Enotes.com/poetry_criticism/larkin_philip_arthur)

Many Movement poets were cynical of nature poetry. Amis' 'Here is Where' begins with a parody of how a nature poem begins:

Here, where the rugged water  
Is twilled and spun over  
Pebbles backed like beetles....

(qtd. in Morrison 166)

Soon the poet says that such descriptions, now – a - days are there only to rouse sentimentalities of people living in towns:

The country, to townies  
Is hardly more than nice,  
A window –box, pretty  
Only when the afternoon is empty.

(qtd. in Morrison 166)

Amis' 'Here is Where', Davie's 'Oak Openings', Enright's 'Nature poetry' and 'Changing the Subject', Conquest's 'Antheor – all these poems 'bring out the difficulty of writing a nature poem.' (Morrison 67) It must, however, be noted that in the earliest phase of his career, Larkin wrote wonderful nature poems on seasons, day and night etc. In the most mature phase of his career he again seems to have returned to nature. There are poems in *High Windows* related to nature. (eg. 'To the Sea', 'Livings', 'Show Saturday') These phases, especially, the last one, do not show the features of the Movement.

#### 4. A SENSE OF AUDIENCE:

The Movement poets had a sense of audience in the process of writing. There is a concern among the poets to be agreeable to their readers. Larkin once said: 'I write to preserve things I have seen, thought, felt both, for myself and for others.' (*RW 77*)

Amis also claimed that before composing a poem "I ask myself, is this idea likely to interest anyone besides me? And try no longer about it if the answer seems to be NO." (qtd. in *Morrison 108*) This desire to be agreeable made the poets create an image of themselves as 'modest, friendly, well – mannered and, above all, fair - minded.' (*Morrison 108*) For this image the poets often used expressions which Davie calls 'social adaptiveness'. (qtd. in *Morrison 139*) These are expressions like 'I suppose', 'I'm afraid', 'surely', 'it seems' and 'well'. The following are some illustrations of such expressions in Movement poetry:

Only I've a better hand  
In knowing what I can stand  
Without them sending a van –  
Or I suppose I can.

(*CP 117*)

One question, though it's right, to ask  
Or, at least, not witfully.

(qtd. in *Morrison 99*)

Along with modesty, some of these expressions suggest uncertainty, non-commitment which seems to be a feature of postmodern literature. These hesitations and self – justifying expressions also reflect the poet's conflict to convince himself and others that he is right and, thereby, to find a solution to the

uncertainty. To put in the words of Morrison: these expressions reflect “the poet’s struggle to find a way out of uncertainty and to persuade himself that something is the case.” (Morrison 106) In ‘Reasons for Attendance’, for instance, the speaker tries to convince himself regarding his choice not to join the world inside the hall. Expressions like ‘surely’, ‘so far as I’m concerned’, and ‘if you like’ in the poem record the process by which the poet tries to convince himself.

The Movement poets probably had two types of readership in their mind. – 1. the general mass and 2. the intellectual elites. Along with the impulse to reach out to the general mass by dealing with day – to – day experiences of life, often in conversational language with little use of obscure allusions, Movement poetry is also marked by intellectual wit, making the Movement ‘academic’. (Morrison 118) The comic title ‘Toads’ used to describe the boredom, monotony and drudgery of the routine office work is witty. When asked in an interview how he thought of the ‘toad’ image, Larkin answered: ‘Sheer genius, you know.’ (In Hamilton, ‘Four Conversations’ 75)

The frequent use of ‘we’ implies a sense of belonging to the small group of intellectual audience. In ‘Whatever Happened’ the speaker says:

At once whatever happened starts receding.  
Panting, and back on board, we line the rail  
With trousers ripped, light wallets, and lips bleeding . . . .

(CP 74)

Generally speaking, this is how the intellectuals like the speaker tend to reconcile with whatever happens. In ‘Poetry of Departures’ the speaker says:

We all hate home

And having to be there:

(CP 85)

Here also, the speaker seems to identify himself with a small group.

In 'The Old Fools', after reflecting on the pathetic condition of the old fools, naturally seeing no solution of their condition, at the end of the poem the speaker uses the pronoun 'we', perhaps to confirm with the intellectual group his conclusion to the rhetorical questions:

Can they never tell  
What is dragging them back, and how it will end?  
Not at night?

...

Well,

We shall find out.

(CP 197)

Here, with a distinct difference between 'they' and 'we', the speaker joins, neither the mass nor the 'old fools' but the smaller group of intellectuals who too, like him, would hopelessly end the matter with such a vague answer.

### **3.4 DISPERSAL OF THE GROUP:**

After the publication of *New Lines* in 1954 the group affinity began to dissolve. *New Lines* was the climax. Then after, the lines diverged. The socio-political climate, the personal circumstances of the writers, the literary environment – all these together caused a dispersal of the group. The Movement was never an official group so the exact date of its dispersal as well as inception cannot be found. A turning point for the Movement came in 1956. Friendships and collaborations continued, but after 1956 it was no longer possible to think of



the Movement writers as being united in a common cause. In 1957 John Wain wrote: "The revolt is now over. Its work is done." (Wain, 'English poetry' 339)

The Movement was directly connected with the universities. It originated and flourished on the university campus. After 1956 not all the Movement poets were associated with universities. John Wain and Amis gave up teaching. Larkin and Jennings served as librarians so they too, could not be called academic.

The Movement ceased to be provincial. Apart from Larkin who maintained the image of a provincial recluse, other Movement writers migrated either abroad or to metropolis other than London.

The literary scene in England also changed. Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath struck a different note in poetry. The publication of Hughes' first volume of poems *The Hawk in the Rain* in 1957 was a remarkable shift from the Movement. The poems in *The Hawk in the Rain* are marked by ruggedness and are full of romantic energy which the Movement rejected. Against *New Lines* Alvarez published an anthology called *The New Poetry* which had several poems by Ted Hughes. In the introduction to this anthology Alvarez indirectly attacked the polite urbanity of the Movement poetry. He argued that in the postwar England lives were:

Influenced profoundly by forces which have nothing to do with gentility, decency or politeness...They are forces of disintegration which destroy old standards of civilization. The public faces are those of two world wars and the threat of nuclear war.

(Alvarez 26)

Thus, after 1956 it was difficult to associate even the Movement writers with the Movement. The writers who initially, at universities as undergraduates shared views, then after seemed to differ from one another in their attitude to poetry (to literature). Davie, for instance, insisted on taking poetry seriously as a profession. Larkin, on the other hand, rejected Davie's stand; for him it was a hobby. He argued that poetry should be a spare time activity; he has to manage poetry writing along with other spare time activities like social life, reading, letter writing and mending socks.

The Movement gradually lost its recognition. Its associates won fame as individual literary artists. However, the fact remains that the Movement played a very important role in the making of these writers. It is a significant phase in the history of English poetry as well.

The Movement poetry, with Larkin within it, is relevant to the present study in that its departure from modernist themes and techniques is perhaps the starting point of a shift towards Postmodernism. It was an indication that the transition had begun.

## CHAPTER – 4

### LARKIN AND POSTMODERNISM

The previous chapter studied Larkin as a Movement poet. The features of the Movement poetry – some of them anticipating postmodern directions – and Larkin's association with the Movement were analysed in detail in the earlier chapter. Starting with an evident modernist influence, Larkin abandoned it in course as a Movement poet. The Movement's provincialism and anti modernism for instance, can be seen as foreshadowing Postmodernism. Even after the Movement lost its significance and identity, Larkin retained its provincialism, anti modernism and the sense of audience in his poetry. In *High Windows*, published in 1974 – long after the dispersal of the group – some of these features can be found. Thus, not simply as a Movement poet but also as an individual literary artist, Larkin seems to pave way towards Postmodernism. The present chapter will bring out certain features of Larkin's poetry which may be taken as a faint beginning of Postmodernism in English poetry or, at least, leading towards postmodern dimensions.

#### **4.1 BEST SELLER POETRY:**

In his study Hugh Kenner observes that the Movement poets insisted on easy intelligibility as a way of selling poetry. According to him 'the cult of Larkin' (Hampson and Barry 2) i.e, Larkin and the Movement poets created a readership which preferred 'nothing difficult'. (qtd. in Hampson and Barry 2) The desire as well as attempts of the writers, through an easy intelligibility, to be best sellers

links them with Postmodernism. As discussed in Chapter one of the present study, in the postmodern mass society a writer's success is often measured by the market value of his product – literary work. The sense of audience of the Movement writers, their desire to be agreeable and to be convincing may be taken as a move towards Postmodernism, even if it does not imply commodification of poetry. However, it must be noted here that desire to be agreeable does not seem to make Larkin compromise in most of his literary output which won him fame. In fact, in a poem titled 'Fiction and the Reading Public', written in February 1950, published in 1954 in *Essays in Criticism*, the poet's intention seems to satirize the common readership. A common reader is not interested in the literary artist's subject or style; he wants the writer to make him 'feel good'. The implication may be that an ordinary reader wants something that pleases his senses, his impulse; he wants no moral lessons, no advice, nothing difficult, nothing beyond sensation or thrill. An artist must please the mass 'for two generations' and, the common reader assures him, 'you'll truly be good.' This being good is, however, a cheap popularity:

'Give me a thrill', says the reader,  
Give me a kick,  
I don't know how you succeed, or  
What subject you pick.  
Choose something you know all about  
That'll sound like real life;  
Your childhood, your Dad pegging out;  
How you sleep with your wife,  
  
But that's not sufficient, unless

You make me feel good –  
Whatever you're 'trying to express'  
Let it be understood  
That 'somehow' 'God plaits up the threads,  
Makes' 'all for the best',  
That we may lie quiet in our beds  
And not be 'depressed'.

For I call the tune in this racket;  
I pay your screw,  
Write reviews and the bull on the jacket –  
So stop looking blue  
And start serving your sensations  
Before it's too late;  
And please me for two generations –  
You'll be 'truly great'.

(CP 34)

As a literary artist who is not simply there to thrill a common reader or give him 'a kick' as he says, Larkin's poetry can not be, altogether, a commodity but by choosing something 'you know all about / That will sound like real life', Larkin's works definitely tend to be best sellers, at least, with the English readers.

#### **4.2 POETRY AS A VERBAL DEVICE:**

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, it is true that poetry for Larkin is a side activity, not a profession. He is under no compulsion to produce a poem daily yet the fact remains that his poetry is free from cumbersome intellectual and aesthetic subtleties which we find in earlier poets. James Booth is quite right when he says that in Larkin's poetry 'the old concept of aestheticism is replaced

by postmodern utilitarianism'. (Booth 77) so, Larkin's poetry serves as commodity to lay readers looking for ordinary, simple and easy pleasure. Larkin observes:

Some years ago I came to the conclusion that to write a poem was to construct a verbal device that could preserve an experience indefinitely by reproducing it in whoever read the poem. This sounds more like a technical manual than an aesthetic programme.

(RW 83)

As a technical manual, 'a verbal device' Larkin's poetry is far away from aestheticism of the naughty nineties as well as from aesthetic values of modernist poetry. It foreshadows postmodernism.

#### **4.3 LOW PROFILE POETRY: TRUE TO EXPERIENCE:**

From modernist poets' broodings over culture, civilization, man's role in the universe, etc. Larkin shifts to ordinary, day – to - day life in his poems. He says:

I write about experiences, often quite simple, everyday experiences which acquire some sort of meaning for me, and I write poems about them to preserve them.

(RW 79)

Both, personal and communal experiences find utterance in Larkin's poetry. This is what is critically christened as low profile poetry. Commenting on the low profile poetry of Larkin, Davie writes that Larkin's observations in his poems are:

representative of many people's experience in political and social world of post war Britain. In this context Larkin's poetry of lowered insights and patiently diminished experiences were justified.

(Davie 71)

'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album' is about turning pages of the photograph album of a young lady recording the process of her growing 'on the black thick pages'. (CP 71) 'Church Going' is about entering a church, observing it and moving around it, not as a devotee but as a curious visitor. The speaker, wandering on his cycle, enters 'another church' (CP 97) in which no religious ceremony is going on. He observes the structure and the things like 'seats and stones,/ And little books....' The poems 'Toads' and 'Toads Revisited' are about the burden and boredom as well as inevitability of routine office work. With the help of the toad image the poet humorously comments on the monotony of routine work. The speaker slogs for six days in a week just to meet with the household expenses. He does not enjoy the routine work. He compares it with a toad, loaded with the burden of its shell, walking slowly, dragging itself; work for him is drudgery:

Why should I let the toad work  
Squat on my life?  
Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork  
And drive the brute off?

Six days of the week it soils  
With its sickening prison –  
Just for paying a few bills  
That's out of proportion.

(CP 89)

In another well - known poem, 'Dockery and Son', the speaker reflects on his experience of visiting Oxford years after graduating from there. The title poem of the volume *The Whitsun Weddings* describes a train journey. The speaker

observes the typically English landscape from the train. Then, as the newly wedded couples board the train, he minutely observes them and their relatives on the platforms. He contemplates their future.

Like 'The Whitsun Weddings' the poem 'To the Sea' also records both, personal as well as impersonal, common experience of the mass. The speaker enjoys the celebration of the annual ritual of going to sea. He sees people having fun in the sea and remembers the times when his parents brought him to the sea. In 'Show Saturday' we find the speaker moving in a fair. He observes with pleasure different games and shows like that of jugglers and wrestlers. In this common event, he takes interest in ordinary things like the lining up of cars, the crowd of people as well as animals, stalls and balloon – men:

Grey day for the show, but cars jam the narrow lanes.

Inside on the field, judging has started: dogs

(Set their legs back, hold out their tails) and ponies (manes

(Repeatedly smoothed to calm heads) over there, . . .

There's more than just animals:

Bead – stalls, balloon – men, a Bank, a beer – marquee that

Half – screens a canvas Gents; a tent selling tweed,

And another, jackets.

(CP 199)

The poem 'Ambulances' refers to ambulances seen on roads in the city. 'The Old Fools' brings out the misery, suffering and decadent state of old people. 'Dublinesque' describes a funeral procession. The speaker watches the funeral procession of a prostitute. Thus, one may say that Larkin writes about common,



everyday experiences of himself and people. His poetry thus, leads to Postmodernism.

#### **4.4 PROJECTION OF POSTMODERN WORLD:**

It is true that Larkin's speakers are almost always outsiders who never participate directly in an experience. Their non - participating attitude will be discussed at length in the next chapter of the present study. At this point, it is worth noting that the world projected in the poems, the world observed by the speakers certainly seems to bear marks of Postmodernism. The world projected in Larkin's poems can be studied in the following categories:

##### **A. THE COMIC WORLD:**

There is, for instance, the comic world of people who live on their wit, people who never turn paupers in the poem 'Toads':

Lots of folks live on their wits;  
Lecturers, lispers,...  
They don't end as paupers.

(CP 89)

In 'If my Darling' the speaker humorously and ironically brings out the inconsistencies of the human mind and the split personalities with no identical inner as well as outer selves. The expression is very comic. The poem begins in a very funny manner. With an allusion to the famous Alice of *Alice in Wonderland*, perhaps, the speaker seems to have taken the liberty to imagine and develop a fairytale-like impossible situation. However, the implications of this imaginary situation are rooted in reality:

If my darling were once to decide

Not to stop at my eyes,  
But to jump, like Alice, with floating Skirt into my head,

She would find no table and chairs,  
No mahogany claw-footed sideboards,  
No undisturbed embers;

The tantalus would not be filled, nor the fender-seat cosy,  
Nor the shelves stuffed with small- printed books for the Sabbath,  
Nor the butler bibulous, the housemaids lazy:

She would find herself looped with the creep of varying light,  
Monkey-brown, fish-grey, a string of infected circles  
Loitering like bullies, about to coagulate;

(CP 41)

Playfully and ironically the poet hints at the triviality and superficiality of love relationship. It is better to keep it restricted to eyes. It is disappointing to go into depths, to 'jump' 'into...head'.

The ironic yet humorous beginning of the poem 'Latest Face' prompts us – the readers- to laugh at the situation. Both, 'the admirer and the admired' and even their embrace are laughed at in the poem:

Latest face, so effortless  
Your great arrival at my eyes;  
No one standing near could guess  
Your beauty had no home till then;  
Precious vagrant, recognize  
My look, and do not turn again.

