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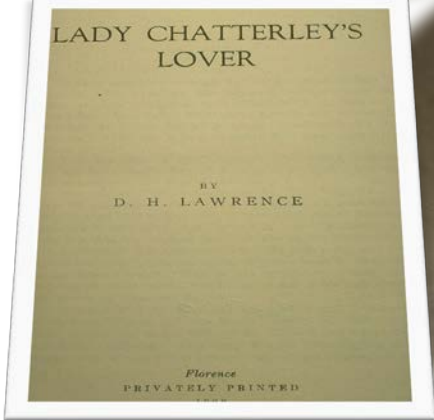
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Philip Larkin and Secularisation

By

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Contents:

Chapters	Titles	P.no.
	Summary	i
	Introduction	1-25
Chapter 1	<i>Jill and A Girl in Winter: A Revelation of Self</i>	26-48
Chapter 2	Submission is the only Good : The Unconditional Love	49-74
Chapter 3	The Sad-eyed, Clear-eyed:	75-187
	(I) Rejecting the Myths	75-95
	(II) A Hunger for Seriousness: Religion, Sex, Art	96-118
	(III) From Conflict to Compromise	119-134
	(IV) The Padlocked Cube of Light: The Urge for Freedom	135-178
	(V) The Total Extinction: Perception vs Reality	179-187
Chapter 4	Beyond the Shapes and Shingles	188-205
Chapter 5	From 'Here' to High Windows	206-224
Chapter 6	The Quest for Meaning: From Proximate to Ultimate	225-234
	Bibliography	235-245

Summary

Philip Larkin's work covers a span of life that marks one of the most turbulent and transitional stages in British history: having WW2 at one end and the 'swinging sixties' at the other, it serves as a really useful document about not only Larkin's personal life but also the contemporary cultural, social and political circumstances. With war working as a catalyst, the slow and steady process of secularisation in English society covers a journey of, perhaps, centuries within decades. The old established ways in every sphere of life, challenged by the new generation, emerge in the form of a 'youth culture' characterised by a spirit of freedom. Consequently, the pre-war communal values are replaced by the individual and materialistic concerns of an ambitious generation.

The process leaves its marks on Larkin's work from the very beginning to the very end. His novels and first published collection of poems show his deep concern for the miserable situation of a war-stricken people. *The Less Deceived* (1955), urged mostly by the unfulfilled war-time promises in the immediate post-war era, is characterised by a rejection of myths. The third collection, *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), features the poet's frustration over the growing materialistic pursuits in the contemporary age. Finally, *The High Windows* (1974) takes the form of a bitter satire over the excessively libertarian attitude as well as the myth of life as a whole. This pattern has been followed also in the chapter-wise division of the thesis where the argument, taking its initiative from a humanistic approach, deflates the mythical as well as materialistic aspect of life, and concludes in the need for a harmonious whole where individual freedom and communal values, keeping within the rational limits, go hand in hand.

Introduction:

I

Philip Larkin's poetry, particularly the poems such as 'Church Going', 'Going, Going', 'Here', 'High Windows', 'To the sea' and 'Show Saturday', demonstrates that the fulfilment Larkin longs for lies in a sense of harmony that is not simply emotional, cultural and social but also of terrestrial and spiritual significance. In fact, what is remarkable about most of his poems is their relevance in the contexts of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007) as well as Jonathan Bate's *Song of the Earth* (2000). They, in a way, present a synthesis of the ideas in both the books: a contemporary modern self's dissatisfaction or lack of fulfilment is as much due to its displacement regarding the natural ways as the spiritual ways of living life.

What Taylor's *A Secular Age* establishes as the cause for the phenomenon of secularization is 'a change in sensibility': a change from a 'porous' into a 'buffered' self, or a shift from an 'enchanted' to a 'disenchanted' world, making an individual have the experience of life in a different way. Hence, the unhampered live communion that merged a pre-modern 'porous self' with the external world into a single harmonious whole stopped working anymore. The 'change in sensibility' had actually been the awakening 'conscious', an outcome of the complex interplay of a modern, rational, scientific and practical approach in various forms that themselves were motivated by different historical events and movements of cultural, social and political value from time to time. Using the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century Europe – one of the most significant movements that served as a turning point in the history of the western world – as a reference in the historical perspective of his secularisation thesis, Taylor explains how it performed a role in germinating reflective, rational, analytical and scientific modes within the 'self'. The subsequent social, scientific and technological advancement pushed the 'self' further away from the sphere of cosmic, spiritual and supernatural forces that used to be within the range of its experience while in a 'porous' state, thereby helping to make things specifically and life in general meaningful.

'Conscious', rising as a buffer, blocked the previously porous position between a 'self' and the world outside. 'Meaning' – which a 'porous self' imbibed from the outer world – shifting into the inner world of a

'buffered' self, transformed into an outcome of the rational and analytical process occurring within. In other words, a 'self' in its 'buffered' form – independent of the influence of cosmic forces – devised an alternative disciplinary system that follows its own individual, rational and logical ways of authentication. With rationality and logic as prime principles, a 'buffered self' has little to do with the good and evil spirits once experienced as pervading the world, and having a role in shaping the 'lives, psychic and physical', of those with 'porous' selves. With 'conscious' replacing 'porousness', things that were previously linked with the realm of spirituality and supernaturalism and interpreted as such, now came to be explained in rational, scientific, medical, psychological and technical jargons. In fact, with the theories of 'conscious', 'subconscious' and 'unconscious' entering the sphere of literature and literary criticism, life assumed the form of a psychoanalytical phenomenon.¹ For example, most of the behavioural issues and their consequences believed as spiritual in the pre-modern age are now treated as hormonal and psychological.²

An embodiment of this phenomenon of change may be imagined in Larkin's poetic journey from 'Church Going' (1955) to 'The Building' (1973): a scene shifting from the decaying church building (representing the declining spiritual and communal ways of English life) to the high 'building' of a hospital that people visit in the hope 'to transcend the thought of dying'³. However, a prominent aspect of the latter poem is the image of 'a locked church' that reminds of the church in 'Church Going':

'When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?'

⁴

¹ Md. Mahroof Hossain, 'Psychoanalytic Theory used in English Literature: A Descriptive Study', *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: G Linguistics & Education*, 17.1, (2017).

² Charles Taylor, *Buffered and porous selves* (2018) <<https://tif.ssrc.org/2008/09/02/buffered-and-porous-selves/>> [accessed 15 May 2018].

³ Philip Larkin, 'The Building', in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), p. 84-86

⁴ Ibid, 'Church Going', pp. 35-36

The wonderings and fears in the lines written about a decaying church in 1953 seem to have come true in the image of the 'locked church' of 'The Building' composed about a hospital in 1973, almost twenty years later. The 'locked church' building – having seen its good days at some point in the past, perhaps – seems forgotten and lost in the dull, dusty and insignificant look of the surroundings. One can easily understand how tale telling the silent deserted look of the image is, especially when seen from the height of the busy 'building', its counterpart. The poem, through images like these, seem to convey that the things once sought for through spiritual rituals conducted in liturgical expressions are now being dealt with medically and scientifically in a jargon specifically used in the context of various forms of ill-health. With the 'parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases'⁵ or, with a 'self' locked to spiritual forces, a contemporary modern man cannot have the experience of the pilgrims to Canterbury for whom the water that 'contained a miniscule drop of the blood of Thomas à Beckett . . . could cure anything, and even make [them] better people'⁶.

'Faith Healing', while depicting somewhat mockingly the sight of an American faith healer 'in rimless glasses, silver hair,/Dark suit, white collar . . . Directing God about this eye, that knee'⁷ of a sick woman, reaches quite a serious and sympathising conclusion. The woman's problem is nothing but a thirst for love, and what makes her 'twitching and loud/With deep hoarse tears' is no more than the faith-healer's 'warm spring rain of loving care' reflected in the gentle and affectionate way he uses 'his voice and hands'⁸ while dealing with her:

'In everyone there sleeps
A sense of life lived according to love.
To some it means the difference they could make
By loving others, but across most it sweeps

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid, 'Faith Healing', pp. 53-54

⁸ Ibid

As all they might have done had they been loved.’⁹

Suggesting emotional deprivation as the cause of the woman’s misery in the context of faith healing shows the psychological approach of a modern self in quite an emphatic way. Love as a necessity of life in emotional and psychological perspective has been emphasised in ‘The Ugly Sister’ as well:

‘Since I was not bewitched in adolescence
And brought to love,
I will attend to the trees and their gracious silence,
To winds that move.’¹⁰

Being independent, confident and invulnerable to irrational cosmic forces, a ‘buffered self’ is expected to be strong and fearless. In fact, it is this feeling of being at the centre of things, of having the potential to do things for life’s betterment without divine intervention that leads to the idea of ‘exclusive humanism’. However, too much centrality and self-dependence of the ‘buffered self’ results in individualism and isolation, something contrary to the communal sense and ways of living. Viewed from this angle, the idea of ‘exclusive humanism’ seems rather a loss that man has been experiencing in the form of growing distance from where and whom he belongs to due to the ongoing modernisation. The sense of loss, the issue of self and society, rootlessness, nostalgic attitudes, and a longing for fulfilment reflected in Larkin’s works such as ‘Verse de Société’ (1971), ‘I Remember, I Remember’ (1954), ‘Here’ (1961), ‘High Windows’ (1965), ‘To the Sea’ (1969) and ‘Show Saturday’ (1974) seems motivated mainly by factors like these.

Jonathan Bates’ *Song of the Earth* concerns mainly the question of how significant and useful the role of a writer (or an artist) can be in saving a society from the displacement caused by the contemporary material onslaught. Literature (or art, in general) has the potential to restore man’s relationship with Mother Nature through using appropriate subjects,

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid, ‘The Ugly Sister’, p. 14

imaginative power and artistic techniques. Bates supports his point of view with quite an interesting and detailed survey of some relevant works by writers like W. Wordsworth (1770-1850), S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834), Lord Byron (1788-1824), John Keats (1795-1821), Percy (1792-1822) and Mary Shelley (1797-1851), John Clare (1793-1864), Jane Austen (1775-1817), Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Philip Larkin. Besides, he plumbs, not in a less interesting way, etymological details to show how the words 'culture', nature and farming are related. 'Cultivated' – a prototype of 'culture' – came into use for a piece of land harrowed for farming; in other words, its naturalness is moulded for a specific purpose. Bates, in this piece of his discussion, comes to a conclusion that 'culture' – contrary to popular opinion – is not against nature unless it turns unusually materialistic and mechanised: it is simply a living style, applicable as much to the organic communal ways as to the isolated and individual ways of living life.

However, what is significant and relevant in Bate's book regarding the current topic is its discussion about the change in 'consciousness' that corresponds with the 'change in sensibility' that Taylor considers as the main reason for a modern 'self' experiencing life differently. In Bate's opinion, what counts for this change in 'consciousness' is the western culture's view regarding 'terrestrial environment' that has turned too 'instrumental' in the contemporary age to leave any space for the sense of intimacy and emotional attachment that once weaved the country folk, flora, fauna, soil and seasons into an organic whole. A modern world of inventions, new life styles, fast ways of mobility, and competition for material and commercial pursuits has switched us out of tune with 'the rhythm of nature', thereby breaking the organic wholeness and harmony that Bate seeks the possible ways to link with through nostalgic works composed in the manner of pastoral fiction.