Admirer and admired embrace

On a useless level, where  
I contain your current grace,  
You my judgment;

(CP 53)

Like most of the poems on love by Larkin, the poem brings out the futility of love relationship. The embrace of the lovers exchanges not the genuine feelings, but the beloved's 'current grace' and the lover's 'judgement'. The tone of the poem is light and humorous.

'Annus Mirabilis' is another poem which can be sited for its comic expressions:

Sexual intercourse began  
In nineteen sixty – three  
(Which was too late for me)-  
Between the end of Chatterley ban  
And the Beatles' first LP.

Up till then there'd only been  
A sort of bargaining,  
A wrangle for a ring,

So life was never better than  
In nineteen sixty-three  
(Though just too late for me)-  
Between the end of the Chatterley ban  
And the Beatles' first LP

(CP 167)

The Latin title means 'miraculous year'. The poet humorously and ironically calls the year 1963 'Annus Mirabilis' as the beginning of 'sexual intercourse'. He notes

the significance of the year as falling 'between the end of Chaterley ban / And the Beatles' first LP.' The end of ban on D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chaterley's Lover* signifies acceptance by the English society, of the freedom of individual from traditional bindings in love relationship. Beatles' first LP – a sensuous music, especially for youngsters – also suggests the free, impulsive, sensuous love.

#### **B. THE LOW PROFILE WORLD OF ORDINARY PLEASURES:**

There is the low profile world, inside the hall, of the dancing couples in 'Reasons for Attendance'. Couples under twenty five are:

Shifting intently, face to flashed face,  
Solemnly on the beat of happiness.

(CP 80)

The loud voice of trumpet is fascinating. The hall is lighted. For a moment, the detached speaker is drawn towards the 'lighted glass', attracted by the authoritative voice of the trumpet. The men are enjoying 'the wonderful feel of girls'. The world of superfluous parties compelling the speaker 'to ask that ass about his fool research' (CP 181) in 'Vers de Societe' may also be read as the ordinary, less intellectual postwar, postmodern world. The speaker and his wife have invited 'a crowd of craps / To come and waste their time and ours:' (CP 181) Though strongly critical of such gatherings in the early part of the poem, the speaker, in the end, accepts the significance and necessity of such social virtue and accepts to be a part of the gathering.

The people enjoying the ritual of going to the sea, suggested in 'The distant bathers' weak protesting trebles / Down at its edge' (CP 173) in 'To the Sea', the games, shows and stalls in 'Show Saturday' mark the low profile world

of ease. The world of the young described by the speaker in 'High Windows' as 'heaven' may also be read as the ordinary, superficial world of postmodern society:

When I see a couple of kids  
And guess he is fucking her and she is  
Taking pill or wearing a diaphragm,  
I know this is paradise.

(CP 165)

The speaker sees young boys and girls together and imagines them enjoying youth. The ordinary enjoyment – he 'fucking her' and she 'taking pills' – is 'paradise' for the lonely speaker.

### **C. THE MONOTONOUS WORLD OF THE WORKING CLASS:**

The working class of the postindustrial society forms the monotonous world in Larkin's poetry. The monotonous, routine world of those 'who leave at dawn low terraced houses / Timed for factory, yard and site' as in 'The Large Cool Store' (CP 135), who are a 'cut – price crowd, urban yet simple', pushing through 'plate – glass swing doors' to buy 'cheap suits, red kitchen – ware, sharp shoes and lollies' as in 'Here'. (CP 136) The monotonous world of the working class in Larkin's poetry is discussed in detail in the earlier chapter under the Movement and Larkin's provincialism and projection of postindustrial society.

### **D. MASS SOCIETY:**

In his article 'The Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction' Irving How puts forth some features of the postmodern mass society. (The term 'mass society' has been discussed in chapter one of the present study) 'Some of the

characteristics of the mass society, which can be found in Larkin's world, are as under:

- a) Social classes continue to exist, and the contradiction between class - status and personal condition become elusive and problematic.
- b) Traditional centres of authority like family tend to lose some of their binding power upon human beings.
- c) Passivity becomes a wide - spread social attitude – the feeling that life is a drift over which man has little control.
- d) Strong beliefs seem anacronist.

The loss of binding power of centres of authority like family is found in a number of poems like 'Home is so sad' and 'I remember, I Remember'. In 'Home is so Sad' (CP119) home 'started as / A joyous shot of how things ought to be'. 'The pictures and the cutlery, / The music in the piano stand / That vase' – all these things reveal the completeness and joy of home in the past. Today the situation is different. The same home is 'sad' and is 'bereft / of anyone to please.' In 'I Remember, I Remember' (CP 81-82) the speaker recalls his uneventful childhood which passed with little warmth from the elders of the family. He has always missed grandpa's or grandma's stories, their love. The speaker also remembers the 'splendid' family in his neighborhood – the family which could offer no comfort or warmth even to a child like young Philip:

...

And wasn't spoken to by an old hat;  
And here we have that splendid family,  
I never ran to when I got depressed,

(CP 81)

There is a passing by reference to home in 'Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel'. (CP 163) In the loneliness of the station hotel, the speaker observes and describes objects like 'knives and glass', 'shoeless corridors' and the lights. He notices 'the headed paper, made for writing home', But immediately a comment follows in small parenthesis' – '(If home existed)'.

Passivity of attitude can be found in the way people like Dockery, Bleaney, Arnold and the speaker in the first section of 'Livings' live. Bleaney's dull life – with no life at all – is reflected by his possessions and by things he never possessed. He passed his life in one room amidst these possessions.

Flowered curtains, thin and frayed;  
Fall to within five inches of the sill,

Whose window shows strip of building land;  
Tussocky littered. 'Mr. Bleaney took,  
My bit of garden properly in hand.'  
Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook

Behind the door, no room for books or bags –

(CP 102)

The speaker in the first section of 'Livings' has inherited his father's business. He is an agent of agricultural goods. He deals with farmers. Every third month he puts up at a hotel in small towns and villages for three days. There, with ample time and little activity he whiles away time reading:

The-shire Times from soup to stewed pears.  
Births; deaths; for sale; police court; Motor Spares.  
Afterwards, whisky in the Smoke Room; Clough,

Margetts, the Captain, Dr. Watterson;  
Who makes ends meet, who's taking the knock,

Government tariffs, wages, price of stock.

(CP 186)

The world around him is unrefined, rather raw:

Smoke hangs under the light. The pictures on  
The walls are comic-hunting, the trenches, stuff  
Nobody minds or notices. A sound  
Of dominoes from the Bar. I stand a round.

(CP 186)

In spite of all this, he continues the way of living as earning 'living'. He realizes that 'It's time for change in nineteen twenty-nine' but there seems little desire or active thought to change the occupation.

People like Dockery in 'Dockery and Son' and Arnold in 'Self's the Man' live their lives, perhaps, with passivity. As against the speakers making conscious choice' in both the poems, Dockery and Arnold blindly follow the worldly customs - both get married and have children.

Passivity of attitude can be found in the concluding lines of 'Dockery and Son', 'The Building', etc. In 'Dockery and Son' the speaker arrives at a pessimistic conclusion that life is a drift:

Life is first boredom, then fear:  
Whether or not we use it, it goes...  
And age, and then the only end of age.

(CP 153)



'The Building' also ends on a similar kind of assertion. It suggests the futility of human efforts to check the mortality and inevitability of the 'coming dark':

. . . nothing contravenes  
The coming dark, though crowds each morning try  
With wasteful, weak propitiatory flowers.

(CP 193)

Whatever way we may live, life 'goes' and comes to an end as in 'Dockery and Son'. Howsoever one may strive to prevent 'the coming dark', death is the ultimate reality as suggested in 'The Building'.

#### **4.5 CHANGE OF ATTITUDE TO PROBLEMS:**

Larkin's world is often marked by postmodern ease. There are problems and short-comings in his world as well, 'Sunny Prestatyn' for instance, brings forth the sick mentality of society. In the poem, the model girl advertising the hotel 'Sunny Prestatyn' is almost turned into a sexual object, a commodity. In the poster the girl is dressed in 'tautered white satin'. The advertised hotel seems 'to expand from her thighs and / Spread breast – lifting arms.' (CP 149) The passers-by meddle with the poster:

She was slapped up one day in March;  
A couple of weeks, and her face  
Was snaggle – toothed and boss-eyed;  
Were scored well in, and the space  
Between her legs held scrawls  
That set her fairly astride  
A tuberous cock and balls

Autographed Titch Thomas, while

Someone had used a knife  
Or something to stab right through  
The moustached lips of her smile.  
She was too good for this life.  
Very soon, a great transverse tear  
Left only a hand and some blue.  
Now Fight Cancer is there.

(CP 149)

The subject of the poem – analysis of an advertisement – itself marks the transition from poetry of the earlier poets. Like a postmodernist, Larkin seems to show an interest in media and its vivid images. Larkin himself describes the subject of the poem as “one of those jolly, colourful posters that are so beloved of publicity – officers of seaside towns, showing the universal symbol of happiness, a pretty girl.” (qtd. in Booth 119) At another level, the poem seems to be, to put in the words of James Booth: “a social satire, the poet’s elegant deconstruction of the sexual myth of the holiday poster.”(Booth 119) The designer of the poster has subtly manipulated the erotic implications of the poster. In the poster the hotel ‘seemed to expand from her thighs.’ (CP 149) The implication seems to be that both, the hotel and the girl are available to the male holidaymaker.

Like many other poems ‘Tacking in Bed’ is about decaying human relationship, driving one to isolation even in the presence of the companion:

...Nothing shows why  
At this unique distance from isolation  
  
It becomes still more difficult to find  
Words at once true and kind,

Or not untrue and not unkind.

(CP 129)

Poems like 'Wild Oats', 'Latest Face' and 'If my Darling' bring out inconsistencies of the human mind resulting in unstable, wavering love relationships. In 'Wild Oats' the speaker recalls his meeting two girls 'twenty years ago':

A bosomy English rose  
And her friend in specs, I could talk;

(CP 143)

After having a seven year long relationship with the 'friend', during when he wrote 'about four hundred letters,/ gave a ten - guinea ring' he parted with an agreement that 'I was too selfish, withdrawn, And easily bored to love.' The fact is that even after such a long time, today he has two photographs in his wallet – one of the friend and the other of the 'bosomy English rose' he perhaps could never talk to.

In 'To my wife' the speaker speaks of the relationship between himself and his wife. The relationship, begun with the hope of a happy union has, perhaps, led itself to failure:

So for your face I have exchanged all faces,  
For your few properties bargained the brisk  
Baggage ,...  
Now you become my boredom and my failure,  
Another way of suffering, a risk,  
A heavier-than-air-hypostasis.

(CP 54)

The attitude to problems has changed quite a lot from that of modernists with Larkin. Lolette Kuby comments:

In Larkin's poetry the objective problems of the modern world are personal, not issues but sights and sounds, a way of life, innate assumptions that govern thought behaviour and values.

(kuby 128)

Modernist problems like the death of God and disconnection from past are present for instance, in 'Church Going' but they occur as 'the fully assimilated private thoughts and emotions of one man.' (kuby 132)

Failure of love relationships is, generally speaking, accepted with little grievance in Larkin's poetry. This note of acceptance, or rather the taken-for-granted attitude links Larkin with Postmodernism.

In 'Marriages' the unpleasant reality or the secret of marriages is smoothly brought out by the poet:

When those of us who seem  
Immodestly – accurate  
Transcriptions of a dream  
Are tired of singleness,  
Their confidence will mate  
Only with confidence-  
With an equal condescence,  
... ..  
They chatter for a partner-  
Some undesirable,  
With whom it is agreed  
That words such as liberty  
Impulse or beauty

Shall be unmentionable.

(CP 63)

The poem seems to imply that people go for marriage only when they get 'tired of singleness'. The partner is 'undesirable'. Marriage is only an agreement on certain terms. Ideals, or, rather, affirmations of a love relationship, considerations in sustenance of marriage like 'liberty, impulse or beauty' remain unmentionable. With all this, there seems to be no complaint in the poem.

Duality, even in love relationship, is accepted as natural in human beings. In 'Wild Oats' the relationship breaks with an easy acceptance, with a little feeling of guilt. The speaker frankly confesses about the duality of human nature and dismisses the whole event as an 'unlucky dream'.(CP 143)

The typical playfulness of postmodernism found in Larkin's poetry, also sometimes helps to overcome the pain of problems like pollution, financial hazards, a very average living standard, an undistinguished mass-identity and failure in love relationship. In 'Toads' the speaker tries to overcome the monotony of daily work by comparing it with a toad. In 'If my Darling' and 'Latest Face' there is an attempt to mitigate the guilt of inconsistencies of human nature and impermanence of love relationship with playfulness.

#### **4.6 REJECTION OF CHRISTIANITY:**

As discussed in the first chapter of the present study, the 20<sup>th</sup> century is marked by a loss of religious faith, a rejection of Christianity. This modernist feature continues in the postmodern era but with a change in attitude. While the modernists grieve the death of God, the postmodernists celebrate it or, rather, accept it without a feeling of pain or shock. The rejection of Christianity in

Larkin's poetry is in the postmodern fashion. Unlike modernists Larkin does not lament the loss of religious faith or even of spirituality. In fact, some modernists like Yeats and Eliot do not negate religion but civilization which is spiritually barren, which has given up true religious faith. 'The second coming' which is a vision of the second coming of Christ but, this time, coming of not the Holy Ghost or God but of a monstrous image, is based on the idea of the cycle of 2000 years of Christian civilization and Christ's prophesy:

Surely, some revolution is at hand;           9  
The Second Coming? Hardly are these words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight; somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again, but not I know  
That twenty centuries of stormy sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?       22

(The Second Coming 9-22)

*The Waste Land*, one of the most representative modernist poems which describes the land as sterile and barren, ends on a note of self – contentment, self - defined peace – an affirmation conveyed in the concluding line – 'Shantih, shantih, shantih.' -, that faith in religion, in humanity and in the self can save the civilization.

Failure of religious faith is a recurring feature throughout Larkin's poetry. Even if it is not the main subject of a poem, it is very often there as a passing by reference. There is, for instance, a 'locked Church' in 'The Building'. The speaker describes the outside world seen from the 'building' i.e, the hospital:

Outside seems old enough  
Red brick,...  
Traffic, a locked church...

(CP 192)

The locked church in the outside world is 'old enough', i.e, it is a part of the world people are familiar with. 'Locked church' is as normal an image as 'red brick, lagged pipes, and someone walking by it / Out to the car park'. (CP 192)

In 'Money' the subject is money and its importance in life. This is perhaps the only poem in Larkin's *Collected Poems* which brings out how the power of money separates 'long French windows' (CP 198) from a 'provincial town'. (CP 198) In the last stanza the poem brings out the normal, common realities of a provincial town. Here there is a mention of churches as decorative pieces and as 'mad':

The slums, the canal the churches ornate and mad  
In the evening sun.

(CP 198)

In 'Vers de Societe' the speaker contemplates solitude and social gatherings:

All solitude is selfish. No one now  
Believes the hermit with his gown and dish  
Talking to God (who's gone too) ....

(CP 181)

God is gone. This adds to people's reluctance to believe the hermit in solitude. The worthless gatherings also on the other hand, are simply a waste of time. The speaker is critical of such gatherings which compel him to be artificial and play at goodness. He wonders:

Are, then, these routines

Playing at goodness, like going to church?

Something that bores us, something we don't do well.

(CP 181)

The implication is that going to church is only 'playing at goodness'. Failure of religion to free man from fear of darkness and death is brought out in one of the most serious death poems 'Aubade'. The poem is exclusively about fear – the fear of darkness, the fear of extinction. In the past religion struck a note of comfort and hope. Religious faith sustained common man through fear and tremors of life. But now it is simply a trick:

No trick dispels. Religion used to try

That vast moth-eaten musical brocade

Created to pretend we never die...