Treating an age or environment as ideal or mythical conveys, consciously or unconsciously, an artist's dissatisfaction with the contemporary world that he/she lives in. Obviously, the same is true of the readers as well. The fascination many of us have for Jane Austen's 'lost world of elegance, of empire-line dresses, of good manners, of ladylikeness and gentle-manliness in large and beautiful houses' or Thomas Hardy's 'honest, rustic way of life among hedgerows, haystacks and sturdy English

oak trees' signify that we too are nostalgic for something lost.¹¹ Bates' idea of the significance of such artistic practice definitely applies to Philip Larkin whose 'Going, Going' – an environmental critique – he has included in his book as not only one of the 'songs of the earth' but also made it the title of one of the book's chapters. The poem demonstrates that the word 'going' in Larkin's context is the passing away of not simply the belief ('Church Going') and life ('Going'), but of the pastures as well. Where in the case of life it has to happen anyway, with the other two it occurs due to man's greed and the consequent material and commercial pursuits.

Philip Larkin's attitude to the post-war contemporary environments needs to be examined in his nostalgia for England of the past in a composite of cultural, social, political, terrestrial and spiritual perspectives. Larkin referring nostalgically to the English social environment of before 1914 – practised by many other Movement writers also¹² – as having order, stability, strength, peace and innocence clearly suggests his dissatisfaction with the contemporary unstable and transitional situation in the wake of the war. An example, particularly in this respect, is Larkin's 'MCMXIV' – 1914 in Roman numerals – wherein English life before 1914, viewed from a perspective of the post-war restless situation, has been described as something desirable. Was English life before 1914 really something to be idealised may be a question for many after going through the poem. However, what matters more regarding our current discussion is to explore why anyone would look for something behind or beyond the environment wherein one lives.

However, as said before, Larkin's looking beyond the contemporary environment is not simply the nostalgic inclinations for the cultural, social and political stability before 1914 (MCMXIV) or the communal ways of life as demonstrated in poems like 'To the Sea' and 'Show Saturday'. 'Here' and 'High Windows', for example, taking the speaker's urge beyond merely communal and natural, fall into a category that seems relevant to the theory of 'porous' and 'buffered' selves in Charles Taylor's secularisation thesis. Therefore, beside the things already described, Larkin's issue is of existential significance.

¹¹ Jonathan, Bate, 'Going, Going', in *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 1.

¹² See John Wain, 'Along the Tightrope', in *Declaration*, ed. by Tom Maschler, Lindsay Anderson (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1957).

Charles Taylor and Jonathan Bate both consider untampered intimacy and communion between humanity and the environment as essential for harmony and the longed for sense of fulfilment. However, where in the previous case, the discussion is mainly faith-oriented and is somewhat vertically inclined (with spirits and cosmic forces having quite a significant role), the latter one – community-focused and emphasising closeness to nature in terrestrial and ecological context – is earth-bound. Hence, the porousness in Bate's case (though he does not use the word 'porous') is horizontal and 'deep-delved'¹³, merging the coexisting terrestrial (the very soil, seasons, flora and fauna of an area), cultural and social environments into a single harmonious whole that works like an organism. Beside other things, the intimacy amongst these cohabiting constituents involves an active role of a mutually shared knowledge inherently transferred from generation to generation. Though, the supernatural forces (angelic and demonic both) associated with Charles Taylor's 'porous self' are not visible in Bate's picture of wholeness, one may perceive the like of them somehow in the sense of sanctity that pervades through his concept of the environment. Like the Greek spirits, they feel blended in the very atmosphere.

The contemporary materialistic pursuits *A Secular Age* and *Song of the Earth* describe as antagonistic to faith and the communal ways of living respectively are subject to Philip Larkin's critical attitude as well. The buffer of rational and calculated attitudes supposed to instil confidence and a feeling of 'self-sufficiency' through rendering 'self' a central status works otherwise for Larkin; in his case it leads to a feeling of 'insufficiency'. How can a 'self', vulnerable to the existential issues of impermanence, death and others, devise the meaning of things specifically, and life generally on the base of perceptions¹⁴? Obviously, the meanings thus worked out are relative and may serve only provisionally. Their provisional and relative nature is discernible in the ways our perceptions keep on changing with the varying temporal and spatial perspectives. Larkin's sense of unfulfilment and critical attitude towards material progress and its consequences, therefore, may be interpreted in the contexts of both Taylor and Bate: the loss of belief as well as the

¹³ The phrase 'deep-delved' has been used in Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'.

¹⁴ The issue of perception, knowledge and truth has been dealt with in Larkin's 'Going' (Archie Burnett, 32)

vanishing of the communal ways of living in the modern contemporary society. It is mainly a sense of longing for them that motivates poems such as 'Church Going', 'The Whitsun Weddings', 'To the Sea', 'Show Saturday', 'Here' and 'High Windows'. Where the first four poems are mainly concerned with a sense of intimacy and togetherness that characterise a community, the other two demonstrate the curiosity and confusion of a questioning 'self' regarding the ultimate reality and the purpose of life that, with its false promises, hopes, fears and failures never seems to take one to a fulfilling end. The only thing approaching is, unfortunately, death:

'Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
No waters breed or break.'¹⁵

The fear of death – 'the solving emptiness/That lies just under all we do'¹⁶ – that obsesses Larkin, makes life for him a complete illusion. Hence, it is the meaning behind this illusion that Larkin longs for.

The purpose of the ensuing thesis is to explore Larkin's response towards the growing secular trends in English society after the Second World War in view of the above discussion. With his coming of age during the panic-stricken years of war, youth during the scarcity of immediate post-war years, middle age during the material prospering after the 'rationing days' and old age during the Swinging Sixties, he recorded what he witnessed around him in a direct, simple, comprehensive, accessible, friendly and dialogical way that is reflective of his democratic attitude regarding the writer-reader relationship.

The Second World War is one of those historical events that, like Charles Taylor's 15th century Reformation, caused a huge temporal, spatial, cultural, social, political, emotional, psychological and spiritual displacement. The people already dislodged in view of Taylor's *A Secular Age* were now further dislocated. In a situation like this, it was natural for Larkin to get restless and search for some anchorage in spiritual or

¹⁵ Philip Larkin, 'Next Please', in *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), p. 31

¹⁶ Ibid, 'Ambulances', pp. 63-64

communal sense, or find a refuge in his nostalgically motivated poems many of which have been mentioned already. However, 'At Grass' and 'Homage to a Government' – two of them – are of particular interest due to their lamenting tone regarding the lost imperial dignity that vouchsafed strength, order and stability to English life in the past.

How can a literary 'self' with humanistic approach be interested in things that are supposedly conservative? The answer may be simple. Larkin was aware that the material, commercial and sexual pursuits that the contemporary youth were involved in were not going to provide them with the sense of fulfilment and freedom that they were after. In fact, he warned about it in most of his poems in *The Less Deceived* (1954). He knew that desires like these led one nowhere but 'into fulfillment's desolate attic'¹⁷. Hence, for him, the sense of fulfilment or freedom could be anywhere but not in the things with provisional or relative meaning. His looking backward rather than forward in this respect was because he knew that in the latter case it would be a further displacement, taking him away from the essence he was looking for. This urge of Larkin has been vividly demonstrated in 'Here' – one of his masterpieces – in which the speaker, 'Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows' reaches the 'Loneliness that clarifies'¹⁸:

'Here silence stands
Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,
Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,
Luminously-peopled air ascends;
And past the poppies bluish neutral distance
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach
Of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:
Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.'¹⁹

The 'untalkative, out of reach' 'unfenced existence' that is longed for shows the speaker as someone with a 'buffered self' who, unable to have communion with the nature around, looks for a transcendental

¹⁷ Ibid, 'Deceptions', p. 41

¹⁸ Ibid, 'Here', p. 49

¹⁹ Ibid

experience. This is how a 'buffered self' experiences when it believes neither itself nor is porous enough to have an organic relationship with its environment that Taylor talks about. The same is true of Bate in his terrestrial context.

II

Irrespective of how Charles Taylor's explanation of his secularisation theory in the historical perspective is received in critical circles, what counts more in the current discussion are the metaphorical expressions he uses for the states of 'self' ('porous' and 'buffered') as well as the background his work provides as an appropriate introductory context to the current thesis. A combination of the two – the spiritual and terrestrial aspect Taylor's and Bate's theories respectively – corresponding with the communal and spiritual aspects of Larkin's nostalgic inclinations, helps in covering his work broadly and deeply. However, filling this frame required quite an exhaustive study, including Larkin's work, letters and critical essays, literary criticism, literary and social history, and more. Before going into the details of how applicable and useful they have been in working out this project, a brief account of the ups and downs in Larkin's literary career during his life as well as posthumously seems useful to know.

In his newspaper article about Philip Larkin, Andrew Motion recalls in a loving and lively manner:

The last big Larkin-fest was held in 1982, and coincided with his 60th birthday. Faber published a collection of friendly essays, the South Bank Show did a profile (in which the only signs of Larkin himself were his hands, pudgily turning the pages of a book), and newspapers ran appreciative features about him. Roy Hattersley struck the single sour note, in a half-hour TV special that raked over the same sort of "faults" that Al Alvarez had found in the poems 20 years earlier: excessive pessimism, predictable gloom, narrow horizons.²⁰

The poetic extract with its celebration of 'the last big Larkin-fest' and Al Alvarez's negative remarks about Larkin's work twenty years ago suggests the entire picture of Larkin's critical reception before and after his death in a skilfully compact manner. It signifies the decline that Larkin's fame, having its peak in 1982 after seeing its

²⁰ Andrew Motion, 'A fanfare for the common man', *The Guardian*, 5 July 2003.

highs and lows, underwent in the literary as well as public circles after the publication of his letters by Anthony Thwaite (*Selected Letters*, 1992), and a year later his biography by Andrew Motion (*Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, 1993). However, there is something more interesting about the phrase 'the last big-fest'. Its echoing of the 'Last Supper', with Larkin as the central figure, and 'Roy Hattersley [striking] the single sour note' (reflecting Al Alvarez unpleasant remarks) amidst the praise by the rest of the company is highly allusive and meaningful. The way Motion depicts the scene is quite ominous, suggesting that something undesirable is going to happen.

In fact, undesirable it was when happened! The dramatic way in which Larkin's reputation suffered – after his death in 1985 – with the publication of the letters and the biography has been described vividly and sympathetically in another intense as well as informative extract from the same article:

The nation's favourite poet, lonely but loveable, was condemned as a misogynist, a racist and a porn addict. A grumbling teddy-bear was one thing; a grizzly who talked about "niggers", detested children, and coldly played women friends off against one another in order to preserve his solitude was quite another.²¹

Seeing the reaction of the literary as well as public circles to the new and shocking image of a once admirable Larkin, it seemed the poet was doomed along with his work once for all. Ironically, even the ones who loved him as a writer during the 'pre-letters-and-biography days' condemned his work by conflating it with his personality reflected in his letters. Some of them went to the extent of even removing his books from a few libraries as well as their own personal collections.

Consequently, 'the political attitudes in Larkin's poetry' now came to be 'fiercely contested throughout 1990s.'²² In this respect, some notable of 'Larkin's detractors' were Lisa Jardine, Germaine Greer and Tom Paulin. It would not need much to see the extent of their anger provoked by the 'vile sentiments' in some of Larkin's letters.

²¹ Ibid

²² Stephen Cooper, *Philip Larkin: Subversive Writer*(Brighton: Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), p. 1

Words and phrases such as ‘a casual, habitual racist, and an easy misogynist’ (Jardine), ‘anti-intellectual, racist, sexist, and rotten with class-consciousness’ (Greer about Larkin’s poetry) and ‘the sewer under the national monument Larkin became’ (Paulin)²³ are self-explanatory how the un-official poet-laureate was at the risk of going into oblivion.