(CP 208)

'Faith Healing' ironically brings out the hollowness of words spoken by the priest who has come to comfort the sad, young, rejected women. The grandeur and glamour of the priest 'Upright in rimless glasses, silver hair; / Dark suit, white collar' (CP 126) surrounded and served by stewards is in sharp contrast to the deprived women 'in flowered frocks' gathering 'where he stands'. (CP 126) The adjective 'American' used for the priest through a synecdoche - if related to the



poet's prejudice for 'foreign', adds to his distaste for and disapproval of the churchman.

In a symbolic poem 'Water', the poet rejects the traditional concept of religion and says:

If I were called in  
To construct a religion  
fools  
I should make use of water:

Going to church  
Would entail of fording  
To dry different clothes;

(CP 93)

By expressing a desire to construct a religion with the help of water here the poet seems to imply a religion, not of fundamentalism or deep philosophy but of ordinary people's understanding, religion as a basic need of life and yet as simple and plain as water. In the title poem of his last volume of poems *High Windows* the poet, at the end of the poem, seems to negate any kind of faith, seen by even modernists like Eliot and Yeats, in spirituality and religion:

The deep blue air, that shows  
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless

(CP 165)

In an interview with Ian Hamilton Larkin said:

Religion surely means that the affairs of this world are under divine surveillance and so on and I go to some pains to point out that I don't approve that kind of thing, that I'm deliberately ignorant of it.

(In Hamilton, 'Four Conversations' 73)

Larkin refused to consider his widely debated poem 'Church Going' as a religious poem. He says:

Of course, the poem is about going to church, not religion. I tried to suggest that by the title – the union of the stages of human life – birth, marriage and death – that going to church represents and my own feeling that when they are dispersed into the registry office...

(In Hamilton, 'Four Conversations' 73)

In the poem the speaker enters the church not as a devotee but as a visitor. He moves round the empty church and observes 'matting, seats and stone / And little books, sprawling of flowers, cut / for Sunday, brownish now....':

Mounting on lectern, I peruse a few  
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce  
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.

(CP 97)

A common reader may sense religious ceremonies in these lines and hence, look for religious implications of the poem but the phrase 'Here endeth', pronounced 'more loudly than I'd meant' suggests the ending of the religious faith as well. Soon, after coming out, he wonders:

When churches fall completely out of use  
What we shall turn them into...

(CP 97)

He makes some wild guesses:

Shall we avoid them as unlucky places.  
Or, after dark will dubious women come  
To make their children touch a particular stone;

(CP 97)

Ultimately he accepts the great significance of the church but not as a place for religious worship:

A serious house on serious earth it is;  
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet;  
Are recognized and robed as destinies,  
And that much never can be obsolete  
Since someone will forever be surprising  
A hunger in himself to be more serious,  
And gravitating with it to this ground,  
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,

If only that so many dead lie round.

(CP98)

The church shall retain its importance forever as a place 'to grow wise in', as a place to learn the lesson of the ultimate truth, the ultimate reality of life. This learning will come not from prayers or mass but from the graveyard in the church which has so many dead around.

According to Roger Day the title 'Church Going' signifies different meanings: 1) going to churches like this visit. 2) church is going (religion is dying) and 3) going to church as people used to and as they will:

The speaker enters the church as a Visitor and wonders about its predicament. The ironic description of the poem is that there will be an inevitable evolution in people's thinking.

(Day, R. 43)

Larkin is not anti – religious; he is unreligious. He has lost the anti-Christian fervour. To quote James Booth: "He has no anger against God for not existing; nor does he generate atheistic spirituality." (Booth 136)

Dom King is right up to this extent when he says in his article 'Sacramentalism in the poetry of Philip Larkin' that "Larkin's attitude towards traditional Christian belief is rarely bitter or satirical," (King, D. 'Sacramentalism'(www.montreal.edu/dking/SacramentalisminthePoetryofPhilipLarkin.htm-)) However, his argument that there is sadness in Larkin's poetry about the 'impossibility of religious faith for modern secular man' (D. King) does not seem logical. Larkin's attitude often seems to be that of an indifference towards the loss of religious faith and the impossibility of having it in 'modern' times. One would certainly agree with James Booth when he says: "Larkin is not ready to quarrel with religious beliefs championing atheist philosophy. He simply refuses to bother about that kind of thing." (Booth 137) D. King tries to support his argument by quoting Larkin's 'Days':

What are days for?

Days are where we live.

They come, they wake us

Time and time over.

They are to be happy in:

Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question

Brings the priest and the doctor

In their long coats

Running over the fields.

(CP 67)

It is true, there is sadness in the poem as suggested by D King. But the sadness is not because of 'the priest and the doctor / In their long coats' trying to save life in vain. It is not the failure of both, Science and Religion that makes the poet sad.

The sadness is about unbeatable malign force – Death. It is about the Fate of all human beings, about the inevitability of death.

#### **4.7 UNCERTAINTY AND AMBIVALENCE:**

Lack of conviction, the state of not being sure are some of the features of Postmodernism. These – though in little way and in a different context – are recurring features of Larkin's poetry as well. Uncertainty in a Larkin poem implies the possibility of a further brooding over the poem. Larkin does not always give one committed meaning but by concluding the poem on a note of uncertainty, leaves it open - ended. Unlike a typical postmodern writer, he does not resist meaning, implication. The meaning which he intends to convey is very much there. However, a faint resemblance to Postmodernism may be found in the use of non-committal words in the poems and the uncertainty or loose end of the poems opening the possibility of further thinking. In 'I Remember, I Remember', while recollecting Coventry as a place where his 'childhood was unspent', the speaker is asked by the listener friend:

You look as if you wished the place in hell:

(CP 82)

The speaker's reply is:

'I suppose it's not the place's fault'

....

Nothing like something happens anywhere

(CP 82)

The loose end suggested by the phrase 'I suppose' does not deny other possible reaction of the speaker to the place. The last line of the poem 'Nothing like

something happens anywhere' is just one possible reply – the speaker's own thought.

'Well, we shall find out' (*CP* 197) at the end of the poem, 'The Old Fools' may also be read as other than implying – as it does – the impossibility of any reply to the questions raised with sympathy and pain in the poem about the miserable condition of the 'old fools':

What do they think has happened, the old **fools**,  
To make them like this? Do they somehow suppose  
It's more grown up when your mouth **hangs** open and drools,  
And you keep on pissing yourself, and can't remember  
Who called this morning?

.....

Or do they fancy there's really been no change?  
And they have always behaved as if they were crippled or tight,  
. . . . If they don't (and they can't), it's strange:  
Why aren't they screaming?

.....

Can they never tell  
What is dragging them back, and how it will end? Not at night?  
Not when the strangers come? Never, throughout  
The whole hideous inverted childhood?

(*CP* 196-197)

The speaker, it seems, does not deny the role of the reader (suggested by the phrase 'we') in synthesizing predicament of the 'old fools',

'Mr. Bleaney' ends with 'I don't know'; (*CP* 102) 'Self's the Man' ends with 'Oh, I suppose I can'. (*CP* 118) Both these concluding lines imply uncertainty, a

sort of non - commitment on the part of the speaker, or, at least, possibility of different meanings.

'An Arundel Tomb', a remarkable poem in *The Whitsun Weddings* ends on a note of ambivalence. The speaker sees the earl and the countess holding hands in effigy. He wonders whether this gesture of love is a genuine representation. He, then, notices with a 'sharp tender shock' 'his hand, withdrawn, holding her hand.' (CP 110) So the poet ends the poem with an ambivalent conclusion:

Our almost instinct almost true,  
What will survive of us is love.

(CP 111)

In real life the earl and the countess might not have lived up to this image. However, years after, the gesture of love has become almost reality so the speaker rightly says, 'What will survive of us is love.'

#### 4.8 REJECTION OF THE ABSOLUTES:

Like postmodernists Larkin's speakers have little faith in established values. Very often the speakers refuse to believe in conventions but they need to develop their own internal resources. Andrew Motion writes:

Larkin clearly has no faith in inherited and reliable absolutes. But as far as this means that the individuals must discover their own internal resources, his poems have an affirmative aspect.

(Motion, Larkin 60)

In 'Church Going' while the speaker says that 'churches shall fall completely out of use', (CP 97) and will be replaced by powers other than religion, he, at the same time, asserts that church is 'a serious house on serious earth,' (CP 98) and, as discussed earlier, it is still a place to grow wise in. The speaker accepts

the significance of the church according to his own internal resource. In 'Water' the poet wants to construct religion with the help of water.

#### **4.9 USE OF POSTMODERN DEVICES:**

Parody, pastiche, irony etc. are a few favourite devices of postmodern literature. Larkin's poetry is often marked by irony and satire. He often uses irony to check strong emotions. To quote Philip Gardner:

Larkin is an emotional poet; the irony of his tone may be the self-protection of a man who guiltily feels himself to be on the edge of life but more often, it is there to control strong feeling. Where irony is absent, the strength of his feeling is frighteningly apparent.

(Gardner 92)

Ironic overtones are evident in 'Vers de Societe'. The speaker claims a moral superiority in keeping away from society and in avoiding narrow ego - bound conversations – 'Asking that ass about his fool research'. (CP 181) But the self - deceived speaker is exposed in the final lines:

The time is shorter now for company,  
And sitting by a lamp more often brings  
Not peace but other things.  
Beyond the light stand failure and remorse....

(CP 182)

Finally, the speaker shows his willingness to be with others.

Along with humour, there is satire revealed ironically in 'Homage to a Government'. The poet is critical of the British government's decision to withdraw soldiers from trenches as a measure of cutting down the defence expenses:

Next year we are to bring the soldiers home  
For lack of money and it is alright.  
Places they guarded, or kept orderly,



Must guard themselves, and keep themselves orderly.  
We want the money for ourselves at home  
Instead of working, and this is all right.

It's hard to say who wanted it to happen,  
But now it's been decided nobody minds.  
The places are a long way off, not here,  
Which is all right, and from what we hear,  
The soldiers there made only trouble happen.  
Next year we shall be easier in our minds.

Next year we shall be living in a country  
That brought its soldiers back for lack of money,  
The statues will be standing in the same  
Tree-muffled squares, and look nearly the same,  
Our children will not know it is a different country.  
All we can hope to leave them now is money.

(CP 171)

The poet satirically argues in favour of the British government's decision. At first, he says that the places guarded by the army must now guard themselves; secondly, the places are 'a long way off' and, as heard, the soldiers made only trouble there. The repeatedly used phrase 'This is all right' intensifies the note of satire in the poem. The poem ends with a humorous satire that, by decreasing defense expenses, 'we' shall be leaving more money for 'our' children.

Another poem with an ironic touch is 'The Literary World'. In the two brief sections the poet ironically brings out the artificiality of the modernist writers and the aloofness of the writers who took poetry – writing as a profession. The first section is an address to the modernist writer, Kafka. Larkin, by showing what

depression means, ironically criticizes the intense but artificial and borrowed emotions of the modernist writers. In the second section the poet is humorously ironic about the household of Mr. And Mrs. Tennyson:

Mrs. Alfred Tennyson

Answered

begging letters

admiring letters

enquiring letters

business letters

and publishers' letters.

She also

looked after the clothes

saw to his food and drink

entertained visitors

protected him from gossip and criticism.

And finally

(apart from running the household)

brought up and educated children.

While all this was going on

Mister Alfred Tennyson sat like a baby

Doing his poetic business.

(CP 38)

Mr. Alfred Tennyson is busy doing his 'poetic business'. He is totally cut off from daily work and ordinary jobs like answering letters, looking after clothes and bringing up children. The irony is directed towards 1. the poets for whom writing poetry is a profession and 2. more towards the Victorians and the Modernists who isolate themselves from the ordinary world.

#### 4.10 USE OF COLLOQUIAL WORDS:

Many critics have documented Larkin's poetry as marked by colloquial usages. To quote from Wikipedia online Encyclopedia: "He is well known for his use of slang and coarse language in his poetry, partly balanced by a similarly unique word choice." ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip\\_Larkin](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Larkin) -) Poems like 'If my Darling', 'Latest Face', 'Next Please' are marked by colloquial usages.

Apart from the above discussed postmodern tendencies found in Larkin's poetry in general, there are a few isolated poems also, each revealing some peculiar postmodern trait. 'Going Going' for instance, focuses on a problem related to environment. The poem laments cutting down of trees, urbanization at the cost of destruction of nature – trees, meadows, open lands, etc. The poet shows his deep concern over the consumption of open land in London:

I thought it would last my time –  
The sense that, beyond the town,  
There would always be fields and farms;  
Where the village louts would climb  
Such trees as were not cut down;  
I knew there'd be false alarms

In the papers about old streets  
And split – level shopping, but some  
Have always been left so far  
And when the old part retreats  
When the bleak high – risers come  
We can always escape in the car.

(CP189)

The poem 'Money' ironically, yet in a humorous manner, brings out the spendthrift mentality of the young generation of postmodern society – materialistic, not believing in saving money and indulging into all pleasures that money brings with it:

Quarterly, is it, money reproaches me:

‘Why do you let me lie here wastefully?

I am all you had of goods and sex,

You could get them still by writing a few cheques.’

So I look at others, what they do with theirs:

They certainly don't keep it upstairs.

By now they've a second house and car and wife:

Clearly money has something to do with life

In fact – they've a lot in common, if you enquire:

You can't put off being young until you retire;

And however you bank your screw, the money you save

Won't in the end buy you more than a shave.

(CP198)

The chapter has successfully brought out some traits of Larkin's poetry, all of which may not be accepted as typical postmodern features; one may say that Postmodernism begins with these tendencies - in the form of anti modernism, change of attitude to problems, low profile writings, etc. Larkin has his little, unconscious yet significant role in the development of Postmodernism from Modernism. As Gary Day writes: "Larkin's poetry is, thus, in part, the shifting relationship between two types of poetic discourses." (Day, G. 34) Thus, though Ian Gregson considers the generation after Larkin and the Movement poets as

postmodern, it can still be maintained on the basis of the tendencies discussed in the present as well as earlier chapters that Larkin's poetry not only anticipates and leads towards Postmodernism, but also faintly begins it. As has been discussed in the first chapter of the present study, the demarcating line between Modernism and postmodernism is very thin. One cannot compartmentalize the end of Modernism and the beginning of Postmodernism. It is Larkin's poetry which shows this transition in English poetry, bearing the marks of both, Modernism as well as Postmodernism from time to time. Thus, the tendencies discussed in the present chapter may rightly be justified as suggesting a departure from Modernism and a move towards as well as a beginning, in some respects, of Postmodernism.

**CHAPTER - 5**  
**AN INDIVIDUAL POET CAUGHT BETWEEN MODERNISM AND**  
**POSTMODERNISM**

In the previous chapters Larkin's poetry has been analysed in its various phases as reflecting modernist and postmodernist tendencies. The early poetry of Larkin, written during, more or less, the modernist era, tends to be influenced by modernist poetry in general as well as in particular; as a poet of the Movement his poetry, with a strong anti - modernist stand, makes a remarkable departure from modernist poetry; with a departure from Modernism Larkin's poetry, with perhaps no serious intention or awareness of the poet, moves towards Postmodernism and reflects faintly or initiates or, sometimes, anticipates postmodern tendencies. The earlier chapter focused on such tendencies found in Larkin's poetry. But every literary artist, at his best, is a unique individual. Critical labels (like modern, postmodern, romantic, neo – classical) to his works as well as to him are given by readers and critics.

Secondly, for a widely read, discussed and studied poet like Larkin, there are many possibilities of readings with various interpretations and responses. Brother Anthony is right when he notes that:

There is a remarkable diversity of readings being made of Larkin's works, and that no one reading can easily be privileged over others. The reader is left very free to respond, which is good for the reader but a challenge too.

(Anthony, ' Without Metaphysics'

[www.hompi.sagang.ac.kr/anthony/Larkin.htm-37k- \)](http://www.hompi.sagang.ac.kr/anthony/Larkin.htm-37k-)

With this argument the present chapter is an attempt at bringing out some unique qualities of Larkin's poetry – qualities which establish Larkin as a unique, individual literary artist; each of these qualities can be seen as having, within itself, traits of Modernism as well as Postmodernism and alludes completely to none. In other words, each quality is a trap in itself between Modernism and Postmodernism.