However, an equal (or, perhaps, stronger) and parallel struggle was going on (consciously or unconsciously) in a positive direction also, intended to either restore the Larkin of ‘pre-letters-and-biography days’ or exploit the situation along with his letters and biography to establish his fame on a firmer ground. Beside his fans in the public, a few names from the literary circles who moved in this direction are Anthony Thwaite, Andrew Motion and James Booth. Motion’s observation in this respect is quite illustrative:

Larkin's posthumous fate has not been to vanish but to be transformed. There will always be readers who regret this, and feel the change has been damaging or even disgracing: they want to go back to the old pre-letters-and-biography days, when the bear was still a teddy. On the other hand, there are plenty of people who would rather know the truth and develop their reading of the poems accordingly, exploring the links - and the separations - between life and work. And the signs are that these people have carried the day. Larkin's poems are still bought in large numbers, he is still a regular feature of the school syllabus, and curiosity about his self and his writing is evidently far greater than mere repugnance or rejection.

To prove the point, one only has to look at Tom Courtenay's recent play *Pretending To Be Me*, and two imminent TV programmes about Larkin: the documentary *Love and Death in Hull*, directed by Ian MacMillan (on Channel 4 tomorrow at 8pm), and Richard Cottan's film for BBC2, *Larkin: Love Again*, directed by Susanna White, to be shown later this month.²⁴

III

Philip Larkin and Secularisation – the topic of our ongoing discussion – is an attempt to explore Larkin’s work as a product of interactive process

²³ Ibid, pp. 1-2

²⁴ Motion

within the post-war social and political continuum. Rather than going for comparative analysis of some particular works with various critical ideas, the thesis derives its argument mainly from the primary sources in their relative period of composition, and that is where its originality lies. However, it does not mean the assignment would have been possible without consulting some valuable works of literary, cultural and social significance to support its point of view.

Stephen Regan's *Philip Larkin: An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism* (1992) is one of the significant books that serve as secondary sources in this respect. Besides its emphasis on the necessity of Larkin's study in the post-war social and political context, the book's significance actually lies in its suggesting a pluralistic critical approach towards it – something quite befitting to its covering the main research question of the thesis in a broader perspective. Appreciating the cultural, social and political significance of Larkin requires a sufficient understanding of the spirit of the age, no doubt. However, it seems more productive to assess him in a way that represents his work in a wide spectrum. A comprehensive account dealt with in thematic, aesthetic, linguistic, social and historical frame of references would be, naturally, more revealing of the psychological, emotional and cultural complex that plays a fundamental role in the formation of attitudes.

While highlighting his point of view Regan divides, very appropriately, Larkin's work into four sections with names reflective of their very roots lying in the relative contemporary social and political conditions. 'Wartime Writings', the first section, attributes the sorrow, vagueness, chaos and confusion characterising the early work of Larkin to the war situation

wherein a nascent, creative and restless soul struggles to make his way out through exploring his identity and role in life's universal phenomenon. The main question facing him seems the riddle of fate and freedom. Does one have the freedom to perform any role in life? That the ever-restless creative impulse gets further ignited by the war situation can be clearly seen – besides the work as a whole where it is generally implied in the writer's mood and tone – in writings such as *Jill* (1946), *A Girl in Winter* (1947), and poems like 'Conscript' (June 1941).

In 'Fables of Freedom' – the next section – Regan interprets *The Less Deceived* in terms of the poet's realisation of the various presumptions regarding freedom and fulfilment as nothing but myths or illusions, a product of wishful thinking. Obviously, the end of war did not mean a simultaneous or immediate end to physical or psychological issues, or a means of instant fulfilment for the war-stricken nation. Where reconstructing and renovating things had to take time, the war-inflicted emotional and mental scars seemed far more difficult to heal. Hence, the general atmosphere of dissatisfaction, uncertainty and eagerness during the immediate post-war years was not that unlikely to happen. The sad situation has been aptly depicted in the images of deceiving hopes, loss and helplessness in poems like 'At Grass' (1949), 'Wires' (1950) and 'Next Please' (1951).

Moreover, rather than simply a reconstruction of the things damaged and destroyed, it turned out to be a restructuring of the system culturally, socially and politically: things were shaping in a different way than they had been prior to the war-years. The contemporary youth – least interested in religious and traditional ways of life – was going to be a

generation with secular, liberal and more individual tastes. Besides material progress, the society was going to be multicultural due to the fast flow of immigrants from the British colonies. In 'From Austerity to Affluence', Regan discusses the situation with reference to *The Whitsun Weddings* the poems in which were composed mostly during that period. With the fifties' decade coming to an end, and 'austerity' leading to 'affluence', the writer could see that the problem was going to be more than simply the poor economic situation. With progress and prosperity marking the succeeding decades emerged a craze for material and commercial pursuits that seemed dominating the ethical and aesthetic values – the warp and woof of a community-based society – with a spirit of competition in material sense. Concerns like these have been illustrated in 'The Whitsun Weddings' (1958) and 'Here' (1961): where the jovial description of weddings in the former represents Larkin's love for the traditional and communal aspects of English life, the latter conveys the speaker's unease at their vanishing away because of the life-style of the 'cut-price crowd'. The subject has been discussed in 'Homage to a Government'²⁵ and 'Going, Going'²⁶ – poems having a political significance – also, in which the losing of moral, aesthetic and national values due to commercial pursuits has been blatantly satirised.

Finally, 'The End of Consensus' implies the breaking of a seemingly compromising – though actually tense – cultural, social and political situation. The sliding starts suddenly after a climactic state characterised

²⁵ The poem, composed in the context of the historical Suez issue (1956), satirizes the government's decision to withdraw its forces for monetary reasons ignoring the toll it was taking in the form of national dignity, morality and courage.

²⁶ With its bitter satire about the greedy politicians and business societies, 'Going Going' laments the succumbing of England's pastoral features – 'the traditional British heritage' – to industrial and rural expansion.

by a suspension between the religious and the secular, the conservative and the liberal, and the old and the new. The outburst can be felt echoing in poems like 'High Windows' (1965), 'Annus Mirabilis' (1967) and 'This be the Verse' (1971) thematically, linguistically and historically. Here is what implies the balance tilted in case of the poet's temper as well – something corresponding with his crossing the threshold of middle age. Unlike the compromising – though inherently sad, complaining and ironical – tone of the previous collections, the poems in *High Windows* are marked by a polemical mode. The declining health and loss of hope regarding not only social and political reformation but also life as a whole finally have their complete hold on him. The sense of being finally trapped in life's blind alley can be felt in poems such as 'The Old Fools' (1973), 'The Building' (1972) and 'Aubade' (1977) that strongly convey the clear but tragic sense of what is going to be next.

The current research borrows from Regan's four sections of Larkin's work for its structure. However, the book – though an excellent introduction to the various possible approaches towards Larkin – leaves much room for further elaboration. Following Regan's chronological pattern, *Philip Larkin and Secularisation* provides an extended commentary – supported by stuff from numerous other relative sources of literary as well as social significance – on Larkin.

Stephen Cooper's *Philip Larkin: A Subversive Writer* (2004) – another source of vital importance to the thesis – is an elaboration of what Regan has already discussed; rather, it would not be wrong to say that it has improved upon what Regan has already discussed. Besides stressing on the social and political value of Larkin's major works, Cooper makes a

useful effort at inter-relating them psychologically, socially and politically with his unpublished as well as incomplete pieces of prose and poetry. His appraisal of Larkin covers the early writings by Brunette Coleman (young Larkin's pseudonym), his manuscripts and letters, focussing especially on his correspondence with J.B. Sutton, his friend since the days in King Henry VIII School, Coventry. A noteworthy aspect of Cooper's book is his highlighting the difference between the Larkin corresponding with Kingsley Amis (1922-1995) – his friend since the days at Oxford – and the one exchanging letters with J.B. Sutton. Where the former case brought him the infamy of being a sexist, racist and misogynist, the latter, like his literary works, reveals him as a humanist, having a seriousness and sobriety as well as critical of the conventional and orthodox attitudes regarding gender and social politics. The discussion with J.B. Sutton often revolves around their concern for an alternative – characterised by a harmony between masculine and feminine roles – to the orthodox patriarchal and chivalric ideals that may help in promoting the cause of humanity in the world. As in *A Girl in Winter*, 'Conscript', 'Wedding Wind' (1946) and 'Maiden Name' (1955), for example, it is often about the same motif of voicing against the conventional roles of a man and woman – a cause of suffering for both – in a male domineering society. In other words, these letters reflect Larkin's true and literary self rather than the reactionary, chatty and non-serious one while addressing Kingsley Amis.

Therefore, it is not simply because of stressing on the cultural and social significance of Larkin's work but also highlighting its concern for humanity – contrary to his letters-based image of being a sexist, racist and misogynist – that Cooper's book helps in strengthening the main argument of the current thesis. His evidence-based discourse supports the

idea of Larkin's response towards the growing secular trends in the post-war English society primarily as humanistic rather than conservative, liberal or anything else based on narrow concepts.

Blake Morrison's *The Movement* (1980) – while tracing the Movement's origin mainly as a reaction against the Modernists' theory and practice of art as well as looking into Larkin's links with the group – also highlights their humanistic concerns in terms of their realistic, rational, and democratic approach thematically as well as stylistically. Their way of communication, unlike the prophetic or highly intellectual voice from the Modernists' pulpit, brings the writer at level with the public through using colloquialism that often takes a conversational form. Some points – worth noticing and useful regarding the Movements' thematic and stylistic approach – discussed in the book are quite applicable to the thesis. Being cautious about any adventurism culturally, socially and politically – particularly after the chaotic war situation – the group seemed prone to political pacifism. In their concern for rationality, discipline and stability, they valued a society characterised by a balanced, sensible and realistic approach.²⁷ Hence, they not only disliked the pose of high intellectualism and snobbish manner often associated with social and cultural elitism, but also were sceptical about the emerging trends of rootless and directionless freedom in the post-war scenario. They seemed susceptible to English traditions – in a somewhat mild and flexible form purged of oppressive and exploitative elements – for the stability, order and identity they rendered to the English life once. To be more exact, their contribution to the post-war cultural and social life lies in their fondness

²⁷ Larkin's 'Born Yesterday' – a poem written on the birth of Sally Amis (1954-2000) – and 'Poetry of Departures' beautifully illustrate the idea of how excessiveness in any aspect of life may cause trouble.

for the ordinary and matter-of-fact as well as their clear, simple, logical and conversational manner that served as an antidote to the modernists' vague intellectuality prone to fascistic attitudes. Morrison's reference to Donald Davie's critical remarks on Ezra Pound's style as having fascistic potentialities²⁸ is an apt and illustrative example in the context.

However, Morrison highlights a significantly interesting question in his book. After a detailed discussion about Larkin's thematic and structural similarities with the Movement's matter-of-factness, Morrison points out his having a distinctive edge over the rest of the group because of his romantic inclinations. He does not explain, though, that these epiphanic moments are rooted in the writer's feelings of discontent over the imperfections of life in various minor and major degrees. However, unable to achieve their target – the ultimate meaning or some repose of utopian nature as often seen in the case of typical romantics – imaginative uplifts like these seem to scatter and collapse before taking any definite form that can be encapsulated in physical or metaphysical terms. Elaborating this point, the proposed work is set to bring out an image of Larkin with somewhat mystic inclinations that plays a considerable role in forming his point of view regarding the contemporary circumstances.