## **5.1 LARKIN'S SPEAKERS:**

### **A. DETACHED INDIVIDUALS:**

A majority of Larkin's speakers are isolated, lonely beings who detach themselves from the world they describe. Lolette Kuby rightly says:

A recurring type among Larkin's characters is the 'loner', the 'outsider', the man who chooses to choose . . . . refusing to become party to nature, social forces or the will of another.

(Kuby 58)

The speakers in Larkin's poetry are mainly nonparticipating individuals. They are modernist individuals who contemplate experiences, who have missed out or, rather, chosen to be deprived of the ordinary pleasures of life. To quote Bruce Martin: "Larkin's speaker is almost aloof and, at the most, an unparticipating spectator of the rooted lives and pleasures of others." (Martin 11) Speakers like those in 'Dockery and Son', 'Self's the Man' and 'Mr. Bleaney' are isolated bachelors. Speakers in 'Spring', 'Faith Healing', 'The Whitsun Weddings', 'To the Sea', etc. are detached observers of the world around them. In 'To the Sea' the speaker, though he enjoys the celebration of the annual sea-going ritual, is himself only a lonely observer. The phrase 'strange to it now' shows that he is not

only distant from the younger generation but also from the people around him on the shore:

Strange to it now. I watch the cloudless scenes,  
The same clear water over smoothed pebbles,  
The distant bathers' weak protesting trebles  
Down at the edge . . . .

(CP 173)

The light - house - keeper in 'Livings' is again, the lonely type, alone in the midst of nature. He learns of the outside world only when 'radio rubs its legs'. (CP 187)

In 'Here' the speaker, while fully responsive to and non - condescendingly appreciative of the urban 'cut - price crowd', moves away from that setting towards a remote life.

In 'The Building' also the speaker persists in his role of detached observer. He describes the world outside the building from the building:

Look down at the yard – outside seems old enough:  
. . . and someone walking by it  
Out in the car park, free . . . .

(CP 192)

And he believes that:

O world,  
Your loves, your chances are beyond the stretch  
Of any hand from here.

(CP 192)

He also describes activities going on in the building. But, even within the building he is not one of those 'at that vague age that claims / The end of choice.' (CP 191) He is only an observer who observes and makes us observe with his eyes.



Whatever he says is said with much sensitivity and intensity but he is not a participant of that world.

#### **B. A DELIBERATE RESISTANCE TO POSTMODERN MASS IDENTITY:**

The apparently modernist speakers, however, can be studied as implying a self - contrary personality. Their personality can be analysed with two possible implications: 1. bearing a deliberate resistance to what may be termed as postmodern traits, 2. revealing a nature which, if not checked, may have led to typical postmodern schizophrenic personality.

Larkin's speakers as individuals insist on retaining their individuality. They make their own choice in life and thereby, assert their individuality. They present themselves in comparison with or, at least, as against the postmodern figures who have lost their individuality and have acquired a mass identity. Dockery, Arnold and Bleaney have been with the mass, bearing little individual Identity like Auden's 'The Unknown Citizen'. The speakers evaluate their life and choices as against these figures and take satisfaction in being individuals. They make their own choices in life and try to take satisfaction by the act of choosing. However, at one stage the speakers themselves tend to doubt propriety and significance of their choices. Thus, choice, at times, simply seems to be a deliberate attempt to avoid mass identity. It seems to be a part of the speakers' attempts to retain their individuality. The isolated bachelor in 'Dockery and Son' wonders about Dockery's life with a wife and children and says:

Why did he think adding meant increase?

To me it was dilution.

(CP 153)

At one point the speaker even doubts the appropriateness of his own choice to remain a bachelor:

To have no son, no wife,  
No house or land still seemed quite natural,  
Only a numbness registered the shock  
Of finding out how much had gone of life.

**(CP 152)**

In 'Self's the Man' the speaker compares his and Arnold's life and says that Arnold is not less selfish than he. But he concludes justifying himself as better than Arnold:

To compare his life and mine  
Makes me feel a swine.  
Oh, no one can deny  
That Arnold is less selfish than I.

But wait, not so fast;  
Is there such a contrast?  
He was out for his own ends,  
Not just pleasing his friends

And if it was such a mistake  
He still did it for his own sake  
Playing his own game  
So he and I are the same.

Only I am a better hand  
At knowing what I can stand  
Without them sending a van –

Or I suppose I can.

(CP 118)

The speaker simply claims a cerebral superiority over Arnold i.e, he thinks himself better off than Arnold as a contemplative rational individual as against mass identity of Arnold.

### **C. DUALITY OF SELF:**

This typical postmodern feature is characteristic of Larkin's speakers as well. The speakers of Larkin's poems are often split dual personalities. They tend to make their own choices in life and then, often find them unfulfilling, unsatisfying. The speakers choose either to work or sit in a park, to marry or remain bachelors, to join a dance or to respond to creative impulse, etc. Then they sometimes think of having misjudged themselves or lied to themselves by making a wrong choice. They doubt the worth, validity and propriety of their own choice. As Kuby says:

They are dualistic creatures for whom 'right' is identified with 'ideal'. Choice cannot possibly be right, satisfaction cannot possibly be attained because a thing, after it is chosen and an experience, after it is lived in nature, is different from its ideal component.

(Kuby 82)

Like a Platonist Larkin distinguishes between the ideal and the real, but his is a Platonism turned inside out. "What to Platonists are 'appearances' are to Larkin reality, and what to them is reality is to him fantasy." (Kuby 81) While Platonists see the real surface of the world as illusory and non - sensible reality as reflecting a deeper, ulterior reality, Larkin considers that which is on the surface to be real and the deeper one as a deceiving shadow that can never be grasped.

The choice of speakers to remain bachelors in 'Dockery and Son' and 'Self's the Man' has already been discussed. In 'To My Wife' the speaker regrets the choice of marrying as it led to stopping 'all ways up but one'. (CP 54) In 'Toads' the speaker has to choose between routine work and other activities like sitting in a park. In 'Reasons for Attendance' the choice is between joining the dancing couples in the hall and remaining outside, responding to the creative insight. Kuby rightly comments:

All of Larkin's themes, sub-themes, subjects, ideas, even his style are particles of a major unifying vision – the duality of man. . . . His field of vision is organized: the simultaneous existence of the human psyche in a metaphysical and a real world is the essential fact behind each of the particulars of life. He sees humanity as being what it is, in respect to time, choice, morality, love, sex, work, history and self-image as a result of that simultaneity or duality.

(Kuby 81)

Simultaneity is one of the basic concepts of Postmodernism. Postmodern simultaneity is multiplicity. As against this, Larkin's speakers can be analysed as presenting simultaneity in duality rather than multiplicity.

## **5.2 THE TENSION BETWEEN CEREBRAL AND AFFECTIVE:**

In Larkin's poetry there is often a tension between a cerebral consciousness and an affective mood. There is a combination, sometimes a conflicting one, of the modernist element of contemplation and the postmodernist element of emotion.

### **A. DRAMATIC SPEAKERS:**

Larkin manages to generate a tension between the two modes by projecting a dramatic personality. Since the poet has a personal contact with the

subject he chooses, we may be tempted to assume that the speaker of the poems is Larkin, the man and the poet himself but that would be a simplistic assumption. Though Larkin himself once said, "I wouldn't want to write a poem which suggests that I am different from what I am", (In Hamilton, 'Four Conversations' 75) he has also asserted: "I think one has to dramatize oneself a little." (In Hamilton 74) There is not a single personality in the poems. To quote Larkin himself:

What I would like to write is different kind of poems that might be by different people. Someone has said that the great thing is not to be different from other people but from yourself.

(In Hamilton, 'Four Conversations' 74)

There are many different people in Larkin's poems. "There are many Larkins in his poems", says Terry Whalen. (Whalen, *P.L.* 10) Thus, one may say that the speakers represent a part of Larkin's personality and not necessarily the entire self. Larkin's deliberate creation of a dramatic persona and his determination not to be different from himself, combine to produce an interesting state of tension and eventually results in a poem in which both, the arousal of emotion and a distancing from emotion, are present.

#### **B. CEREBRAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE SPEAKERS:**

The speakers' position as detached observers enables them not only to observe things neutrally but also to engage in speculation. In this sense, Salem Hassan calls the speakers' detachment a device used by the poet:

There are many poems in which the speaker watches the surroundings through a window or listens to the natural elements outside a building. The frequent use of this device is not accidental. In my view, it provides the

poet or the speaker with some measure of society and then it sharpens his observations and heightens the situations created through the contrast between the almost static, more or less silent interior and the moving, usually noisy exterior.

(Hassan 110)

In 'The Whitsun Weddings' the speaker is on the train as the "eternal witness of the contemplative artist, inward with what he sees, yet outside it precisely to the extent that he sees it." (Bedient 92) While none of the couples on the train think of 'the others they would never meet / Or how their lives would contain this hour', (CP 116) the speaker does; he also thinks of:

London spread out in the sun;  
Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat:

(CP 116)

The ability to speculate lifts the speaker off the simple, ordinary ground of humanity. To quote Salem Hassan:

What differentiates the speaker from the young couples and the crowd is the fact that, unlike them, he speculates on and feels these experiences (the marriages) as he gradually gets involved in them.

(Hassan 87)

In 'Dockery and Son' the speaker indulges in contemplation during his return journey by train from Oxford. After knowing about his junior co - student, Dockery's son, studying at Oxford, he suddenly wakes up to what he has missed out in life. He compares Dockery's and his life with parallel but never meeting railway lines and wonders about the different paths they took:

Why did he think adding meant increase?  
To me it was dilution. Where do these

Innate assumptions come from? Not from what  
We think truest, or most wanted.

(CP 153)

There is nothing extraordinary in either Dockery's or the speaker's path of life. Dockery is married and has a son who is now studying at Oxford. The speaker is a bachelor. The sensitivity and the thinking habit drive the speaker to contemplation. Thus, Larkin's speakers, detached from the experience they describe, contemplate on ordinary experiences.

### **C. AFFECTIVE MODE IN THE SPEAKERS:**

Along with cerebral consciousness there is, in Larkin's speakers, an affective mode as well. The self that speculates is the same self that feels. The emotion flows gradually out of the detached observer's stance. In 'The Building' for instance, the opening stanzas are full of observed particulars noted without much involvement. It is not made clear right at the outset what building it is. The description awaits readers' interpretation to recognize the building as a hospital. 'The scruffy porters', 'the frightening smell' hanging along the creepers – all these hint at the building being a hospital. In the succeeding stanzas the description continues as the speaker moves about in the building; along with the description the thought process goes on continuously, its initial detached flow revealed through moving images such as 'cups back to saucers', patients waiting on steel chairs as if in an 'airport lounge' gradually moving into such direct remarks as:

Some are young,  
Some old, but most at that vague age – that claims  
The end of choice, the last of hope; and all

Here to confess that something has gone wrong.  
It must be error of a serious sort,  
For see, how many floors it needs . . . .

(CP 191)

The atmosphere of the world inside the building builds up a thought process charged with fear:

. . . and who knows,  
Which he will see, and when?

(CP 192)

With this a degree of emotional involvement begins. The speaker then turns to look at the outside world from within. He describes the man - made world – the brick, the car park, the road and the locked church. With the locked church detail the poem takes off emotionally. The emotional streak completely takes over as the freedom of health outside is sharply contrasted with the prison into which illness casts us:

O world,  
Your loves, your chances are beyond the stretch  
Of any hand from here

(CP 192)

'The Old Fools' offers more than one emotional flight undertaken by the speaker. 'The million – petalled flower' is a very strong image revealing the emotional state:

It's only oblivion, true;  
We had it before, but then it was going to end,  
And was all the time merging with a unique endeavour  
To bring to bloom the million – petalled flower



Of being here.

(CP 196)

The image implies the abandoned possibilities of joyous, youthful life.

For the old fools life is 'there' and not 'here'. The future has nothing but oblivion to offer and the past with its richness is impossible to attain. This makes their present baffling. They do not realize it and their lack of knowledge or awareness results in 'an air of baffled absence, trying to be there / Yet being here.' The speaker is again overcome by emotions, a mix of anger and compassion, on seeing this state of the old fools.

In 'An Arundel Tomb' the contemplation of history and the passage of time releases memorable stanzas. The countess and the earl, carved in stone, displaying gesture of love, have survived through time as a symbol of true love. The speaker, sensitive enough to perceive with a 'tender shock / His hand withdrawn, holding her hand', displays an emotional wishfulness that would like to accept this reassuring symbol. But a skeptical intelligence prompts him to characterize this stone fidelity as 'hardly meant'. The concluding lines of the poem with their reference to the need for such symbols illustrate clearly the constant interchange between the mind and the heart.

#### **D. PREDOMINANCE OF THE CEREBRAL CONSCIOUSNESS OR, AT THE MOST, A BALANCE BETWEEN THE TWO MODES:**

In an interview with Ian Hamilton Larkin himself confessed that he is an emotional poet. At another place he remarked that a poet is governed by an impulse to create. In spite of these, it must be noted that the final note in his poems is, almost always, a cerebral one or, sometimes, a combination of both,

the cerebral and the affective modes. The cerebral consciousness of the speaker may sometimes lead to a postmodern – like non - committed, uncertain end as in ‘The Old Fools’ (already discussed) – ‘Well, we shall find out’. (CP 198) The speakers in Larkin’s poems generally overcome emotions. Larkin, for that matter, successfully subdues the affective mode with the help of a few devices like a generalized statement at the end of a poem (as in ‘I Remember, I Remember’, ‘Dockery and Son’, etc.) and ironic overtones (as in ‘Vers de Societe’).

Sometimes, when the emotions are too intense to overcome, there is an attempt to achieve a balance between the cerebral and the affective modes. The famous poem ‘Aubade’ is one such example. In the course of the poem there is an overlapping of speculation and emotion. Because of its extremely grave subject, there is often a predominance of emotion. The emotional flight carries the speaker to a state of awareness of those moments of life when man is by himself, alone – not at work, not with others, not in the daylight. In those dark night hours – the darkness before dawn – the speaker wonders about death in a mood of intense dejection and dread. The poem projects the ordinariness of the daylight world which seems to go on so normally, so reasonably – people working, meeting their friends and relatives, enjoying the light of the day. But every night this normal looking world dwells in ‘soundless dark’, longs to belong and fears the state of:

Not to be here,  
Not to be anywhere,

(CP 208)

Next day, again, the routine begins; the light reappears. Only the mind records that the whiteness of the sky is like day with 'no sun', and the work goes on because it 'has to be done.'

The subject of the poem is too grave for the speaker to be casual for a long time. The 'soundless dark' in the first stanza hints at the seriousness. And from the very fourth line, 'Till then I see what's really always there', the poem achieves a strong blend of emotion and intellect. The poem is about fear and also about thinking of fear; the former projecting an emotional state of mind, the latter, a cerebral. The state of mind projected, the subject dealt with, are frighteningly emotional; at the same time, it is the speculation and wondering about the nature of fear.

The second stanza projects the fear of the unknown, unfamiliar. 'The mind glares at the glare', not because life has been unworthy or something is missing in life, or some things have not been done, but because of the sense of 'the total emptiness for ever':

The sure extinction that we travel to,  
And shall be lost in always.

(CP 208)

In the third stanza the cerebral is added to the affective when the speaker thinks about the 'way of being afraid':

This is a special way of being afraid.  
No trick dispels. Religion used to try,  
. . .  
And specious staff that says 'No rational being  
Can fear a thing it will not feel', not seeing

That this is what we fear – no sight, no sound,  
No touch or taste or smell; nothing to think with,  
Nothing to love or link with;  
The anaesthetic from which none come round.

(CP 208)

The speaker refers to religion which 'used to try' to offer a comfort. But religion only pretends 'we never die'. Science and reason too, have failed. They may say, 'no rational being / Can fear a thing it will not feel', but this fear is certainly of something never experienced before and yet so true and inevitable a fact.

The next stanza is again about the fear. Since there is no remedy, no comfort against death, what remains throughout life is the terrible fear. In the course of the poem the affective always remains dominant. At one point we feel, the cerebral is defeated, totally overcome by emotion when the speaker says: 'Being brave / Lets no one off the grave.' However, in the concluding stanza the two modes are equally brought to a sort of balance. There is a sense of recognition accompanied by a deep dejection on the part of the speaker. There is a compromise in the end. Though nights are scaring, work and thereby life must keep on going.