Chronological assessment needs, obviously, to see a work in a wide biographical as well as contemporary cultural and social perspective. Besides some TV documentaries and newspaper articles, what has been particularly helpful in informing about Larkin as a person as well as writer are the two popular biographies: Andrew Motion's *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life* (1993) and James Booth's *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love* (2014).

²⁸ Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1973)

Where the former presents a 'detailed, meticulous and sympathetic' account of Larkin's life and work, the latter focuses mainly on how the events of the writer's life, his love affairs and work reciprocate each other. While exploring Larkin's image, Booth tries to persuade that it is his work rather than his letters where true Larkin needs to be looked for.

Perhaps, it would not be wrong to say that Booth's biography of Larkin serves as a supplement to that by Motion the same way as Cooper's critical piece of work does to the one by Regan. The thesis considering Larkin's reaction towards secularisation as humanistic renders the works of Cooper and Booth – due to their stance for the writer's defence against the accusations of sexism, misogyny, racism and quasi-fascism levelled by critics such as Lisa Jardine, Germaine Greer and Tom Paulin – quite significant. Quoting both the critics, the current thesis develops the point further: unlike his writings, private correspondence with intimate friends such as Kingsley Amis demonstrates Larkin's reactionary, non-serious and chatty self. Speaking in the same strain, Booth points out that Larkin's topic and tone change from person to person: the Larkin writing to Sutton is – unlike the one addressing Amis – almost the same seen through his literary works. Determining a true image of Larkin necessitates going for something that speaks of his soul rather than his wit, and that means definitely his voice as an artist. Moreover, the non-serious and reactionary Larkin seen in the letters to Amis may be traced back to their youthful days together at Oxford when none would dare have a thoughtful pose or pass a serious remark for fear of being mocked at by the rest of their company²⁹. Reviving those light modes and moments at Oxford through correspondence with intimate friends in later life must have been no more

²⁹ Andrew Motion

than interludes of comic relief – in fact, letters for him were a way of living vicariously – in his busy and isolated life-style as a writer as well as a librarian. Moreover, the stuff in these very private and informal letters was not meant to be published and thus hurt anyone's feelings; it would not be unreasonable to take it simply as a product of mutual light moods between two very intimate friends.

Similarly, discussing Larkin's work as an interactive phenomenon in the contemporary socio-political apparatus would not have been possible without going through Arthur Marwick's *British Society Since 1945* (1996), Callum G. Brown's *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (2006) and Alan Sinfield's *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Post-war Britain* (1997). Marwick's book, with its remarkably simple, clear and readable coverage of the post-war attitudes regarding social as well as sexual politics, religion, household, family, material progress and technological advancement provides a background that considerably helps in understanding Larkin from the 'austerity' of immediate post-war years to the 'affluence' of the sixties. In a way, the book is a detailed account of the cultural, social and political circumstances that Regan, in his book, refers to in terms of cause and effect with respect to Larkin's work.

However, it is important to see what occupies the central position in our discussion is the issue of faith. With its focus on the faith culture of British society in twentieth century, Callum Brown's book turns out to be of special use while exploring Larkin's response to the post-war secular trends. Its comprehensive account of the declining faith, growing secularisation and spiritual revolution provides a cultural and social context rich enough to see the significance of Poems like 'Church Going'

(1954) and 'Faith Healing' (1961) specifically and Larkin's agnostic attitude generally.

Alan Sinfield's *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Post-war Britain* is a significant source of presenting literature and life as a reciprocal phenomenon. The book, due to its detailed analytical discussion on how literature, music, film, media, journalism and politics intersect with one another, helps to see things from a new perspective. Sinfield points out how literature plays a journalistic role through citing examples from the past and present of British history. Where propagating the pre-war colonial myths of the white man's burden was for justifying British imperialism in the world, the post-war myth of 'evil within' was to cover their shameful brutalities during the world wars fought amongst the nations who felt proud of being the most civilised ones. However, there were many such as the Movement's writers for whom the twentieth-century horrible events worked as eye-opener from the world of innumerable conventional, romantic, religious, moral and political myths – actually meant for serving the cause of aristocracy and elitism – into a world of reality and common-sense. Hence, the post war literary writings such as those of Philip Larkin are suggestive of warning against falling for the mythical aspects of life in any religious or secular context. Larkin's sceptical attitude is, in fact, applicable not only to the myths in conventional sense but also to the new liberal trends characterising at their peak 'the swinging sixties' that were presumed as fulfilling. Anti-establishment attitudes like these resulted in egalitarian forms of art and literature that served the taste of all rather than few. Sinfield's composite but analytical approach towards the changing literary trends within the social and political apparatus facilitates the current work through

explaining the process of post-war cultural, social and political transformation.

Using the above-mentioned books as secondary sources, Larkin's attitude towards the contemporary secular trends has been analysed through synthesising multiple ways of criticism. The work is planned with each individual chapter appreciating Larkin thematically, aesthetically and linguistically in a chronological sequence within their relative biographical and social contexts. After dealing with the young artist exploring the fundamental issues of man's identity and role in view of his personal experiences in the contemporary cultural, social and political atmosphere in the first two chapters, the discussion gets to a stage where the writer feels his old self³⁰ useless at a time and place when the world around seems getting younger. The chapters covering the middle stages of *The Less Deceived* and *The Whitsun Weddings* demonstrate how the initial phase of wondering and confusion ends in a state of utter disappointment when the ultimate answer to the questions turns out to be nothing but death. The total extinction that holds Larkin with a life-long obsession of fear renders any idea of fulfilment or freedom meaningless. Taking into account all this perspective the work under discussion is an effort to deal with the main question deeply and widely.

Besides, Larkin's sceptical behaviour – an outcome of his life experience that moulded him into an agnostic and rationalist – does not let him accept anything in its wholeness. Consequently, his response regarding the post-war secular trends is commonly considered as a complex one. However, it does not seem that complex if viewed as something based

³⁰ See 'The Old Fools' and 'The Building' by Larkin.

purely on humanistic rather than conservative or liberal approach. Larkin's hate for the oppressive or exploitative aspect of anything religious, traditional or even secular makes a sufficient proof in this respect. The great source of oppression or exploitation is, in fact, the expectations one has regarding them that often turn out ironical. In poems like 'Deceptions' (1950) and 'The High Windows'³¹, religion and sex have been presented as the root-cause of oppression to humanity. The same applies to anything based on orthodox and inflexible attitudes in religious or secular sense.

Hence, Larkin's reaction towards religious, traditional and secular trends is not biased but rational and humanistic. He does not want us be fooled by perceptions of fulfilment lying in the old faith or the so-called new freedom. His critical attitude towards the cultural, social and political developments in 'the swinging sixties' – focussed specially in poems like 'Annus Mirabilis' (16 Jul 1967) and 'The High Windows' (12 Feb 1967) – needs to be seen from this perspective. Similarly, his nostalgic feelings, especially in poems like 'Show Saturday' (1973) and 'To the Sea' (1969) may also be viewed likewise. Rather than sharing the popular craze for material and commercial interests in a modern world, it is the humanistic concerns of a community-based life that Larkin highly values. The above-mentioned two elegiac poems highlight the organic forms of mutual love, respect, sympathy and caring attitude that gave structure and strength to English social life once, and that the speaker wishes to remain forever.

The unbridled pace for commercial interests, and the rootless ways – emerging out of the sixties' and seventies' youth-culture – that to Larkin seemed leading nowhere but another illusion rendered his yearnings

³¹ 'The High Windows', because of its criticising faith and sex as oppressive forces at the same time, serves as two in one.

sharp enough to question life's ultimate meaning. However, rational barriers did not let him see anything except 'nothing' and 'nowhere' beyond the 'sun-comprehending glass', or feel anything except the silence around the 'untalkative' sun. Perhaps, the consistent longing for ultimate reality elevates Larkin to the same level of mystic approach in the secular environment of twentieth century that W. Wordsworth seems to have achieved through his belief in pantheism in an era characterised by faith. Hence, his poetry – despite having its roots at the centre of life's humdrum – often takes the form of high tension between the proximate and ultimate concerns. In fact, this is one of the main causes that account for Larkin's seemingly complex response towards the contemporary growing secular trends.

Chapter 1

Jill and A Girl in Winter: A Revelation of Self

Life in College was austere. Its pre-war pattern had been dispersed, in some instances permanently . . . This was not the Oxford of Michael Fane and his fine bindings, or Charles Ryder and his plovers' eggs. Nevertheless, it had a distinctive quality. A lack of *douceur* was balanced by a lack of *betises*....and I think our perspectives were truer as a result. At an age when self-importance would have been normal, events cut us ruthlessly down to size.³²

It is the conflicting loyalties to parents of very different temperaments which typically lay the foundations of future neurotic anxieties and this was true of Larkin. His father was a rationalist and atheist, always ready to pour scorn on religion, while his mother was a gentle and devout woman with Anglican sympathies which she repressed because of her husband.³³

Being at Oxford (1940 – 43) is one of the significant events in Larkin's life, a stage that enables us to see his life in its complete social, political and literary perspective. Was Larkin's social background that of an elite class? Such a question is natural to arise for Oxford was supposed to be a place for the students of elite class. Larkin, on the contrary, was the son of an industrious self-made man, a city treasurer in the provincial town of Coventry, and was qualified from a local grammar school rather than a public one. Like him, it was also true of many other Movement writers such as Kingsley Amis(1922–1995), Donald Davie(1922–1995), John Holloway(1920-1999), J. D. Enright(1920–2002) and John Wain(1925–1994), etc. , who shared almost the same social background – a lower-middle-class – and some of whom joined Oxford or Cambridge as

³² Philip Larkin, *Jill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p.1.

³³ R.L. Brett, *Faith and Doubt: Religion and Secularization in Literature from Wordsworth to Larkin* (USA: Mercer University Press, 1997), p. 229.

scholarship boys.³⁴ This seems a matter of much social significance: their presence at Oxford, in a way, is the setting of a thaw in the traditional hierarchal structure of the English society, and anticipates the emerging of a new generation, a new 'post-war type', in Britain.

Oxford played an important role also in getting him out of 'an atmosphere of clinched irritation'³⁵ at home, and providing an opportunity to the artistic potentialities, hidden in his 'cramped but creative'³⁶ personality, to flourish.³⁷ The journey that had taken its start from schoolchild writings in *Coventrian*³⁸, the school magazine, now continued in the guise of Brunette Coleman who accompanied him for some time even after he left the college. During this phase of his literary career he wrote some pieces of fiction, criticism and verses the notable among which are *Trouble at Willow Gables* (a novella), *Michaelmas Term at St Bride's* (an incomplete sequel), a fragment of pseudo-autobiography and Coleman's literary apologia (a critical essay), and seven short poems. The Coleman phase is significant for it not only furnished an outlet for Larkin's sexual complex and limited literary skill, but also helped him greatly in exploring these issues.³⁹ The Coleman's fictions, characterized mostly by homosexuality and lesbianism, led to a heterosexual finale, *Jill*.

The Oxford span will be incomplete if we do not mention the ways Larkin was influenced by his friends and teachers there. It was the company of friends like Norman Iles and Kingsley Amis that increased his self-esteem,

³⁴ Blake Morrison, *The Movement: English poetry and fiction of the nineteen-fifties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 56-7.

³⁵ Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*: (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 9.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 13.

³⁷ Cf. 'The Importance of Elsewhere' (Larkin, *The Less Deceived*) that demonstrates the positive and creative influence of the freedom and novelty one feels while away from the pressures of familiarity.

³⁸ Motion, p. 22.

³⁹ 'Brunette Coleman was a disguise, an amusing mask, but nevertheless also an unwitting means of self-revelation.' Ibid. p. 89.

eased his shyness and encouraged him to use his sense of humour in a 'disaffected way'. Moreover, it was the group of 'seven', of which he was a member, where the basic principles of the Movement seem to have germinated.⁴⁰ Similarly, teachers like John Layard (1891 – 1974) and Vernon Watkins (1906 – 1967) inspired him in their own ways. While the former aroused his curiosity about 'unconscious' and the opposite sex⁴¹, the latter caused his affiliation with W. B. Yeats poetic style.⁴² However, it will be unfair if we do not include Gavin Bone, Larkin's tutor at Oxford, in the list. He, most probably, had a role in Larkin's love for Englishness and clarity, and his 'anti-modernist prejudice'.⁴³ These various factors, no doubt, greatly contributed to the making of his personality as well as his artistic self.

Appointment as a librarian in Wellington, Shropshire (1943) is another substantial event in Larkin's life after he left Oxford. It really served as a turning point for him as he wanted to live purely 'A Writer's Life': he proved himself as not only a good administrator and a writer, but also a person capable to love. Falling in love with Ruth Bowen – a 16-year-old student – was something really new and strange for Larkin who, hitherto, was inexperienced in such matters. '[The] strangeness of Wellington and the early excitement of relationship with Ruth quickened the growth of *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter*.'⁴⁴ The novels were published successively only with a short interval of four months.

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 68-9.

⁴¹ Ibid. pp. 60-61.

⁴² Ibid. pp. 83-84.

⁴³ Morrison, pp.12, 14.

⁴⁴ Motion, p. 190.

The discussion in the ongoing chapter covers both the novels, *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947). Where the former has a great deal to do with 'the life Larkin led before he met Ruth'⁴⁵, the later one bears the experiences of his practical as well as professional life as a librarian. They serve as a useful document on the contemporary social, cultural and political atmosphere, and explore the ways it affects the public and private life of an individual with artistic sensitivity.

Though this work concerns mainly Larkin's poetry, the stories will provide a background regarding the contemporary English society as well as the initial stages in Larkin's development as a writer. The main features of the discussion are to see how Larkin as a budding writer struggles to find his voice through his dealing with the forces of social environment and love. This is not an end in itself, but will be helpful in determining the course towards the research that is mainly about Larkin's poetry.

JILL

Jill is the story of a provincial and working class scholarship boy, John Kemp, who goes to Oxford for study where he is attracted by the reckless and dissipated life of his roommate, Christopher Warner, a well-off southerner who has attended a minor public school. To impress Christopher, he invents an imaginary sister Jill, but soon he finds a real Gillian, the cousin of Warner's friend Elizabeth Dowling. Kemp gets infatuated with Gillian, but his advances are 'thwarted by Elizabeth and rebuffed by Gillian'.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.154.

Though the novel could not get much space in the literary reviews at that time⁴⁶— considered a ‘juvenile attempt’⁴⁷ by the writer himself – it has a significance because of its dealing with some important aspects of life: upward social mobility and love. The two elements have been combined and developed in such a way that while showing the contemporary social and political milieu, they lead to some fundamental issues about life. It is these issues that serve as foundation for Larkin’s way of thinking as a writer in future.

Despite Larkin’s denial of the novel’s having anything to do with class issue, and his assertion that their struggle at that time was to minimise such differences⁴⁸, one cannot close eyes to what actually exists in the story. The issue is there; its being intentional or unintentional makes no difference. His talking of minimising such issues means he felt its existence, and he or the other Movement writers were quite conscious about it.⁴⁹ Rather, it is the difference in social status⁵⁰ that sets the story moving with the idea of ‘upward social mobility’. The theme had become a trend at that time, and has been dealt in many of the later Movement fictions like John Wain’s *Hurry on down* (1953), and Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954) and *That Uncertain Feeling* (1955).⁵¹ An obvious reason for it was the war which, no doubt, played a great role in levelling the class differences, and giving ordinary people hope for a good life with a ‘good culture’.⁵² One of the means for having access to this ‘good culture’ was education.⁵³ Hence,

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.158.

⁴⁷ Larkin, *Jill*, p.19.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.11.

⁴⁹ Morrison, p.69.

⁵⁰ ‘Kemp’s gaucheries are inspired by his worries about social class.’ Motion, p.154.

⁵¹ Ibid. p.66.

⁵² Ibid. pp.67-8.

⁵³ Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-war Britain* (London: The Athlone Press, 1997).

in *Jill*, like John Kemp, we see many other students who, sharing his social background, have won their way to Oxford through scholarship.⁵⁴ *Jill* as being a product of war time, its setting in war time, and a provincial boy's coming to Oxford for study are some of the factors which are closely related with the theme of 'upward social mobility'.

Kemp's inventing an imaginary sister Jill and his falling in love with the real Jill, Gillian, are the outcome of the same desire – the desire to be a part of Christopher's society. While the first one is an attempt to get Christopher's attention and sympathy through cocooning his origin, the second one is an aspiration for having a carefree life – a life without social restrictions often observed in the case of families with lower middle class. The later, despite being the outcome of a desire for upward social mobility, is a desire in itself as well. The influence of Warner's society is not simply regarding the leisurely life style, but their 'lustful and playfully savage'⁵⁵ stories also serve as a catalyst in the process of Kemp's sexual maturation. It can be seen in his 'shadowy wishes, and more shadowy dreams'⁵⁶ for Elizabeth Dowling also. This fusion of social and sexual desirability, present in several Movement fictions, also serves the purpose of minimizing the sense of class difference – an indication towards the spirit of compromise that lies at the heart of the Movement's work.⁵⁷ However, the core of discussion here is the conclusion these issues lead to.

The desires themselves are, no doubt, significant, but become more consequential in the struggle to materialise. In his pursuits, a social climber faces not only the resistance of those whom he wants to fit with,

⁵⁴ Morrison, p.58.

⁵⁵ Larkin, *Jill*, p.57.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p.100.

⁵⁷ Morrison, p. 69.

but his own people also stand in the way of his 'going beyond' himself. The social pressures from both sides want him to know his place.⁵⁸ This situation, consequently, takes the form of a continuous conflict and struggle that concludes in either success or failure. In any case, he finally emerges as a changed person; the change is often a fundamental and positive one. John Kemp, in pursuit of his desires, has to go through the same process. He can fit neither in the circle of Warner nor in that of Whitbread. Where the former does not accept him because of his origin, the latter is unacceptable to him as it is associated with his origin – the social environment he considers responsible for his misery. However, a very important component of that environment is his parents who are directly related to him. This makes them, in his view, directly responsible for the flaws he sees in his personality, and consequently his life.⁵⁹ It explains Kemp's wish for 'the passers-by to think that he was [Mrs Warner's] son' and the anger with which he drove his mother's thought 'from his mind'⁶⁰. Nevertheless, while feeling so the protagonist forgets that his parents themselves are a product of that environment, and they also could not help it in their turn then.⁶¹ Denying them is like denying oneself, something that takes him through a rigorous process of revelation about not only self but also life.

Revelation with respect to self and life is an important aspect of the story. It is Larkin's genius to blend the elements of social mobility and love in this regard; where status stands for the material aspect of life, love stands for

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 66.

⁵⁹ '[The] Freudian legacy assures us that our childhoods are with us for life: we are what they made us; we cannot lose their gains, or be compensated for their loss.' [Philip Larkin, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1983)].

⁶⁰ *Jill*, 90-91.

⁶¹ The situation anticipates Larkin's poem 'This Be the Verse' (*The Less Deceived*).

its spiritual and emotional aspect. Life itself is a combination of matter and spirit, deficiency in anyone of which may cause man's misery. For a life to be perfect there must be some ideal balance between the two. Kemp's deficiency is in both the cases, a realisation that puts him through a never-ending and painful process of analysing self and life – the beginning of knowing at the cost of innocence. The stimulus in this regard is, no doubt, the new environment at Oxford where he has been put. Once discovered, the struggle to cover it starts. Soon he finds it a hard target to achieve: the forces responsible for the deficiency still chase him; the marks they have left on his personality are too permanent to wash away. This brings him to some very fundamental questions about life:

[If] there was no difference between love fulfilled and love unfulfilled, how could there be any difference between any other pair of opposites? Was he not freed, for the rest of life, from choice?

For what could it matter? Let him take this course, or this course, but still behind the mind, on some other level, the way he had rejected was being simultaneously worked out and the same conclusion was being reached. What did it matter which road he took if they both led to the same place...What control could he hope to have over the maddened surface of things?⁶²

It is here that the voice of the protagonist becomes, in a way, directly the voice of Larkin. Rationalism, no doubt, explains these issues in terms of social and emotional forces, but the problem starts when Kemp finally faces the question regarding the difference between the sense of fulfilment and unfulfillment – the issue of imperfection, of impermanence. This issue appears, in Larkin's work, in the form of a consistent pursuit for a harmony between man's material and spiritual needs, but the result always emerges in the form of deficiency. Consequently, he seems to realise that life cannot be explained with respect to its material and

⁶² *Jill*, p.243.

emotional aspects only⁶³, it needs something more. However, his rational and sceptic attitude will never allow him to opt for a way that originates from transcendentalism. While on the one hand he is dissatisfied with what his rational faculty asks him to believe, on the other he cannot believe in the invisible despite its appeal.⁶⁴ It becomes a dilemma where one cannot believe, but longs for a belief – the agony of disbelief. This situation puts him in a state of suspension somewhere between the rational and the irrational, the material and the spiritual, or the modern and the traditional, and seems to lie at the base of his conflicting attitudes. All this gives us a glimpse of what direction Larkin's voice will take in his subsequent works.

Larkin's uncertainty about life's reality manifests his realistic approach that makes him see life as it is rather than interpreting it in terms of theories based on theological or philosophical absolutes. Here, one can see his difference from the twentieth century Modernists whose approach towards life is characterised by innovative dimensions of psychology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, anthropology and politics. Besides, new experiments and techniques in style and structure (fragmented and non-chronological) have also made them obscure and incomprehensible, something they thought as a matter of pride and superiority over the public. Larkin, like other Movement writers, has gone quite contrary to them both in his matter and manner. The audience that he keeps in mind is not simply the leisure class intellectual type, but an ordinary reader with a good common sense⁶⁵; his work is intended for communication rather

⁶³ Morrison, p.189.

⁶⁴ Brett, p.230.

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp.135-6.

than intellectual exercise.⁶⁶ Likewise, his way is not that of imposing or suggesting, but sharing. This keeping at the level of the reader rather than having a distinctive position beyond the reader's access is reflective of his humanism. The world of *Jill* has nothing to do with mythical, mystic, utopian or chivalric. It is a world of ordinary, commonplace reality, and its protagonist is a 'non-hero' figure who goes through the normal experiences of life in a quite familiar place and way without any allegoric, symbolic, psychological or philosophical intention. This ordinariness in matter and directness in expression not only links Larkin with the pre-war English literary tradition, but also signifies the rise of anti-Modernist trends on the scene of literary culture of the post-war egalitarian English society.⁶⁷

Larkin's realistic approach *can* also be seen in *Jill*'s incorporating much from his actual life which makes the story a sort of self-portrait.⁶⁸ Bruce Montgomery may be right, in a way, when he says 'that massive, affable, pipe-smoking undergraduate was no Kemp'⁶⁹. Nevertheless, there is one's public and private life, and the one more associated with feelings and emotions is the later. It is the emotional aspect of Kemp's life that has much in common with that of Larkin: the dissatisfaction, loneliness, sexual maturation⁷⁰ and creativity are almost the same in both of their cases. Kemp's being from a provincial area and an undergraduate at the wartime Oxford also point towards the writer's actual life. The most obvious one is the blitz episode in which Kemp's town is hugely damaged. This episode is

⁶⁶ P.R. King, *Nine Contemporary Poets, A critical Introduction*: (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 11 New Fetter Lane, 1979), p.2.