#### **E. IMPULSE TO PRAISE:**

In some poems the modernist cerebral comment comes from the speaker's impulse to praise. In poems like 'To the Sea' and 'Show Saturday' the speaker, rejoices the celebration of ordinary events like the annual ritual of going to the sea and a fair. This impulse to praise places the speaker right in the midst of the common humanity. But what makes the cerebral prevail is that even in the

midst of the celebration, the speaker continues to be an outsider, a detached observer. In 'Show Saturday' a show is described. The speaker, it seems, takes us through the show. He describes the games, the shops and the people in the show. He keeps on moving from one place to another and gives specific details – wrestling, acrobats, beer bar, trained races, musical stalls and so on. This dealing with a common experience with a kind of involvement relates the speaker to Postmodernism. However, the modernist detachment still prevails as in the midst of the show, the speaker is alone. He does not participate in any of the activities he describes. He speculates on the symbolic quality of the show. The speaker's eye wanders over the show as it begins – people standing near the arena, then the car parking, then the tires and then the pale sky. As the poem progresses we are taken round the fair; as it comes to a close it is almost as if the afternoon has gone so far. The speaker's eye sees what remains when the show is over. He sees the trucks being loaded, ready to be sent to private addresses. While the crowd merely enjoys the show and returns home, the speaker observes the crowd as part of the show as well as separating from it and returning home. In the beginning the speaker sees humanity as a whole and a part of one family; later on he sees separate families:

The man with hunters, dog – breeding wool – defined women,  
Children all saddle – swank, mugfaced middleaged wives  
Glaring at jellies, husbands on leave from the garden. . . .

(CP 200)

From the happy gathering, which is like summer, people are now back to autumn – to their isolated lives. The speaker thus, seems to suggest that the sense of

'being at one with' is transient, and lasts only as long as the fair goes on, and that separation sets in afterwards.

In the end the speaker expresses a genuine and whole - hearted admiration for the show. It provides an opportunity for vibrant togetherness. The show should go on as a binding link.

Seen as a whole, Larkin's poems are characterized by an intelligence that haunts the speaker throughout the poem. Though there are frequent emotional flights, a vigilant, intelligent awareness takes over in the end. For all the dislike of T. S. Eliot, Larkin shares with him a cerebral consciousness which presides over the poems. Both reject emotions or, rather, control them by a cerebral presence. With Larkin it takes the form of intellectual meditation, but unlike Eliot, Larkin refuses to be intellectual in a way that separates him finally from the 'cut – price crowd' (\*CP 136) he identifies with.

Larkin maintains a poised balance between thought and emotion; the cerebral and the affective are played off against each other in an original way. Perhaps Browning's dramatic monologues are a distant source. But certainly Larkin's poems are more meditative.

### **5.3 MELANCHOLY:**

Another remarkable quality of Larkin's poetry is its peculiar negativism. Larkin's negativism has always been a much debated subject. Geoffrey Thurley, for instance, stresses his 'mental dread of satisfaction'. (Motion, *Philip Larkin* 59) To Ian Hamilton, the great drawback of Larkin's work is its 'rather narrow range of negative attitudes'. (Hamilton, 'Poetry' 70) According to David Timms: "In his

work then, as a whole, Larkin sees life as a bleak, sometimes horrifying business.” (Timms 139) Eric Homberger calls him ‘the saddest heart in the postwar supermarket.’ (qtd. in Motion, *Philip Larkin* 59) Charles Tomlinson criticizes his ‘tenderly nursed sense of defeat’. (Tomlinson 214)

With a negative view of life Larkin is apparently linked with the modernists. However, his negativism is different from that of the modernists. Eliot’s negativism, for instance, was provoked by the times in which he lived. His negativism is mainly a result of depression of the Age – decline of culture and loss of spirituality. Larkin’s negativism, on the other hand, is subjective. It is mainly a result of his own gloominess. Irrespective of the Age, it is a reflection of the fate of the human race.

Larkin’s negativism is more related to melancholy, a deep sadness with which he finally accepts life. Acceptance of life in Larkin’s poetry may be faintly related to Postmodernism – a step ahead and away from Modernism – but Larkin’s acceptance, unlike that of postmodernists, is marked by a deep sadness which is typically Larkinesque.

Melancholy is not an intense emotion; it is a wasting emotion. The tragic is a resolved moment in which affirmation and pain are mixed, but melancholy, because it makes no such single affirmation, is a wasting emotion.

Larkin’s negativism can be compared with Hardy’s negativism (Hardy being the greatest influence on his poetry). Larkin’s negativism is different from the strong pessimism of Hardy. Larkin droops with sadness. Unlike Hardy he is not a fighter. Unlike Hardy’s pessimistic conviction of malign forces, Larkin’s is

always a state of being unsure. The result is a lack of conviction. Hardy is convinced about both, the dignity of the superhuman person and the forces against him. Because of this faith, there is a constant struggle that is tragic. He knows that the malign forces are strong but he is, at the same time, sure that man does and can go on fighting. Though there is final failure, though Tess is going to be hanged, the fact that Tess has lived the conception of a deep, strong character indicates an affirmation which is tragic.

Let us assess the forces and the implications of these forces causing negativism in Larkin's poetry:

#### **A. DISILLUSIONMENT WITH REALITY:**

There is much pain, suffering, darkness, sadness, failure implicit in Larkin's poems. Deprivation, he once said lightly, was for him what daffodils were for Wordsworth. He is certainly preoccupied with:

Time, disappointment, waste, the illusion of love and the evasive reality of loving . . . . Larkin presents himself in the poems as a middle – aged bachelor who has missed out on most of the colourful pleasures of life, a colourful or, at least, a highly coloured childhood, a family, a religion, a poet's freedom. The only freedom he has, or likes to think he has, is freedom from illusions which make other people happy, or, are supposed to make people happy.

(Swinden 349)

One of the reasons for sadness, negativism in Larkin's poetry is disillusionment with reality. Larkin's speakers are disillusioned with reality. They tend to see life as a failure. Their disillusionment with reality can be seen in their attitude to love, daily work, time, etc.



### **A.1. DISILLUSIONMENT IN LOVE:**

In many poems the speaker's disillusionment is caused by his incapacity to love or to be loved. Kuby rightly comments: "There is no experience . . . so inevitably doomed to disillusionment and so valid a symbol . . . for all disillusionment as love." (Kuby 94) In no poem (except perhaps in 'Broadcast') does Larkin seem to express the joy of love. It must be noted here that in some poems he brings out the disillusionment in love with a little postmodern playfulness and irony. (eg., 'If my Darling', 'Latest Face' – already discussed earlier) At times he talks about love with a sort of postmodern ease as in 'Marriages', 'Places, Loved Ones' and 'Love'. In all these poems disillusionment in love is taken for granted, accepted as a natural consequence. In 'Love' the speaker ironically considers the selfish and the unselfish sides of love. To him the selfish side is to be blindly persistent in love and 'upset an existence' for one's own sake. The unselfish side is to 'ignore gravity' by easily letting others down:

The difficult part of love  
Is being selfish enough,  
Is having the blind persistence  
To upset an existence  
Just for your own sake.  
What cheek it must take.

And then the unselfish side –  
How can you be satisfied,  
Putting someone else first  
So that you come off worst?

My life is for me,  
As well ignore gravity.

Still, vicious or virtuous,  
Love suits most of us,  
Only the bleeder found  
Selfish the wrong way round  
Is ever wholly rebuffed,  
And he can get stuffed.

(CP 150)

Everyone tries love. One who is hurt in love realizes that his love was 'selfish', the wrong way. By inverting the implications of the words 'selfish' and 'unselfish', the speaker expresses disappointment with love.

In 'Marriages' the poet says that, when 'getting tired of singleness' one decides to marry, there is selfishness on either side:

They chaffer for a partner –  
Some undesirable,  
With whom it is agreed  
That words such as liberty,  
Impulse or beauty  
Shall be unmentionable.

(CP 63)

In 'Places, Loved Ones' the speaker has:

Not met that special one  
Who has an instant claim  
On everything I own

Down to my name.

(CP 99)

Further, there is an assumption, almost a sure assertion that:

To find such seems to prove

You want no choice in . . .

Whom to love.

(CP 99)

In many poems there is a pinch of pain and suffering in the expression of disillusionment with love. In 'Dry Point' and 'Deceptions' temporary and only apparently fulfilling sexual intercourse, with its impersistence, leads to disillusionment and self – deceit. So, if the woman seduced is in pain and suffering in 'Deceptions', the seducer too, as the speaker says, for his self – deception ' . . . stumbling up the breathless stair / To burst into fulfillment's desolate attic' (CP 32) is equally pitiable.

In 'To My Wife' the speaker regrets the 'peacock – fan' future and matchless potential lost with the choice of his wife. It has been a bad bargain for him:

So, for your face I have exchanged all faces,

For your few properties, bargained the brisk

Baggage . . . .

(CP 54)

Now the wife has 'become my boredom and my future / Another way of suffering . . . .' (CP 54) The speaker is disillusioned with his marriage.

In 'Love Songs in Age' the widow finds her love songs - she used to sing in her youth – wrapped in decorated and coloured covers. And:

The unfailing sense of being young

Spread out like a spring – woken tree wherein

The hidden freshness sang . . . .

(CP 113)

The freshness of youth and brightness of love are still there in the songs. They are:

Still promising to solve and satisfy  
And set unchangeably in order.

(CP 113)

But the promise has not come true in her case. Though it was she who sang them in her youth, the songs did not soothe her, or, perhaps, did not set her married life in order. The recollection thus, is not of fulfilled love associated with the sweet love songs with a freshness of youth but of the meaninglessness of the songs in her life.

'An Arundel Tomb' shows the ambivalence of the relationship between the Earl and the Countess. The sculpture shows an apparently faithful pair, 'lying side by side', holding hands. The speaker notices, 'with a tender shock', 'his hand withdrawn, holding her hand'. But he cannot bring himself to believe that in actual life they lived out this image of reciprocal love. If he were convinced of this, he would probably have been cynical, not melancholic. But he is not quite sure. This state of uncertainty, which draws a postmodern writer towards a hopeless playfulness, generates melancholy in Larkin. It leads to an extreme point of ambivalence as he says that the sculpture proves:

Our almost instinct, almost true:  
What will survive of us is love.

(CP 111)

Thus, Larkin's speakers are disillusioned in love and their disillusionment causes melancholy.

### **A.2. DISILLUSIONMENT WITH DAILY WORK:**

In 'Toads' the speaker is bored with the monotonous slogging for six days of a week. He, therefore, describes his work with the image of a toad. With all dislike for the daily work, he still has to continue with it:

For something sufficiently toad – like  
Squats on me, too;  
Its hunkers are heavy as hard luck;  
And cold as snow;

And will never allow me to blarney  
My way to getting  
The fame and the girl and the money  
All at one sitting:

I don't say on bodies the other  
One's spiritual truth;  
But I do say it's hard to lose either,  
When you have both.

(CP 89-90)

In poems like 'Livings'- Section one and 'Toads Revisited' also there is dissatisfaction with daily work.

### **A.3. DISILLUSIONMENT WITH TIME:**

The speakers in Larkin's poems are disillusioned with the 'present' and tend to escape it or wish to do so. The present for them is, always, uneventful. In 'Triple Time' the poet brings out the inability of man to live in the present. In 'The

Old Fools' neither the present nor the future holds any hope or joy for the old fools. The present is a painful reminder of the end of the power to choose. It indicates degeneration of strength, abilities, efficiencies as well as physical appearance. Childhood had youth to look to and youth, at least, life ahead but old age has nothing to look to except oblivion. They have no control on their present and they bafflingly experience their own decay. So the old fools prefer to live 'Not here and now, but where all happened once.' (CP 196)

### **B. CHOICE AND FUTILITY OF CHOICE:**

Choice, like time, is a major theme of Larkin's poems. Almost all speakers of Larkin's poems make choices. They choose between participating in a dance and remaining away from it, marrying and remaining a bachelor, working and not working, etc. As discussed earlier, they often tend to doubt the propriety of their own choice. One step ahead of it, they often realize futility of any choice in life. This is because, they are obsessed by a sense of transience, impermanence of everything in life. Whatever you choose, the ultimate reality is aging, extinction – death. This pre-determined view of life is also responsible for negativism and sadness in Larkin's poetry. In 'Dockery and Son', having discussed the validity of his own choice of bachelorhood and Dockery's, of having a family, the speaker arrives at a conclusion that, in the ultimate analysis, no choice means anything because:

Life is first boredom, then fear.  
Whether or not we use it, it goes,  
And leaves what something hidden from us chose,

And age, and then the only end of age.

(CP 153)

Thus, the speaker's realization about futility of choice is also a cause of sadness in Larkin's poems.

### **C. OLD AGE, DEATH AND FEAR OF DEATH:**

Larkin is constantly haunted by the idea of mutability, aging death and fear of death. "A painful awareness of oncoming age figures in a number of poems." (Martin 41) In 'High Windows' the speaker, as an old man, recalls his youth as a lost world; time has led him to a point where 'rather than words comes the thought of high windows.' Larkin is so much obsessed by the idea of impermanence, mutability, aging, fear of death and death that in everything he sees and does – a celebration, a journey, etc. – he always thinks of its impermanent nature. The enjoyment of life is, therefore, shadowed by this obsession. In 'Show Saturday' the speaker enjoys the fair but is also concerned with the evening that approaches and sends the crowds 'back to autumn'. In 'To the Sea' he describes the joyous sea – going ritual. He grows nostalgic remembering his participation in the celebration as a child with his parents, but the contemplation on passage of time and with the description of the evening when 'the sunlight has turned milky', when 'the white steamer has gone', he hints at old age and on transience of things.

In 'Vers de Societe' the fear of death is compounded with the fear of growing old. In the beginning of the poem the speaker is reluctant to attend a social gathering, considering it as a waste of time, preferring, instead, to utilize solitude in acquiring knowledge. But ultimately, he accepts the invitation

admitting that 'only the young can be alone freely' and that, to the old, loneliness brings 'not peace, but other things' like the fear of extinction, ceasing. Donald Hall rightly says:

The fear of dying, daily companion of many, found its Homer, Dante and Milton in Philip Larkin. His post – religious, almost Roman skepticism looks forward only to total emptiness forever.

(Hall <http://www.newcriterion.com/archive/04/feb86/philip.html>)

When asked in an interview with the *Observer* whether he remained worried about growing older, Larkin replied:

Yes, dreadfully. If you think you are going to live to be seventy, seven decades, and think of each decade as a day of a week starting with Sunday, then I'm on Friday afternoon now. Rather a shock, isn't it? If you ask why does it bother me, I can only say, I dread endless extinction.

(RW55)

The fear of extinction is beautifully projected in 'Aubade'. The speaker thinks about 'the sure extinction that we all travel to' and fears it because it means:

Not to be here,  
Not to be anywhere,  
And soon, nothing more terrible, more true.

(CP208)

In Larkin's poems 'human beings exist in time; they are born and they experience death', says Roger Day. (Day, R. 12)

In a number of poems Larkin is directly concerned with death. In 'The Old Fools' he deals, at length, with what it means to be old and what old age brings with it. Seeing the undignified decline of the old fools the speaker emotionally cries out, 'Why aren't they screaming?' He thinks of the abundant possibilities of



the 'million - petalled flower of being young'. The anger in the beginning of the poem, supposedly directed towards the old people turns into a contemplation on death. There is an emotional outburst: 'At death you break up', and in the course of the poem the readers learn that the anger is directed, not against the old but against the inevitable approaching of age and death.

In 'The Building' the preoccupation with death is yet more grave. While in 'The Old Fools' aging leads to death, in 'The Building' age is no criterion:

Some are young,  
Some old, but most at that vague age that claims  
The end of choice.

(CP191)

Death can threaten life at any age. The description of the man – made world outside the building – 'beyond the reach of any hand from here' – heightens the intensity of the feeling of hopelessness. No faith or good wishes can contravene:

The coming dark, though crowds each morning try  
With wasteful, weak, propitiatory flowers.