⁶⁷ Morrison.

⁶⁸ Motion, p.107.

⁶⁹ Morrison, p.15.

⁷⁰ Motion, pp.36, 107,154.

exactly autobiographical,⁷¹ and refers to the incident of November 14, 1940 when Larkin's hometown Coventry was heavily bombarded by the German air raids. The tragic event left five hundred fifty four people killed and a thousand wounded.⁷² Similarities and autobiographical elements like these speak of Larkin's concern for current and contemporary.

Jill's preoccupation with the struggles of a provincial boy at Oxford at a time when the English society is undergoing great political and social transition is a valuable work by Larkin. It not only signifies the changes occurring at that time, but also tells how they influence the growth and development of a young voice that is struggling its way towards making a place on a stage already occupied by the literary giants like T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and W.H. Auden (1907-1973). The voice, characterised by a struggle between the rational and irrational at its very initial stage, looks forward to a promising and prolific literary career.

A GIRL IN WINTER:

The story of *A Girl in Winter* is the story of a twenty-two years' old girl, Katherine Lind, who has taken refuge in England because of some unknown war disaster that happened to her family. It has been aptly divided into three sections: the first and final sections show her present situation as a refugee, serving as a library assistant in a wintry provincial town in England. The mid-section is a flashback to the three weeks of summer that she spent with Fennels – an English family – as a guest and friend of their children, Robin and Jane, about six years ago. Where the

⁷¹ Ibid, p.48.

⁷² Ibid, pp.47-49.

middle section is a piece of the past pleasant memories regarding her feelings of love towards Robin Fennel, the first and final sections show her situation of loneliness and disillusionment that is a bit mitigated by the prospect of meeting her former lover.

With its themes of war, peace and love, skilfully woven with the native seasons of summer and winter, the story not only shows the social and political condition of England in its various modes, but also tells us how they affect the life of an individual. Developing along these lines, the story lets us see some characteristics useful for a proper comprehension of Larkin's overall work. The notable among them are Larkin's pessimistic attitude, his Englishness and poetic style. The present discussion will cover almost all of them for they not only show Larkin's attitude towards the prevailing trends of the period, but also serve as a further and final step towards Larkin's career as a poet. The salient features of this discussion are to see analyse the ways the forces of social environment and love work towards the understanding of self and life (a), what does Larkin's attitude towards love as well as English traditions and landscapes signify (b) and how does Larkin realistic approach reflects through his matter and manner(c). It is obvious that this part of the chapter is nothing but an elaboration of the previous discussion about *Jill*. Keeping Love and social milieu as the focus of discussion is important for it covers Larkin with respect to both the specific and universal, and helps in identifying his response towards life in both capacities. It is necessary, at this stage, to see Larkin's response to life as a whole before restricting to the main thesis.

Love, death and disaster, the bearers of knowledge and experience, play a consequential role in life.⁷³ The Second World War (1939 – 1945) is no exception in this respect. The tremendous destruction that it brought in its wake caused much emotional, psychological and spiritual change in the life of people. Where the hopes and aspirations regarding the social and scientific progress were replaced by fears and doubts, the faith in the divine power converted into rationalism. The pre-war innocence and optimism was substituted by a harsh but realistic attitude towards life. For Larkin, being a sensitive product of the age, it is natural to record the prevalent situation and his attitude towards it. *A Girl in Winter* is a good attempt in this regard.

The setting of the story somewhere in thirties and forties is quite suitable and realistic in showing England in its modes of peace and war. The effect has been beautifully emphasised by associating peace with summer and war with winter. Where summer section of the story is characterised by vitality, warmth and happiness of the outdoor activities, its winter section implies lifelessness, cold and isolation of indoor life. In a way, the combination of summer, adolescence and peace in the middle section signifies innocence, while winter, with its sufferings of war, stands for experience and knowledge. The nostalgia for innocence, implied in the winter-section, anticipates many of Larkin's future works, especially *MCMXIV* (1964)⁷⁴, 'To the Sea',⁷⁵ *Show Saturday*, etc.

The adverse effects of war situation have been further emphasised through presenting the protagonist as a refugee girl. This makes her the

⁷³ Philip Larkin, *A Girl in Winter* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p.183.

⁷⁴ Larkin, 'MCMXIV' in *The Whitsun Weddings*, Burnett, pp. 60-61.

⁷⁵ See 'To The Sea' (Burnett, p. 75)

centre of all the scrambling and struggle for survival that is going around in the cold and foggy winter of a gloomy provincial town in the war-stricken country. Like everyone else, she is also trying to make the best of what meagre she has. However, her problem is not simply the scarcity; it is also the loneliness of living alone in a strange place. She either has to adapt herself to her present and move forward, or try to restore what she can of her good past life. Her attempt to rekindle the old extinguished feelings of love seems a ray of hope in this regard. Perhaps, the power of love will pull her out of the abyss of emptiness, and enable her to bring the pre-war pleasures back to her life.

Love which makes its way from *Jill* to *A Girl in Winter* finds itself in a bit different situation, but meets almost the same conclusion⁷⁶. It serves the same purpose of analysing self and life as in the case of the previous novel. To have a good comprehension of this aspect of the story, it is useful to analyse love itself with respect to the feelings in the summer and winter sections. In the previous case, it is impulsive, mainly driven by sexual desire.⁷⁷ Accordingly, all the sights and sounds bear the brightness of the spontaneous and fresh youthful feelings in this part of the story. Despite the force and energy the feelings carry, the problem that arises is the disharmony of dullness versus intelligence that reaches its culmination with the awkward kiss at the end of the section⁷⁸. Love's next and more important sequel starts in the winter section.

Despite the lack of that delicate harmony which has often been a mystery in the case of love, Larkin makes at it another go in the winter section. This

⁷⁶ Motion, p.164.

⁷⁷ '[The] desire she felt for him was cloudy and shameful.' *A Girl in Winter*. p.127.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.173.

time it seems to have more of maturity and intellect rather than impulse – an effort to restore that sense of security and satisfaction that was a part of Katherine’s past life once.⁷⁹ More than any concern for passion, the motive seems to be an escape from loneliness and isolation into a sense of being secure. The base thus provided seems too fragile to sustain the relation. Nevertheless, the intellect has grown too strong to allow any mistake or negligence. The previous zeal has transformed into a cold cynical attitude; the passion has become victim to fears and doubts, a natural outcome of growing age as well as sufferings. The process of revelation that had already started reaches its culmination at the last minute: this time it is not intelligence versus dullness, but cold cynicism versus sensuality⁸⁰. After all, love is not simply sex, and life is not merely to please senses; it is something more than that. Satisfaction and fulfilment seem to be the name of something beyond all this. What if it cannot be achieved, one should not, at least, be the victim of deceptions⁸¹. Remaining truthful to the apparent reality may be hard, but not as shocking as one gets the truth after a life of self-deception. It is better to accept it fully and at once rather than in pieces, and at intervals.⁸² Consequently, the preference goes for an ordered and disciplined life rather than one shaped by others’ demands, even if it means enclosing oneself in cold seclusion. Here the story seems to anticipate ‘Dockery and Son’⁸³. Thus, sufferings and love in *A Girl in Winter* have been presented not simply as the various modes of life, but the means of analysing self and reality.

⁷⁹‘[The] Fennels were nothing if not English.’ Ibid. p.22.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.237.

⁸¹ The idea makes the basis of *The Less Deceived*, Larkin’s second published collection of poetry.

⁸² See *A Girl in Winter*, p.183.

⁸³ ‘Dockery and Son’ (Burnett, p. 65-67)

The analysis of self and life, as in the case of *Jill*, further elaborates Larkin's deterministic attitude. Nothing can be as clear and self-explanatory in this regard as the statement that 'a person's life is directed mainly by their actions, and these in turn are directed by their personality, which is not self-chosen in the first place and modifies itself quite independently of their wishes afterwards'⁸⁴.⁸⁵ Despite its seemingly strong social aspect, the superstitious element pointed out by Blake Morrison in the context of *Jill*⁸⁶ seems to persist here as well⁸⁷. This total negation of the freedom of choice is followed by a belief in inaction rather than action.⁸⁸ One should give a chance to chance itself rather than interfering, as stretching out a blind hand may knock the cup over⁸⁹. This is like giving in completely to the flow of life rather than planning it according to choices⁹⁰. The attitude is quite becoming a person like Larkin whose life itself was a series of many indecisions⁹¹.

For a rational and sceptic person like Larkin what remains of religion are love and tradition. Love seems to serve as a substitute for faith: he seems to seek in it what a believer seeks in something beyond.⁹² Looking to it as a solution to man's miseries is like bringing the remedy to man's sufferings at the level of humanity.⁹³ This attitude towards love anticipates many of his poems like 'Faith Healing' and 'Arundel Tomb'. Katherine's generous

⁸⁴ *A Girl in Winter*, pp.184-85.

⁸⁵ The statement seems to anticipate 'This be the Verse' (*High Windows*).

⁸⁶ Morrison, p. 189.

⁸⁷ *A Girl in Winter*, p. 212.

⁸⁸ '[Kemp] felt a great unwillingness to do anything; he had learnt that action usually left him worse off than better.' *Jill*, p. 206.

⁸⁹ *A Girl in Winter*, p. 190.

⁹⁰ '[Katherine] feels it impossible to live a life shaped by choices . . .' Motion, p.163.

⁹¹ Derived from 'Larkin's final indecision was the last in a series that shaped his life'. *ibid*, p. xvi.

⁹² 'For Christianity . . . the holy is the 'depth' of the common.' John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Bloomsbury Street London: SCM Press LTD, 1963), p. 87.

⁹³ 'Once the dogma of his 'deity' has been put out of the way, the humanist picture of Jesus is noticeably sympathetic . . .' Robinson, p. 68.

outlook, a change so surprising and fresh for her, is also because of her expected meeting with her former love. It can be noticed in her sympathetic attitude even towards a cross creature like Miss Green⁹⁴, or in the somewhat melting away of her hatred towards Mr. Anstey⁹⁵ whom otherwise she wants to crush like an insect⁹⁶. Why does it fail in her own case? There is something missing!⁹⁷ It is the same issue that has already been discussed – the sense of fulfilment Larkin consistently longs for.⁹⁸ Thus, love in the story has been shown both as ‘hopelessly longed for’ and ‘cynically dismissed as just another evasion of reality’⁹⁹.

His attitude towards traditions can be explained likewise. It is another aspect of life where he seeks to compensate for the sense of insufficiency. Though the traditions themselves are not religion, they at least are that part of life that binds us together in a string of sympathy and love¹⁰⁰, and provide a guarantee of keeping humanistic values alive in a machine age¹⁰¹. An integral part of these traditions (English traditions) is English landscapes, which themselves are also a source of selfless and innocent pleasure¹⁰². Katherine’s interest in the English villages and churches¹⁰³, the loving details of a visit to gymkhana to watch the horse race¹⁰⁴, and the

⁹⁴ See *A Girl in Winter*, pp. 34-5.