(CP193)

'Aubade', perhaps the gravest of all poems, is a contemplation of death itself. In the darkness of the night the speaker wonders:

how  
And where and when I shall myself die.

(CP208)

Death frightens for the implicit 'emptiness forever'. The entire poem is a meditation on the horror of not being, expressed by a consciousness which knows itself as being. Nothing can comfort. Being courageous is useless too

because 'Being brave / Lets no one off the grave.' Life takes its normal course the next day but 'The sky is white as day with no sun.'

Life takes its normal course with telephones crouching 'In locked up offices / Getting ready to ring'. This resignation, back to normal routine after a horrifying night, the hopeless acceptance that 'work has to be done' may strike as postmodern acceptance, accepting death, fear of death and contemplation on death as part of life but the intense sadness and despair implicit in the acceptance, the depth with which the speaker contemplates on death and the realism with which the subject is approached discourage any consideration of the poem as having postmodern traits. The poem is a new thing in the genre of death poems, in its revelation of the conventional subject.

On the whole, one may put in the words of Brother Anthony that:

Time and death dominate Larkin's poetry in complex ways, for the poems are not fierce protests against their power, and Larkin never uses death as a lever to urge people to improve their lives. It is simply always there, a 'fact of life', to be taken into account, casting its shadow over everything.

(Anthony)

Thus, an insistent preoccupation with failure, bleakness and death in Larkin's poems add up to the dominant impression that 'life is neither long nor sweet.' (Martin 53) Reading Larkin's poetry Calvin Bedient says: "English poetry has never been so persistently out in the cold as with Philip Larkin." (Bedient 69) There is a deep sadness, disgust, disappointment in Larkin's poems. There is no struggle against malign forces. He accepts what he cannot change, with a deep sadness. Writing about Larkin's melancholy Martin Dodsworth says:

He does not attempt to suggest that sadness is anything other than itself; it is no kind of triumph; he does not apply his art to this kind of transformation. His poems are moving to the point of desolation because he lavishes such great skill on saying what he would prefer not to be said at all – that life can overcome us with a sense of futility, that it is full of failure . . . .

(Dodsworth 89)

What basically prevents Larkin from taking a strong pessimistic stand is, as stated earlier, the state of being unsure. There are, in Larkin's poems, two voices – the self and the anti-thesis. If there is one voice that negates, there is another voice that affirms or, at least, desires to affirm. If one voice declares the church as a place not worth entering into, the other voice, curious enough, forces him to enter it.

The tension between the two voices is sometimes released in a negation, in which case, the melancholy is intensified, but sometimes it is released in an affirmation, in which case, melancholy is modified. There are moments of celebration, and praise in the poems. In 'To the Sea' and 'Show Saturday' there is celebration. Even in 'The Whitsun Weddings' the speaker enjoys with the ordinary. Appreciation of beauty also modifies melancholy. Terry Whalen says: "Larkin's predisposition towards beauty mitigates his sadness and keeps it from falling to mere satirical fatigue." (Whalen, *P.L.* 29) The light – house - keeper in 'Livings' is in the midst of nature:

Seventy feet down  
The sea explodes upwards;

(CP187)

He enjoys the movement of waves. He describes the sea-creatures: 'Creatures, I cherish you'. He enjoys beauty and gaiety of the sea during day and night. In 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album' the speaker goes through the photographs with great interest. He enjoys, even though for a short period of time, the freshness of a little school girl 'in pigtailed, catching a reluctant cat', 'a sweet girl, graduate', a young lady 'lifting a heavy – headed rose' or 'balanced on a bike against a fence', (*CP* 71) etc. Thus, as Terry Whalen puts it:

Failure and death in his world are undeniably and also bitterly present and demand candid attention. Yet they are not there only as morbid realities since they provide, in representative poems such as 'Home is so Sad' and 'The Old Fools' a more sober registration of the value of life and a struggling hope that moments of beauty are valuable beyond their immediate sensation.

(Whalen, *P.L.* 29)

Larkin himself has said that he writes two types of poems – one type represented by 'MCXIC' and the other by 'Send no Money'. (The poems are cited by Larkin himself in *RW*) For these poems he says:

they might be taken as representing examples of the two kinds of poems I sometimes think I write: the beautiful and the true . . . . I think a poem usually starts off from the feeling, how beautiful that is or from the feeling, how true that is.

(*RW*47)

This does not mean that he compromises with the truth. As Terry Whalen rightly says, "He proposes to value the beautiful in life without denying the 'true' and depressing moments of experience." (Whalen, *P.L.* 31)

In poems like 'Dockery and Son', 'Absences', 'Next, Please', 'At Grass', 'Wants' and 'Going' Larkin's view of life is negative. The melancholic tone is intensified with a frightening sadness in later poems, especially, those in *High Windows*. The note of complete, hopeless submission found in these poems intensifies the melancholy.

*High Windows* was published in 1974, the time during which Postmodernism had deepened its roots considerably in the poetry of the 'new' poets (after the Movement) on the one hand, and Ted Hughes with his nihilism was striking a frighteningly negative note in his poetry on the other. Larkin seems to be between these two radically apart attitudes – the postmodern hopeless playfulness and loss of intense feelings and responses on one hand and primordial force, energy, intense negativism and equally intense responses on the other. Larkin, though negative, has no intensity and nihilism of Hughes; though hopeless, has no 'take it easy' ease of Postmodernism. As against Hughes's force and energy, Larkin is intensely sad and melancholic.

It must, however, be noted that, in spite of negativism, there is a zest for life in Larkin's poems. To quote James Booth: "Though Larkin constantly regrets the impossibility of transcending death, he shows no interest in transcending life." (Booth 159) To be alive for the old fools means the blooming of 'the million – petalled flower / Of being here'. (CP 196)

There is a longing and an admiration for youth in Larkin's poems. Youth is described as a period of 'neglected chances and opportunities'. Though chances are wasted, youth, perhaps, passes as a neglected present; its loss, certainly, is

a precious one. There is a regret for loss of youth. In 'Sad Steps' the speaker says:

The hardness, and the brightness, and the plain  
Far - reaching singleness of that wide stare  
Is a reminder of the strength and pain  
Of being young, that it can't come again,  
But is for others undiminished somewhere.

(CP 169)

Larkin describes childhood as a 'forgotten boredom', old age as a period of suffering, regret, pain and fear and youth as a period of liberty and fearlessness. In 'Vers de Societe' he says: 'Only the young can be alone freely.' (CP 182) His admiration and longing for youth are found in the title poem of *High Windows*:

When I see a couple of kids,  
And guess he's fucking her and she's  
Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm  
I think this is paradise.

Everyone old has dreamed all their lives  
Bonds and gestures pushed to one side  
Like an outdated combine harvester,  
And everyone young going down the long slide  
To happiness endlessly.

(CP 165)

In the midst of deep sadness, if to be alive is affirmative and satisfying, to be 'less deceived' is also a way of attaining some comfort, fulfillment and satisfaction. Though every choice may be painful, life, at least, offers the

satisfaction of being 'less deceived'. Very often Larkin's 'less deceived' speakers take satisfaction in having self – knowledge, in knowing 'what' they 'can stand'. (CP 118) In 'Self's the Man', 'Mr. Bleaney', etc. the speaker takes the comfort in being less deceived.

Finally, the most positive quality of the poems is, - and it is true for all great poetry – as Larkin himself says, the impulse to create, which is never negative. But he says clearly: "It's unhappiness that provokes a poem . . . . It is very difficult to write about being happy. Very easy to write about being miserable." (RW 47) Thus, Larkin's poetry is melancholic and the melancholy, resulting out of the state of not being sure, implies the possibility, though little, of affirmation.

#### **5.4 IMAGERY:**

Larkin's use of images is unique. His poetry is a full justification of Steven's comment that "the greatest poverty is not to live in the physical world." (qtd. in Whalen, 'Imagist Bias' 29) He is essentially a poet of the physical world, quintessentially, a poet of observation. His poems are full of "visual participation in the observable physical world." (Whalen, 'Imagist Bias', 30) He picks up a series of pictures and describes it with exactness and accuracy. Terry Whalen explains Larkin's participation in the physical world through images as his 'imagist bias' and says that Larkin's poetry, in this sense, 'is not as alien to the work of modernists as the first thoughts tried to assume'. (30) Influence of Pound's imagist poetry in early poetry of Larkin has already been discussed in the second chapter of the present study. There are instances, even in his mature

poetry where the physical world is described with visual images which carry no meaning beyond themselves. In 'Spring' the speaker is in a park. He pens a word picture of the park and the people in it in the imagist fashion:

Green shadowed people sit, or walk in rings,  
Their children finger the awakened grass,  
Calmly a cloud stands, calmly a bird sings,  
And, . . .  
Sun lights the ball that bounce, the dogs that bark,  
The branch – arrested mist of leaf . . . .

(CP 39)

In 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album' the speaker presents a series of significant images as he turns pages of the album:

My swivel eye hungers from pose to pose –  
In pigtails, catching a reluctant cat;  
Or furred yourself, a sweet girl graduate;  
Beneath a trellis or in a trilby hat . . . .

(CP71)

In 'How to Stop' also the images used to describe night appear quite casually:

The keen moon stares  
From the back of the sky,  
The clouds are all home  
Like driven sleep.

(CP35)

In 'Show Saturday' a show is described. The speaker takes us through the show. He describes the games, shops and people in the show. The poem is full of splendid details of the scenes – wrestling, acrobats, beer bar, trained races, musical stalls and so on. The minuteness and accuracy of description are



amazing. The speaker sees even 'six pods of broad beams' and notices that one of them was 'split open'. Here are a few images from the poem describing the show:

The wrestling starts, late, a wide ring of people, then cars;  
Then trees, then pale sky. Two young men in acrobats' fights  
And embroidered trunks hug each other; rock over the grass,  
Stiff – legged, in a two – man scrum. One falls; they shake hands.  
Two more start; one grey – haired; he wins though. . . . .

(CP 200)

It should, however, be noted that in spite of his imagist bias, Larkin is not an imagist poet throughout his poetic career. The physical world does exist for its own sake in the poems but often there are suggestions of meaning – ideas – in the word pictures as a whole.

In 'Church Going' for instance, the speaker enters an empty church and describes it with vivid images. The description together suggests the emptiness of the church. There are things but no people in it. There are scriptures, seats, flowers for worship – not fresh but brown. All these things seem to exist only as show – pieces:

. . . Seats and stone,  
And little books, sprawlings of flowers, cut  
For Sunday, brownish now, some brass and stuff  
Up at the holy end, the small neat organ,  
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence, . . . .

(CP 97)

The description suggests that the church is visited by people only once a week – Sunday. No one bothers to remove the flowers so they have turned brownish.

The idea behind is to convey the dying state of religion and religious beliefs. Religious ceremonies have turned into meaningless customs. The church, except for Sundays, is almost like a museum.

In 'To the Sea' the annual custom of going to the sea is described. The poet's observant eye records even such trifle things as 'cheap cigars / The chocolate – papers, tea – leaves and between / The rocks, the resting soap – tins'. (CP 173) These casual, insignificant – looking images may be taken as giving a touch of ordinariness, commonness with no religious connotations of the custom, of the celebration. The people coming to the sea seek ordinary pleasures like eating chocolates, drinking tea, bathing and listening to transistors. Thus, the images, which seem to have been used casually, carry suggestions of meanings beyond them.

Similarly, the images describing the English landscape as seen through the train – window during the journey in 'The Whitsun Weddings' also appear to be spontaneous observations of the speaker:

Wide farms went by, short shadowed cattle, and  
Canals with floatings of industrial froth;  
A hothouse fleshed uniquely; hedges dipped  
And rose . . . .

(CP114)

The images of rural and urban world are put together here. The idea behind it – to suggest the struggle of the rural world to survive against the urban world – strikes the readers only in the lines that follow:

. . . and now and then a smell of grass

Displaced the smell of buttoned carriage – cloth . . . .

(CP 114)

What is unique about these poems is that their vivid imagery of the observable physical world can be enjoyed as minute observations even without relating them to ideas.

In many of Larkin's poems an intelligent and sensitive persona is engaged with the physical world. He not only feels but also contemplates what he sees. As a result, the images often tend to generate different states of mind in the speaker. In the first section of 'Livings' the speaker who is an agent of agricultural goods describes his visits to small towns and his stay for 'three days' 'every third month' at a hotel:

The boots carries my lean old leather lace  
Up to a single, where I hang my hat,  
. . . at which I read  
The - shire Times from soup to stewed pears;  
Births, deaths. For sale. Police court. Motor spares.

Afterwards whisky in the smoke room.

. . . / The pictures on  
The walls are comic – the trenches, stuff  
Nobody minds or notices . . . .

(CP 186)

The images of newspaper details, the comic pictures on walls unnoticed by others, noticed by the speaker reveal the speaker's boredom with his present uneventful mode of living. During his stay at the village - hotel for business

purpose he has time enough to go through such insignificant details in newspaper as 'births, deaths, for sale'.

In some short lyrics one image is central and the whole poem revolves round it. The water image in the poem 'Water' and the sun image in the poem 'Solar', for example, are such images. However, Larkin's peculiarity lies in presenting a number of images against the dominant image (if there is) in the poem. If train is a dominant journey image in 'The Whitsun Weddings', against that, there are a number of images which the speaker offers as he looks out of the train window.

On the whole, one may say that for Larkin the external world holds as much importance as the internal thought process. He describes the whole of the external world with vivid images and quite often thereby develops the thought process. In most of the poems the images, which appear to be a casual observation, have a significance of their own and reveal an idea or a state of mind.

Larkin's images can be studied in five broad categories with more – or - less traditional significance:

- A. Water image
- B. Light image
- C. Journey image
- D. Building image
- E. Landscape image

## **A. WATER IMAGE:**

Water image is presented in poems like 'And the Wave Sings because it is Moving', 'To the Sea', 'Livings', 'Water', 'Here' and 'The Whitsun Weddings'. It appears as life – giving force. Water has creative powers. It also has immense energy. Amassed water is shown as infinite as against the finite, limited life of human beings. In 'Here' for instance, the sea image conveys the expansive, infinite, elemental world, away from the man-made, industrial town. In a remote place the 'neglected waters' wash the land that ends 'suddenly beyond a beach / Of shapes and shingle'. The land ends and the infinite kingdom of water begins. Unlike the beach in 'To the Sea' the beach is not haunted by human beings. So the sea here retains not only its purity but also its natural beauty. There is an awed admiration for the sea as in Section II of 'Livings'. It is only here that 'unfenced existence' is possible. The lighthouse – keeper cherishes even his living alone, alienated from the outside world, with just the infinite sea around him.

In 'To the Sea' apart from representing immense power, energy and infinity the sea stands for eternity as well. There is the 'same clear water over the smoothed pebbles'. Time can do nothing to the sea. It brings youth to childhood, old age to youth. The speaker, standing on the shore, recalls his parents bringing him to the sea. In this way the infinite sea also stands for eternity.

## **B. LIGHT IMAGE:**

Like water light too, is a natural symbolic image. Sun, moon and stars are its natural sources. Light generally stands for hope. The natural light images in

Larkin's poems often convey the sense of perfection and human desire to attain it, but with their distance and height they stand for unattainable desires, happiness and perfection in life.

The sun with its brightness, light and height is a significant image of light. Commenting on the sun image in Larkin's poetry Terry Whalen writes: "The sun appears in Larkin's world as benevolent and mysterious and as the signification of a dignity of life." (Whalen, *P.L.* 72) In 'Aubade' without the sun the sky is still white but it is dull; the light is pale. In 'Here' again, there is a reference to the sun:

Here is unfenced existence;  
Facing the sun, unattainable, out of reach.

(*CP* 137)

Here the sun is a distant, perfect object. 'Existence / Facing the sun' is not obstructed by the flames of factories, 'large cool stores' (*CP* 135) and 'industrial shadows'. (*CP* 136) It is a pure, remote, dignified existence in the midst of nature. This kind of life is, however, unattainable, 'out of reach; (*CP* 137) the speaker says so explicitly.

In 'The Old Fools' three light images are set against one another: 'lighted rooms', 'burning fire' and 'sun's faint friendliness on the wall'. 'Lighted rooms' inside the head signify the sweet memories of youth – life, which once lived and enjoyed, has become a memory. Against this, there is 'sun's faint friendliness on the wall'. The sun, which stands for joy, has now only faint friendliness with the old fools. But with the help of 'lighted rooms' and 'sun's faint friendliness' the old fools manage to keep the fire of life burning. As an indication of that, there is a burning fire in the room.

The light of the sun is cast over 'The Whitsun Weddings' where it has a benevolent, blessing effect. The speaker thinks of 'London spread out in the sun' when he thinks of the newly wedded couples with him on the train, about to start their married life. The sun here stands for the hope of a bright future for the new lives that will result from the union of the couples.

A remarkable evocation of light can be found at the close of the poem 'Livings' where the stars suggest cyclical reappearance, reassuring permanence, time which seems to be eternity. In the third and final section of the poem the life of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Oxford don is described. We hear of an Oxford don interested in such trifling matters as whether the master will dine with them or not and the kill made by the kitchen cat. Having said all these, there is a sudden shift from the earth to the 'Chaldean constellations':

Above Chaldean constellations  
Sparkle over crowded roofs.

(CP 188)

Stars stand for light and these are 'Chaldean constellations' so they may be taken as implying enlightenment. Very subtly then, Larkin seems to be saying that enlightenment is far beyond life on earth. It thus, may be taken to signify unattainable enlightenment.

More obviously, the image evokes the cyclical and permanent presence of the stars as against the linear and transient movement of history and civilization. The stars have been the witness of the passage of life. The word 'Chaldean' is very significant. The setting of the poem is the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The adjective 'Chaldean' is a reference to the Chaldeas, the starting point of the world's

civilization in Mesopotamia. The light image here in 'Chaldean constellations' suggests time and space. The same stars that shone in the distant past over that distant land shine now and here.

The moon image occurs in 'Dockery and Son'. Returning from Oxford, where the speaker has suddenly realized what he has missed out in life, the speaker sees the 'unhindered moon' and even the 'railway lines'. In the thought process of the speaker, who is evaluating his and Dockery's choices. The moon image is very crucial. The moon with its height and light is unattainable human desire, unreachable ideal as contrasted with the real signified by the railway lines. The fact that the moon is 'unhindered', (*CP* 152) signifies the freedom which human beings long for and cannot have.

### **C. JOURNEY IMAGE:**

The journey image is found in many of Larkin's poems like 'The Whitsun Weddings', 'I Remember, I Remember', 'Here', and 'Dockery and Son'. Except for 'Here' in other poems the journey is undertaken by train. As Salem Hassan writes: "Larkin seems to use the train imagery to give an account of his own experience of time." (Hassan 82) Thus, journey symbolically reveals the speaker's consciousness of time. To quote Hassan again: Journey "is a symbol through which the speaker gets his feelings about time across to the reader." (Hassan 65)

The train journey in 'I Remember, I Remember' reveals the speaker's consciousness of time. During an accustomed journey 'by a different line' the speaker reaches the town where he was born. The train stops there for a while



and then starts to go ahead. The speaker's mental journey now begins. The train journey, which symbolizes movement, progression, is now paralleled by the progression of the speaker's thoughts. While the train moves forward, the speaker's journey takes him backwards, to the past. He recalls how his childhood was 'unspent' in Coventry. The speaker then returns to the present. Both, the train and the speaker, have moved towards their destinations – the train towards London and the speaker towards a further degree of self – knowledge, when he concludes saying that:

I suppose it's not the place's fault,,

. . . .

Nothing, like something, happens anywhere.

(CP 82)

In 'Dockery and Son' also the speaker's thought process parallels with the train's progress. The train journey, paralleled with the speaker's thought process, brings out the poet's perfect sense of time in its linear progression. Unlike postmodernists, Larkin's sense of time is well - defined and clear. He distinguishes between the past, the present and the future.

The most famous of Larkin's journey images occurs in 'The Whitsun Weddings'. Here too, as in 'Dockery and Son', the train journey records passage of time but in this case it records the successive moments in what can roughly be called 'the present'. Salem Hassan remarks:

Larkin seems to use the train imagery to give an account of his own experience of time. To examine its possibilities the train imagery may be used as a defense which the speaker attempts to erect against his fear of

the passage of time. Being on the train provides him with a measure of security which fixity never does.

(Hassan 82)

Salem Hassan further notes two levels on which the train imagery operates. First, unlike 'Dockery and Son' (where the tracks and thereby the train suggest only a forward movement), it offers the reader the possibilities of a return to the same starting point against time which always has one way proceedings.

The speaker on the train succeeds in achieving a sort of detachment from time, in recording certain scenes as the scenes fleet by him like those in a film. Thus, being on the train makes him feel momentarily safe from the blows of time.

The second level on which the train journey operates is that the train, being a vehicle in motion, implies time itself which is never static. Lolette Kuby remarks: "Of course, the train ride is a metaphor for life and the train, a vehicle of destiny carrying the passengers into their fate." (Kuby 121) The train, in other words, is a natural symbol for the present which progresses towards the future and stops at its destination. Thus, it stands for life itself. The train's destination is London and life's destination is death. Life ultimately is a 'frail traveling coincidence' which the newly wedded couples experience during their train journey. The journey comes to an end and the couples get off, falling like arrow - showers. The image of falling arrows has double - edged connotations. The 'falling' strikes us as life coming to an end with all its concomitant and sexual excitement but the reference to rain charges the sexual overtones with implications of the continuity of life somewhere. Though one life ends, a new life flourishes.

At the same time, falling showers also connote an unmistakable forward movement. It is the journey itself that is like the falling showers.

The lyrical, ambivalent end implies both, death and fertility. People must die but life on earth will continue. The travelers may change; the train will continue its regular course.

The train is a vehicle in motion. Its movement implies a number of things. The speaker's awareness progresses as the train moves further. To quote Kuby:

In 'The Whitsun Weddings' the speaker's awareness progresses from rote consciousness of the physical world to interested curiosity in the people of the world, to perception of relationships and their symbolic values, and finally to an identification of the self with others.

(Kuby 146)

As the train journey begins, the speaker is conscious only of the physical world – he was late

That whitsun . . .  
my three – quarters – empty train pull out,  
All windows down . . . .

(CP 114)

Leaning out of the window he now observes the scenes and recalls some of them as he sees them:

We ran  
Behind the backs of houses, crossed a stream  
Of blinding windscreens . . . .

(CP114)

and

Wide farms went by. . .

Floatings of industrial froth.

(CP114)

He records the landscape and goes on reading. He is reluctant to pay attention to the noises that come from the platforms and to the people on the platforms. But a casual look at the wedding parties catches his attention:

I leant:

More promptly out next time, more curiously,

(CP115)

He is now interested in the people. Observing more curiously he picks out the individuals from the groups and identifies them. His interest in the people now deepens and he observes the newly wedded couples who board the train. While the couples sit watching the landscape, and none thinks 'of the others they would never meet / Or how their lives would all contain this hour', he contemplates the whole scene. He thinks of the marriage bond itself. He sees the relationship as structuring fertility and thereby continuation of life on earth. As the train approaches the destination, London, the speaker's awareness has progressed. From point to point he has explored the significance of marriage in life. (This does not mean that, unlike postmodernists, Larkin has faith in marriage as an institution. The success of the fathers standing on the platforms, in getting their daughters married is described as 'purely farcical' in nature. But like postmodernists again, he finds his own resources and brings out significance of marriage in terms of continuation of life.) Thus, here train with its movement may be taken as signifying exploration or quest as well.

The train moves from Lincolnshire in the first stanza to London in the last, and the imagery moves from realistic description in the first stanza to symbolism in the last from vehicles of realism. The train and the poem as aesthetic objects are both transformed to 'microcosms of life'.

In 'Here' also, in the course of the car journey, the realistic images move towards the symbolic ones. Here the journey signifies exploration of 'unfenced existence / Facing the sun'.

In 'Here' the speaker is always in the present unlike the speakers in 'Dockery and Son', 'I Remember, I Remember' and 'The Whitsun Weddings'. The journey image, on the whole, generates a contemplative state of mind in the speaker and an awareness of movement through space.

#### **D. BUILDING IMAGE:**

The building image is presented in poems like 'Church Going' and 'The Building'. The speaker presents a number of vivid images against the dominant building image and develops the implications and meaning of the building. The building image in 'Church Going' symbolically presents a postmodern note (Discussed in the previous chapter) – a rejection of the narrative of Christianity. The church with the things inside it and with its surroundings signifies a loss of religious faith; as a social institution concerned with man's birth and death; it is a significant place 'to grow wise in' with so many dead 'lying around':

In 'The Building' the building is described as under:

All round it close – ribbed streets rise and fall

Like a great sigh out of the last century.

The porters are scruffy; what keep drawing up

At the entrance are not taxis; and in the hall  
As well as creepers hangs a frightening smell.

There are paperbacks, and tea at so much a cup  
Like an airport –lounge; but those who tamely sit  
On rows of steel chairs turning the ripped mugs  
Haven't come far. More like a local bus  
These outdoor clothes and half – filled shopping bags  
And faces restless and resigned, although  
Every few minutes comes a kind of nurse  
To fetch someone away . . . .

(CP191)

Here, the building image gets recognized with the help of other images like 'scruffy' porters, a vehicle 'drawing up / At the entrance' and people 'tamely' sitting 'on rows of steel chairs'. Even without mentioning directly, the poet conveys the identity of the building to the readers with the help of these images. The images make it clear that the building is a hospital.

#### **E. LANDSCAPE IMAGE:**

The post - war English landscape, described with vivid images by Larkin, has been discussed in detail under Larkin's provincialism in Chapter 3 of the present study.

#### **5.5 CRAFTSMANSHIP:**

Unlike postmodernists who, as has been observed, seem to pay less attention to the craftsmanship of a poem, Larkin, though not experimental and clumsy in technique and style like modernists, is, by all means, a careful and a conscious writer for whom poetry is a verbal device. His poetry is an outcome of

well – organized, well – expressed ideas and emotions after drafts and redrafts. The point has already been touched upon in the third chapter of the present study that writing was never a profession for Larkin; as he himself said, he wrote two to three poems a year. Anthony Thwaite, the editor of Larkin's collected poems, gives interesting information about Larkin's drafts of poems. To quote his own words:

The notebooks show that from 1949 on, Larkin was an intensive worker at his drafts. The beginning of a poem and its completion often lay apart. For example, his first attempt at 'Love Songs in Age' was made in July 1953, but it was then dropped and not taken up again until December 1956, being completed on 1 January, 1957. 'Take one Home for the Kiddies' was begun in 1954, set aside, and then brought to completion in August 1960. 'Church Going' began on 24 April, 1954, went through twenty – one pages of drafts, was 'abandoned 24/5/54' and then resumed and completed in July of that year.

(Thwaite, *CP XVII*)

Thus, Larkin is very conscious in organizing and structuring his thoughts and feelings with apt words.

Larkin is also a master of meditative lyrics. Many of his poems are contemplative in nature. Apart from very short poems like 'Water', 'Solar', 'The Trees' and 'Home is so Sad', most of his poems seem to follow roughly a pattern – casual beginning, contemplative (including both, thought and feeling) middle and serious end. 'High Windows', 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album', 'The Whitsun Weddings', 'Reasons for Attendance' 'Love Songs in Age', 'Church Going' and many more remarkable poems seem to follow this pattern. Larkin generally begins a poem casually (except for poems directly dealing with a very

grave subject like death) and ends it on a serious note. 'High Windows' for instance, begins with an observation of the youth and ends on a serious thought of high windows:

The sun – comprehending glass,  
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows  
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.

(CP 165)

Larkin's poems are generally rhythmic but what is, perhaps, unprecedented is the ease with which he accommodates conversation, emotional and lyrical outbursts, meditative flow of language and generalized, down – to – earth statements within complex rhyming lines. 'Dockery and Son', for instance, has conversation within the rhyming lines:

'Dockery was junior to you,  
Wasn't he?' said the Dean, 'His son's here now.'  
Death – suited, visitant, I nod, 'And do  
You keep in touch with –' Or remember how  
Black – gowned, unbreakfasted, and still half – tight  
We used to stand round that desk, to give  
Our version of 'these incidents last night?'  
I try the door of where I used to live:

(CP 152)

The a b a b c d c d rhyme scheme is maintained even with the conversation within the lines. The conversation idiom is there in 'I Remember, I Remember' also:

Coming up England by a different line  
For once, only in the cold new year,  
We stopped, and watching men with number-plates



Sprint down the platform to familiar gates,  
'Why, Coventry' I exclaimed, 'I was born here.'

(CP81)

From this exclamation the speaker smoothly turns to contemplation. He contemplates how his childhood was 'unspent' in Coventry. From this recollection of past he returns to present and ends the poem again with a conversation:

'You look as if you wished the place in hell,'  
My friend said, 'Judging from your face.' 'Oh, well,  
I suppose, it's not the place's fault', I said,  
'Nothing, like something, happens anywhere.'

(CP82)

Many of Larkin's poems are divided in stanzas and very often the poet uses run-on lines overflowing from one stanza to the next. This not only serves as a link between stanzas but also maintains a continuity of building up of the theme and of the thought process. Here is just one example:

I thought it would last my time –  
The sense that, beyond the town,  
There would always be fields and farms,  
Where the village louts could climb  
Such trees as were not cut down;  
I knew there'd be false alarms

In the papers about old streets  
And split – level shopping, . . . .

(CP189)

The chapter has attempted to highlight the unique qualities of Philip Larkin as a poet – these qualities have, within themselves, traits of Modernism as well as Postmodernism and yet adhere completely to none. The chapter, thus, completes the consideration of Larkin as a poet trapped between Modernism and Postmodernism.

## **CHAPTER - 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

The earlier chapters of the present study have attempted to develop the argument based on the hypothesis made at the very outset. This concluding chapter attempts to assert the distinct position of Philip Larkin on the literary scene as an individual poet whose poetry is trapped between Modernism and Postmodernism and, thereby, justify the hypothesis.

Philip Larkin was born in 1922, just one year after the publication of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Both these texts are considered as landmarks in Modernism. Modernism was at its peak during this period. Larkin's last volume of poems *High Windows* was published in 1974 and a collection of his essays and interviews, *Required Writing*, in 1983. By this time Postmodernism had deepened its roots in English culture and literature. Thus, Larkin lived through the two very important socio - cultural and literary periods of English history – Modern and Postmodern. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century is dominated by socio-cultural, literary conditions called Modernism; the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is dominated by socio-cultural, literary, etc. traits vaguely defined as Postmodernism.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century came to be known as Modern Age or the Age of Anxiety in England. Modernism is closely related to or, is rather, the result of anxiety. The anxiety was caused by factors affecting life and literature. Some of these factors are - giving up of traditions, dynamism and progressiveness of the new age, World War I, loss of spirituality and religious faith. With the turn of the

century English society, culture, literature – life in general – underwent several changes. There was a strong reaction against the traditions, the old, settled way of life and the established values of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The old generation lamented the loss and was led to anxiety. There was an extraordinary enthusiasm for experiment and a strong will towards change and progress among the new generation. It was an age of dynamism. However, too much of speeding up with dynamism and too much of ambitiousness, for its unrealized ideals, resulted in anxiety.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed two World Wars at an interval of just 20 years. The World Wars brought out the ugly face of man. At one level it caused deaths and destruction; at another level it showed what man is capable of doing to another man.

The Industrial Revolution led to a hopeless urbanization right from the Victorian era. Industrial towns and cities were inhabited by people belonging to two distinct classes – the workers and the owners, the exploited and the exploiters, the poor and the rich. The growing distinction between these classes resulted in anxiety.

The loss of religious faith following Darwin's theory of Evolution, gradually resulting in the loss of spirituality also caused anxiety in the Modern age.

Modernist literature received all these factors with a shock. Concerned with problems of existence, literature was existential in nature.