⁹⁵ Ibid. pp. 204-5.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 19.

⁹⁷ ‘Larkin never made any affirmation of faith, but he had an awareness of a dimension that lay beyond ordinary experience.’ Brett, p. 235.

⁹⁸ ‘The statement is “theological” not because it relates to a particular Being called “God”, but because it asks ultimate questions about the meaning of existence.’ Ibid. p. 49.

⁹⁹ King, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ John Macmurray, *The Structure of Religious Experiences* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), p. 30.

¹⁰¹ The apparently carefree Christopher Warner’s longing for a proper family life (*Jill*, p. 118) also implies the degeneration of humanistic values in a modern society.

¹⁰² ‘Denying so much of what makes life satisfactory and fulfilling for so many . . . Larkin does nevertheless have his sources of alternative value and affirmation. One is jazz . . . another is a conception of English “nature”.’ Neil Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p.90.

¹⁰³ cf. ‘Church Going’ [Larkin, *The Less Deceived*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1955).

¹⁰⁴ See ‘Show Saturday’ and ‘To the Sea’ (Larkin, *High Windows*).

beautiful descriptions of the various sights and sounds of the Oxfordshire village provide us with glimpses of this aspect of Larkin's personality and work. Their significance is emphasised also by the nostalgic feelings, implied in the winter section of the novel, and Mr Fennel's remarks regarding the adverse effects of industrialization and fear of another war.¹⁰⁵ Feelings like these appear also in many of his later works like 'Going, Going' (January 1972) and 'At Grass' (1950).

The engagement with English rituals and landscapes is an evidence of Larkin's Englishness¹⁰⁶ and realistic attitude also. As already stated, it covers the gap created by the Modernists and makes his connection with the pre-war English tradition of which Thomas Hardy is a prominent part. Though Larkin's connection with Hardy is attributed to his mature works of poetry after he was inspired by 'the little blue *Chosen Poems of Thomas Hardy*'¹⁰⁷, his pessimistic approach towards life and love for the English traditions and landscapes show that the connection already existed. Regarding *A Girl in Winter*, Larkin's similarity with Hardy seems to be natural rather than acquired: his Englishness with respect to his mood and matter is native, whereas his poetic style is reflective of his poetic inclination. An extract from a review in this context is worth quoting:

A Girl in Winter has many beautiful passages where [Larkin] turns his skills as a poet to gorgeous descriptions of the English countryside. However, his ability to develop a complex, nuanced portrait of his main character, Katherine Lind, gives the novel its strength and emotional power. This is a sensitive, quiet novel, exploring the difficulty in

¹⁰⁵ '[It] is the same all over England – good arable land being turned into pasture, pasture turning into housing states. It will be the ruin of us . . . Suppose there is another war? What are we going to live on? Christmas crackers and ball bearings?' *A Girl in Winter*, p.79.

¹⁰⁶ See *A Girl in Winter*, p.131.

¹⁰⁷ Philip Larkin, *Required Writings: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 29.

penetrating people's facades to understand who they are and what their motivations are.¹⁰⁸

The physical description leading into the inner crevices of personality is true not only of the main character, but almost all characters in the story. Whether it is characterization or sights and sounds, Larkin's descriptive skill has much resemblance with that of Hardy.

However, an interesting point about the novel is its claim for both the pre-war English tradition and the Modernists. The former has already been discussed in the previous passage. What accounts for the latter is the narrative technique: the flashback method used in the story is mostly a characteristic of psychological novels. Larkin seems to acknowledge it when he refers to the story as 'Virginia Woolf-Henry Green' novel.¹⁰⁹ The flashback technique renders the story speculative and implicit that Larkin has also mentioned in a letter to his parents: '*A Girl in Winter* deals with less explicit feelings and so I have tried to represent them by indirect reference and allegoric incident'¹¹⁰. Such characteristics give the novel a maturity that indicates a step forward to Larkin's career as a poet. In his struggle to determine his artistic identity, he seems to have succeeded considerably so far.

An important aspect of the comparatively mature outlook in *A Girl in Winter* is also its point of view. Narrating the story from the viewpoint of a refugee girl, and treating her in a kind and sympathetic way seems contradictory to his popular image of being a misogynist. What brings him this image is Larkin's seemingly antagonistic attitude towards women,

¹⁰⁸ Kris (Philadelphia, PA)'s review of *A Girl in Winter*. <<http://www.goodreads.com/review>> [accessed 30 Aug. 16].

¹⁰⁹Motion, p. 160.

¹¹⁰Philip Larkin to Eva Larkin and Sydney Larkin, 11 November 1946, quoted in Motion.

found in many of his private letters. Andrew Motion has discussed the point quite in detail in Larkin's biography where he has traced it back to his childhood experiences¹¹¹: the shyness and ignorance in the matters of opposite sex that led to his sexual confusion,¹¹² transformed into a desire for an independent and emotionally uninvolved life later on.¹¹³ It is really interesting, in this context, to see Larkin choosing a girl to voice his feelings and thoughts. Her fears, doubts and cynical attitude are almost the same as those of Larkin; her inner self seems a reflection of him. Moreover, presenting her as bold, intelligent and sensible, the story makes her somewhat stronger than the rest of the characters. At times, it seems a voice for women's rights, especially in the context of problems they faced in their jobs at that time. Such contrasts in Larkin's works are not unusual. However, can this particular case be reconciled?

There is a possibility to work it out. Layard's idea of 'woman as the priestess of conscience'¹¹⁴ must have had a role in this respect. The idea had influenced Larkin greatly: it made him feel the crucial importance of woman in creative process¹¹⁵, and aroused his curiosity about love, woman and heterosexuality. This might be one of the factors for the considerable significance that he has given to a female character as a protagonist of the story. Another reason may be that his problem is not women but the sense of unfulfillment regarding sex¹¹⁶ that exists not only

¹¹¹ '[Larkin] wanted to find out about girls, but felt incapable. His shyness quickly turned into the sneering he had learnt from his father.' Motion, p.61.

¹¹² Ibid. p.87.

¹¹³ 'To have companionship without complicated emotional bonds suited him ideally . . . Ibid' p.149.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.61.

¹¹⁵ 'Ovid, for instance, could not write unless he was in love. Many other poets have been and are the same. I should think poetry and sex are closely connected.' Larkin to James Ballard Sutton – 28 December 1942 (quoted in Motion).

¹¹⁶ 'The thought of actual sex connection is usually repulsive.' Ibid., 20 February, 1941 (Larkin has taken the idea from Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious*)

in this story but also in most of his work. Moreover, taking private correspondence with friends as the basis of argument for Larkin's misogynistic image does not seem much justified for what one says in such cases is often not intended seriously but lightly.¹¹⁷ The story's point of view, and the way it treats a refugee girl, give a bit wider range to Larkin's humanistic concerns, and helps to alleviate the charge of misogyny to some extent.

Like *Jill*, the story of *A Girl in Winter* also bears the features of Larkin's actual life. Katherine's job at the library tells of Larkin's professional experience as a librarian. When the novel was being written, he served as a librarian in Willington. The episode regarding the visit to Oxford University reminds of not only *Jill*, but also shows Larkin's particular attachment with the place. Similarly, the epistolary element in the story refers to his favourite and frequent activity, correspondence through letters, which seems to have consumed much of his creative energy and time¹¹⁸. Nevertheless, an interesting case in this regard is the 'ratchet-voiced' head librarian, Mr Anstey, who represents a character from Larkin's actual life, Mr Astley-Jones, the chief clerk to the Urban District Council and a member of the local council Library Committee. Larkin acknowledges it while responding to a query by Alan Pringle, the Faber's editor of the novel:

Anstey was based as far as personal manner goes on a real person. The circumstances I placed him in were imaginary and invented to fit the book itself I think your first impression of the portrayal – as inoffensive – was just, because although I may not have succeeded I wished to leave a final version of good in the reader's mind. The

¹¹⁷ See Brett, p.226.

¹¹⁸ Ibid' p. 232.

importance of sympathising with people like Anstey is one of the book's minor lessons.¹¹⁹

Using such material both in his prose and in poetry speaks of the value Larkin gives to the real and ordinary.¹²⁰

Both the novels, through a synthesis of social milieu and love, seem to present the journey of the writer's soul. Where in *Jill* it has been presented through combining the themes of upward social mobility and love, in *A Girl in Winter* it has been managed through putting love in its various modes with respect to the situations of peace and war. The role they play in moulding personality and thereby determining thoughts and actions implies Larkin's struggle towards finding his self as well as artistic voice. The progress so far made in this respect can be seen in the comparative analysis of *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter*. The dynamic succession of events and actions, and direct expression in the former has been replaced by a quiescent atmosphere of inner action and poetic style in the latter. This change in mood and manner is indicative of Larkin's artistic maturity as well as poetic inclination. After *A Girl in Winter*, Larkin's attempt to write a third novel proves unsuccessful:

When Philip Larkin published *A Girl in Winter* in 1947, he considered it part of a loosely linked trilogy. His first novel, *Jill*, had represented innocence. *A Girl in Winter* stood for loss of innocence and the consequences. The third novel he planned would mark a return to life. As he told his friend Jim Sutton, "the north ship will come back instead of being bogged up there in a glacier. Then I shall have finished this

¹¹⁹ Larkin, 'To Alan Pringle – 25 November 1946', *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin 1940-1985*, ed. by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 128-129.

¹²⁰ 'I write poems to preserve things I have seen/thought/felt ... both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from the oblivion for its own sake.' D.J. Enright, *Poets of the 1950s* (Tokyo: Kenyusha, 1955), p. 77.

particular branch of soul history (my own, of course) ..." But Larkin never completed the third novel.¹²¹

¹²¹ Carol Rumens, 'Winter reads: A Girl in Winter by Philip Larkin', *The Guardian: Fiction* (20 December 2011 10.15 GMT) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/dec/16/winter-reads-girl-in-winter>> [accessed 30 Aug. 16].

Chapter 2

‘Submission is the Only Good’

[The Unconditional Love]

If art or, to be more specific, literature reflects a genuine response to contemporary social and political conditions, Larkin’s work can be rightly said meeting the criteria. The present discussion illustrates how the subject, mood and tone of his poems have been determined by the spirit of the age.¹²² It is useful, therefore, to draw an outline of the general as well as specific circumstances that inspired them.

Composed mostly during the war years (1943 – 1945)¹²³, they can be categorised as wartime poems. It was, perhaps, one of the worst times in its history when Britain was passing through a tremendous political, social and economic turmoil. The blitz were playing havoc everywhere: where targeting the big cities (Fig-3 & 4) caused life loss and casualties on a large scale, bombing industrial areas resulted in scarcity of manufactures and goods of common use.¹²⁴ The ways introduced to ensure public safety and welfare changed peoples’ life style considerably. Blackout, sheltering, evacuation, rationing¹²⁵ and conscription are some of them that show how austere life was. With men engaged at the front women had to brace the double duty of working outdoors as well as looking after their families at home in conditions far beyond normal.¹²⁶ Youth were being sent to war

¹²²Stephen Regan, *Philip Larkin: An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism* (London: MacMillan, 1992) pp.68-69.

¹²³ James Booth, *Philip Larkin: Writer* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) p. 64.

¹²⁴ Andrew Roberts, ‘Last Hope Island’, *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010).

¹²⁵ See Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-war Britain* (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p.9.