The demarcating line between Modernism and Postmodernism is very thin. Postmodernism grows from Modernism. It works on Modernism. It deals

with almost the same issues as that of Modernism. But it is different from Modernism in attitude to these issues. Modernism for example, grieves the loss of spirituality, religious belief, harmony and integrity in life. Postmodernism, on the other hand, does not complain about anything but tends to accept it. Unlike Hardy, Yeats or Eliot a postmodern writer is not sad that God is dead.

Postmodernists have no faith in any kind of absolutes. Postmodernism revels in fragmentation and does not seem to long for a permanent absolute truth.

A postmodern personality is schizophrenic – one who has lost the sense of time; one who is a split personality.

Postmodern culture is diversified. It is mass culture, consumer culture. It is marked by plurality of cultures. Postmodern society is identified by scholars as mass society. Everything including literature is commodified. A writer's success is measured in terms of the sale of his 'product' – book.

Postmodern literature reflects fragmentation and loss of consistent, absolute truth. It is often marked by a hopeless playfulness and ceases to be profound. There is not one, definite meaning. Texts are open ended in meaning and form. Parody, pastiche, irony etc. are some of the favourite devices of postmodern writers.

The thinkers and scholars associated with the history and development of Postmodernism are Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and Baudrillard.

Larkin grew to manhood in the era of Modernism and unconsciously, rather than with conscious effort, drew towards postmodern directions. His poetry reflects the traits of both from time to time.

Larkin's literary career may be classified in three chronological periods of unequal length. The first phase, starting from his teens – the time when he started writing poetry – lasts until the publication of his first volume of poetry *The North Ship* and his two novels *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter*. This phase covers Larkin's school years, the years spent at Oxford and the period of his first job as a librarian in Wellington library, Shropshire. The second phase – a time of challenges and struggle in Larkin's personal life as well as in his literary career – consists of the period between his move to Leicester University Library in 1946 and his becoming an assistant librarian in Queen's University, Belfast in 1950. The third phase – the most successful and productive one with publication of his all fame - winning volumes of mature poetry, *The Less Deceived*, (1955) *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974) – lasts until the end of his literary career.

In the first phase Larkin's poetry was a bundle of influences recording influence of modernist poetry in general and of modernist poets like Yeats and Auden in particular, of Romantics, Gray, etc. In the first volume of his poems *The North Ship* Yeats is a major influence. The influence of Yeats continued for a pretty long time in Larkin's poetry and until he got influenced by Hardy, Larkin imitated Yeats' music and rhythm. There also appears a resemblance to Yeats' subjects. Yeatsian cycle of 2000 years of Christian civilization, brought out very

well in his 'The Second Coming', for instance, seems to be in Larkin's mind in the following lines:

Let the wheel spin out  
Till all the created things  
With shout and answering shout  
Cast off remembering;  
Let it all come about  
Till centuries of springs  
And all their buried men  
Stand on the earth again.

(*The N.S.* 11-12)

Yeatsian music is imitated in the first poem of *The North ship* – 'a drum taps, a wintry drum'. Yeats' famous scarecrow imagery in 'Sailing to Byzantium' appears in one of the poems in *The North ship*.

- Knowing that I can  
Never in seventy years be more a man  
Than now – a sack of meal upon two sticks.

(*The N.S.* 32)

Larkin's 'Born Yesterday' very much resembles Yeats's famous poem 'A Prayer for my Daughter' in its subject matter.

Larkin's early poetry reflects some features of modernist poetry in general. There is for instance, use of allusions in Larkin's poems. It must be noted that unlike modernists, Larkin does not use very scholarly allusions. Even without understanding these allusions his poetry can be read, understood and enjoyed by the readers.

As a poet of observation Larkin makes use of several visual images to describe the world he observes. This takes his poetry close to the imagist poetry propounded and popularized by Ezra Pound. However, all his poetry is not imagist. Like the symbolist modern poetry there is use of symbols, often as obscure as that of modernist poetry, in the early poetry of Larkin. In the title poem 'The North Ship', for instance, the journey image is extended with the use of ship as a symbol.

Right from the early stage of his literary career Larkin, like the modernists, is a careful craftsman.

Consideration of nature in Larkin's early poetry marks the influence of the Romantics. However, his treatment of nature is often that of a modernist.

With all the influences, there are certain features which are typically Larkinesque and which are found in his mature poetry. Larkin, for instance, perceives time as an 'echo of an axe in a wood.' (*CP* 295) In many early poems there is a reference to death. Time and death are recurrent themes in Larkin's later poetry.

For a short period of time during his literary career Larkin was associated, as the central figure, with an unofficially formed group of undergraduate writers studying at Oxford and Cambridge. The group came to be known as the Movement. The writers came close to one another through personal contact and friendships. The friendship between Larkin and Amis, for example, deeply influenced each other's writings. The writers came from, more or less, similar socio – cultural background. Many of them went to Oxford on scholarships. They



belonged to the same age group. Above all, they had similar ideas and opinions. They all, for instance, agreed on a distaste for modernist poetry.

The Movement is not only an important phase in Larkin's literary career, it also plays a significant role in leading English poetry from Modernism to Postmodernism. Some features of the Movement suggest postmodern dimensions.

Provincialism is a dominant feature of the Movement literature. The writers describe postwar, postindustrial English landscape, society and culture. They do not glamorize provinces. Larkin too, is at home in an urban setting. In poems like 'The Whitsun Weddings' and 'Here' he describes the post - industrial landscape. His world is essentially urban. His speakers observe factory workers and residents from 'raw estates'. (*CP* 136) However, unlike most of the Movement writers he exhibits little bitterness and cynicism towards the bourgeois culture, at least, in his poetry. This takes him close to Jameson's explanation of postmodern culture.

Another significant feature of the Movement, leading to Postmodernism is, anti – modernism. It is true that Larkin began his literary career with modernist influence. But in this phase he, along with other Movement writers, revolted against modernism. Rejecting the grand themes of modernist poetry, the Movement poets confined themselves to experiences of day – to – day life. They avoided use of scholarly allusions in their poems.

The Movement poetry is, largely, anti – romantic. The poets were drawn to Romantic poetry only to reject it.

The Movement poets had a sense of audience in the process of writing. They wanted to be agreeable to both 1. the general mass and 2. a small group of intellectuals, so they consciously tried to create an image of themselves as polite and modest. For this, they used expressions like 'well', 'surely', 'I suppose'. Some of these expressions indicate uncertainty, non – commitment. This can be linked faintly with postmodern uncertainty. The provincialism of the Movement and Larkin, anti – modernism and use of non – committal expressions of the Movement poets anticipate Postmodernism. Thus, the Movement and Larkin in it seem to lead English poetry in general from Modernism to Postmodernism.

Some features of Larkin's poetry (apart from those of the Movement) may be seen as reflecting Postmodernism in its infancy or anticipating it. With down-to-earth realistic poetry of day-to-day life and the Movement strategy of simplicity Larkin's poetry becomes the best-seller poetry in England.

Larkin calls his poetry a verbal device meant to preserve experiences. Free from intellectual and aesthetic subtleties, his poetry – with this utilitarian approach – tends to indicate postmodern dimensions. It is a verbal device which preserves ordinary experiences. Thus, Larkin's poetry is a low-profile poetry of day-to-day, ordinary experiences like visiting a church, going through a photograph album and journeying by a train.

Larkin's speakers are isolated modernist individuals but the world they observe or detach themselves from and describe bears marks of Postmodernism. The world described in the poems is often comic as in 'Latest Face' and 'If my Darling'; it is low-profile with ordinary pleasures like going to the

sea and enjoying the annual ritual as in 'To the Sea'; going to a show as in 'Show Saturday' and enjoying dance as in 'Reasons for Attendance'; it is the monotonous world of the working class as in 'Here'; it is the mass society which negates strong beliefs as in 'Church Going', which is passive in attitude as in 'This be the Verse' and in which traditional centers of authority like family tend to lose their binding power as in 'Home is so Sad'.

Like modernist poetry Larkin's poetry reveals failure of genuine love relationships but, unlike modernists, Larkin rarely seems to complain about the loss. Like postmodernists he accepts it as a normal situation, as in 'Talking in Bed'.

Larkin's attitude to Christianity is also postmodern. He is not sad about loss of religious beliefs or faith. It is often taken for granted, neglected and accepted easily in his poetry as in 'Church Going' and 'Vers de Societe'.

Uncertainty, ambivalence and lack of conviction – these typical features of Postmodernism are found in Larkin's poetry. However, in a different context, Larkin often concludes a poem on a note of uncertainty which, in its turn, leaves the poem open ended. In the poem 'afternoons', for instance, the young mothers grow nostalgic about their love relationship and courting places in the park. The poem ends with the suggestion that:

Something is pushing them  
To the side of their own lives.

(CP121)

The word 'something' and the phrase 'to the other side' open up possibility of several implications.

Larkin seems to use some of the devices frequently used by postmodern writers. These are irony, parody, pastiche, etc. His use of colloquial words in poetry also links him to Postmodernist writing.

With all these, the fact remains that like every literary artist, - Larkin too - at his best, is a unique individual artist. Thus, there are certain features in Larkin's poetry which are unique and which bear a mark of being typically Larkinesque. Each of these qualities, in varying degree is, in itself a trap between Modernism and Postmodernism i.e, it has within itself traits of Modernism as well as Postmodernism and yet alludes completely to none. Larkin's speakers, for instance, are modernist individuals, detached observers who do not participate in the action they describe; at the same time, there seems to be a conscious and deliberate resistance to involvement on their part perhaps to avoid postmodern mass identity like that of Arnold or Dockery. They are, like postmodern split identities, dual personalities. They make their own choices in life and then often find them unfulfilling.

There is often a tension between the cerebral consciousness and an affective mode in Larkin's poetry. The cerebral consciousness can be related to the modernist element of contemplation; the affective mode indicates the postmodernist element of emotion. The tension between the two is generated with the help of dramatic personalities. Larkin's dramatic speakers are essentially thinking beings. They observe a scene or an action and contemplate it. This cerebral consciousness is often in conflict with a strong affective mode in them. At some point the speakers seem to be swept away by emotions. However, they

manage to overcome emotions with the help of irony or, at least, they manage to balance the cerebral and the affective modes. In any case, the fact remains that the final note is always a cerebral one.

Another unique quality of Larkin's poetry is its negativism. With a negative view of life he is apparently linked with Modernism. However, unlike modernists his negativism is related to melancholy, a deep sadness with which he accepts life. This acceptance of life may be related to Postmodernism. But unlike Postmodernism there is a deep sadness and pain in the acceptance and this is typical of Larkin. Unlike Hardy, the major influence on him, Larkin lacks conviction of any kind. With an assurance about both, the dignity of human efforts as well as of malign forces bound to overpower man, there is a constant struggle in Hardy that is tragic. In Larkin, on the other hand, there is a hopeless drooping with sadness.

Many forces are responsible for negativism in Larkin's poetry. Larkin's speakers are disillusioned with reality. Unfaithful, unfulfilling and unsatisfying love relationship, the incapacity to love as well as to be loved cause disillusionment. Monotony and boredom of daily work is also a cause of disillusionment. Time – a major theme in Larkin's poetry – also drives Larkin's speakers to disillusionment. Inability to live in the present causes disillusionment among Larkin's speakers.

Choice, another major theme of Larkin's poems is also responsible for negativism. His speakers make their choices, at one point they doubt aptness of their choice; they even try to take satisfaction in being 'less deceived' compared to others by the very act of choosing. But they realize that every choice is, after

all, futile, meaningless as death is the ultimate reality. There is an obsessed sense of impermanence and a constant preoccupation with the aging process, old age, the fear of death and death itself in Larkin's poems. All these are responsible for negativism in Larkin's poetry. However, with all this negativism there are moments of affirmation in his poetry. If melancholy, the state of uncertainty, leads to negativism, it has a possibility of affirmation also. There is a longing, a zest for life and a celebration of youth in his poetry.

Larkin's use of images is unique. Like the modernist Pound he is essentially a poet of the physical world. He records the world around him with minute visual details in a seemingly imagist fashion. However, in the casual looking word-pictures there are suggestions of meaning, ideas. Sometimes, word pictures with images reveal states of mind in Larkin's poetry.

Larkin's images can be studied in five broad categories with more or less traditional significance. These categories are Water image, Journey image, Light image, Landscape image and Building image. Here Larkin appears quite traditional in his use of these images.

Like postmodernists Larkin is a cautious craftsman. Unlike them he does not claim to be an experimental poet, experimenting with new forms, devices and techniques in his poems. However, he perfected his poems with drafts and redrafts. Stanzas with run-on lines, conversation, contemplative mode, lyricism – all these within one poem with a rhyme scheme, etc. are some unique features of Larkin's craftsmanship.

The following are the findings of the study undertaken:

1. Larkin lived through socio – cultural and literary conditions of two periods, dominated by two different aesthetics – Modernism and postmodernism, hence his poetry reflects the traits of both from time to time.
2. The early poetry of Larkin bears the influence of modernist poetry in general and of modernist poets like Auden and Yeats in particular.
3. Some features of modernist poetry – imagism, symbolism, allusion and a careful craftsmanship – are reflected in the early poetry of Larkin.
4. Other influences on Larkin's early poetry include the influence of Thomas Gray and of Romantic poetry. Like Romantic poets Larkin writes about nature in his early poetry but most of the times his treatment of nature is like that of a modernist.
5. Preoccupation with time, death etc. – Some of the favourite themes of Larkin in his mature poetry – appear even in the midst of influences in his early poetry.
6. The Movement, an important phase of Larkin's poetry, is a significant landmark in 'contemporary' English poetry, leading it from Modernism to Postmodernism.
7. Provincialism, anti-modernism and a sense of audience of the Movement poetry with Larkin as its central figure suggest a shift from Modernism towards postmodern dimensions.
8. Larkin's poetry of day-to-day life with the poet's conscious effort to appeal to the common readers as well as to the intellectuals, is the

best – seller poetry in England – a measure of success in postmodern consumer society.

9. By considering his poetry as a verbal device to preserve an experience, Larkin unconsciously departs from modernist aestheticism to postmodernist utilitarianism.
10. Larkin's low – profile poetry of every day experiences comes close to the concern of postmodernists with common, low – profile subjects.
11. The comic, monotonous and low – profile world of the postindustrial mass society described by speakers of Larkin's poetry bears the marks of Postmodernism.
12. Like both, modernist and postmodernist writings, Larkin's poetry is marked by a rejection of Christianity but, unlike modernists, Larkin does not grieve over the loss of religious belief. Like postmodernists, he accepts it without any complaint or sadness.
13. Uncertainty and ambivalence at the end of a Larkin poem anticipate open - ended postmodern texts.
14. Use of irony, colloquial words and wry humour are typical postmodern features in Larkin's poetry.
15. There are certain unique qualities in Larkin's poetry, each of which has, within itself, traits of both - Modernism and Postmodernism and yet alludes completely to none.



- A. Larkin's dramatic speakers are modernist individuals who deliberately seem to detach themselves from the world around them, perhaps, to avoid postmodern mass identity.
- B. In Larkin's poetry there is often a tension between a cerebral consciousness (modernist element of contemplation) and an affective mode (postmodernist element of emotion).
- C. Like poetry of modernists, Larkin's poetry is marked by negativism but, unlike them, Larkin's negativism consists in melancholy. Like postmodernists he tends to accept life but, unlike them, there is a deep sadness in his acceptance.
- D. Larkin uses imagery in a unique way. Sometimes, like imagist poetry, he brings out visual images; sometimes, like symbolist poetry, imagery is extended with the help of symbols. He uniquely uses recurrent images which can be classified in five broad categories: Water image, Light image, Journey image, Landscape image and Building image.

**16.** Larkin's poetry is a transitional poetry which moves smoothly from Modernism to Postmodernism (though without the poet's knowledge or conscious efforts) and it reflects the traits of both from time to time.

Finally, it may be asserted that Philip Larkin is a typically mid 20<sup>th</sup> century post-war British poet whose poetry belongs to the transitional phase from Modernism to Postmodernism and reflects the transition very well by moving unconsciously, on one hand, from Modernism to Postmodernism and reflecting

from time to time the influences of both on the other. Even with all these, it establishes itself as unique poetry of a unique individual.

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