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 8.

without completing education.¹²⁷ Things like these were going to have a lasting impact on life in post-war Britain in a way that would change the entire structure of English society. It was a situation like this that urged the expedition of 'The North Ship' expected to find answers to some questions of pivotal significance.

For a sad and sensitive soul, already sick of the unpleasant experiences of childhood, wartime must have aggravated the situation. His problem, being the son of a city treasurer, was not of material but emotional and psychological nature¹²⁸; the obvious reason was a 'clenching' atmosphere at home, the outcome of a tense relationship between his parents.¹²⁹ Consequently, there was little inviting at their home for neighbours, friends or relatives.¹³⁰ The wide age-gap did not let him be his sister's friend either. Looking from this perspective his feeling of being lonely and isolated is quite understandable. As a schoolchild, he may have had an interval of relief in the company of a few friends,¹³¹ but the seed of isolation sown in childhood seemed growing with age¹³².¹³³

Unfortunately, he went to Oxford at a time when its previous charm of peace and plenitude had been replaced by a grim atmosphere of insecurity and scarcity. Conscription on a large scale resulted in qualification with truncated degrees.¹³⁴ His weak eyesight saved but isolated Larkin when most of his friends, notably Kingsley Amis (1922–

¹²⁷ Philip Larkin, Introduction to *Jill* (London, Bloomsbury House: Faber and Faber, 1964) pp. 11-12.

¹²⁸ In 'The Ugly Sister' (Larkin, Burnett, p.14) the poet talks of compensating the emotional deficiency caused by the lack of love through giving much attention to the beauty of nature.

¹²⁹ Motion, pp. 9, 10-11, 37.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 10.

¹³¹ 'I never left the house without the sense of walking into a cooler, cleaner, saner and pleasanter atmosphere, and, if I had not made friends outside, life would have been scarcely tolerable.' (University of Hull, Brynmor Johns Library, notebook-5, quoted in Motion, p. 15.)

¹³² See Larkin's poem VI, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p. 7.

¹³³ Ibid. pp. 13-14.

¹³⁴ Philip Larkin, *Jill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), pp. 11-12.

1995) and J. B. Sutton joined the army. Failure because of poor eyesight, already one of the causes of his emotional complex¹³⁵, must have added to his sense of deprivation. He might have been true in his dislike for the army, but there is much difference between rejecting and being rejected. Then, there was the shocking event of his home town Coventry: the place was almost completely destroyed by the German air raids, resulting in huge destruction and casualties (Fig-2).^{136,137}

However, things like these could not distract a boy coming-of-age from his personal issues. Adding to his complex after joining university was his anxiousness about sex and women, a forbidden fruit for him until that time.^{138, 139} Even at the stage of being a university student, he was awkward in matters like these.¹⁴⁰ The sense of loneliness, isolation and detachment in Larkin seems a composite of all these factors.



(F-1)

¹³⁵ Motion, p. 9.

¹³⁶ 'The event has been referred to in several of Larkin's works like "New Year Poem" (31 December 1940), *Jill* (1946) and "Time and Space were only their disguises" (April 1941). [Regan, 1992, pp. 71-73].

¹³⁷ See Thwaite, 2002, pp. 56-57.

¹³⁸ See Janice Rossen, 'Difficulties with Girls', in *Philip Larkin: Contemporary Critical essays*, ed. by Stephen Regan (London: MacMillan, 1997), p. 136.

¹³⁹ 'It now seems strange to me that all the time I lived in Coventry I never knew any girls, but it did not at the time. I had grown up to regard sexual recreation as a socially remote thing, like baccarat or clog-dancing, and nothing happened to alter this view.' [Thwaite, *Further Requirements*, p. 9]

¹⁴⁰ Motion.

On top of all this was his leaving university: missing Oxford and friends mostly engaged on the front, job-hunt, failure in civil services exam and entering the suffocating situation at home once again made him hopeless. The desire to live purely a writer's life, not guaranteeing a decent financial position necessary for living independently, also seemed impossible.¹⁴¹

However, appointment as a librarian in Shropshire, Wellington (1943), proved to be a positive change. Most of the poems included in *The North Ship* were composed here. Initially published in 1945 by Fortune Press, the book had two changes to its second edition by Faber (1955): addition of an introductory part and a poem at the end. Regarding the subject, mood and tone, the poems seem a reflection of the depressing atmosphere of the time generally, and of the confusion faced by a boy coming-of-age specifically. The concern about man's misery leads to the fundamental questions of life's imperfection, sense of unfulfillment, freedom, death, and finally life's meaning itself.

Man's misery is, perhaps, as old as life itself. The struggle for survival must have started at the very beginning of existence, and in every age attempts have been made through proposing and applying various theological and philosophical theories to solve man's problems. Twentieth century, because of the great Wars, made people anxiously ask if there was some flaw in the already existing system. It must have been in this context when it was proclaimed:

'. . . Submission is the only good;

¹⁴¹Motion, pp. 104-109.

Let me become an instrument sharply stringed

For all things to strike music as they please.¹⁴² ¹⁴³

The self-negation is suggestive of humanistic values such as respect, sympathy, humbleness, tolerance sprouting from a single spirit, the spirit of love. Love, the essence of humanity, is the key to solving life's issues: the announcement seems to have been made from a high hill's summit. (Does not it imply resemblance with the way a prophet or saint would deliver a message?)¹⁴⁴ The height, while signifying the importance of the words, also ensures its widespread access to the public. However, 'climbing the hill in the deafening wind'¹⁴⁵ symbolically establishes the message – unlike a prophetic 'vision' or divine revelation – as the quintessence of life's experiences, hence logical. Where the declaration's strength is discernible in 'blood unfurled', 'proudly borne' and 'echoed like horn', its all-embracing love is manifested through 'All things' projecting the idea of 'all life'¹⁴⁶ or trans-humanism. However, the confidence is wavered in the second stanza:

'How to recall such music, when the street

¹⁴² Larkin, IX, Burnett, p.9.

¹⁴³ Cf. 'we should be careful | | Of each other, we should be kind' [P. Larkin's 'The Mower' (Burnett, p. 118)].

¹⁴⁴ BBC - *Religions - Paganism: Britain's spiritual history* (2008-04-11)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/history/spiritualhistory_1.shtml> [accessed 24 August 2016].

¹⁴⁵ The image, symbolic of man's struggling situation, recalls the image of the climber in Robert Browning's 'Prospice'.

¹⁴⁶ The idea of universal love has been illustrated in Larkin's 'The Mower' (Burnett, p. 118), 'Myxomatosis' (p. 37), 'Take one Home for the Kiddies' (p. 59), 'First Sight' (p. 65) as well. Poems like these '[urge] kindness not just to one's fellow man, but to all creatures, all life. . .' They show the poet's humanistic approach at transcendental level. (<http://philiplarkin.com/poem-reviews/the-mower/>)

Darkens? Among rain and stone places

I find only ancient sadness falling,

Only hurrying and troubled faces,

The walking of girls' vulnerable feet,

The heart in its own endless silence kneeling.'¹⁴⁷

The dark streets, 'the hurrying troubled faces' and 'the walking of girls' vulnerable feet'¹⁴⁸ – vividly suggesting a sense of fear, frustration and insecurity – remind of 'the ancient sadness'¹⁴⁹, drowning the heart 'in its own endless silence'; the images plumb the very depth of man's misery. The second last line is of special magnitude because of not only vividly depicting a sense of insecurity, but also linking the poem with the bleak situation of female protagonists in *A Girl in Winter*, 'Deceptions' and the Polish girl in 'XII' (*The North Ship*). Instilling the feelings of sadness and insecurity through evoking the frail figure of a girl walking with hesitant steps in rain through a darkening street cannot be done so effectively otherwise. Soaked in deep sorrow, the image carries the emotional level to a point where one cannot miss the writer's deep concern for the contemporary woman suffering, besides war-situation, due to her poor and 'vulnerable' social status.

¹⁴⁷ Larkin, Burnett, p.9.

¹⁴⁸ The sense of insecurity can be compared with the situation of the raped girl in 'Deceptions'. It can also be linked with the protagonist of *A Girl in Winter*, the Polish girl in poem XII (*The North Ship*) or the bride in 'The Wedding Wind' (*The Less Deceived*).

¹⁴⁹ 'My ancient sadness still

Haunts me, my soul.

I have not heard from God

My cosmic role.' (Sri Chinmoy, *A soulful cry versus a fruitful smile*)

(Short Poems. Org.: *Sadness Poems* (2016) <https://www.shortpoems.org/poems/sadness_poems/> [accessed 24 August 2016]).

One can see how the specific situation of war years has been imperceptibly incorporated within the infinity of 'ancient sadness'; the phrase, exceptionally striking and evocative, traces humanity's innumerable sad stories to times immemorial. Does it imply man's tragic situation as irremediable? Is man's misery unending? Whatever have been declared in human history in the name of salvation until now seem to have done little good. The promises in this respect have been there in numerous religious, philosophical and political forms since long, but the issue seems to persist with a renewed force. Is there something missing in them, or man's tragedy is destined? It is in this perspective that the wholeness and harmony yearned for seems impracticable.

The poem can be rightly set in the contemporary turbulence caused by the great wars and their aftermath: a high time for making tall political, social, philosophical and religious claims to put an end to man's misery. Ironically, such claims and slogans themselves have often been the cause of conflicts and wars:¹⁵⁰ ¹⁵¹ ¹⁵²the ideas thus suggested are either inapplicable, or devised from a partial perspective, and in many cases characterised by a lack of sincerity and sense of commitment, having some ulterior motives. After all, how can one close eyes to the causes of the recently ended Great War?¹⁵³ ¹⁵⁴

The 'submission' Larkin talks about is obviously not in the divine sense but love, an affair at human level. Though the range of love widens enough to embrace the idea of trans-humanism, it avoids any concept of religious

¹⁵⁰ See Cooper, p.106.

¹⁵¹ See Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008) p.1.

¹⁵² See Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2005).

¹⁵³ See Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 250-58.

¹⁵⁴ See Sam Harris, '10 Myths and 10 Truths about Atheism', *The Los Angeles Times*, 24 December 2006.

transcendentalism. Unlike religion, where things are labelled as good or bad in black and white with a reverential as well as fearful reference to some superior deity, 'submission' carries a sense of equality, love, selflessness, sympathy, tolerance and humbleness without needing any such reference. A believers' faith in divinity is substituted with a higher level of devotion or unconditional commitment in humanism – the principle of serving selflessly.¹⁵⁵ Eliminating feelings of pride, prejudice and imposing or judgemental attitudes is, indeed, the highest level of humanism.¹⁵⁶ Is it likely to have such a perfection and harmony in this world of reality? In fact, the situation of man – whether a believer or nonbeliever – has never been ideal.

'Unconditional love' that lies at the basis of the concept of 'submission' needs a great inner change. Nevertheless, having it universally seems Utopian: from historical perspective, life does not seem having a promising future in this respect. The realisation causes a sense of deprivation and emptiness. Without 'unconditional love', having humanism in its entirety is unlikely. If 'love' could be found in its true form?¹⁵⁷ Devoid of its essence, love in almost all the poems carries a sense of loss:

'It is not love you will find,

¹⁵⁵ The idea has been presented as an alternative for metaphysical aspect of religion by the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, John A.T. Robinson, in *Honest to God* (S.C.M. Press, 1963).

¹⁵⁶ '[The] first stanza of "Come then to prayers" (LCP, 5) rehearses one of the themes of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* – a play that Larkin claimed to admire. Eliot's concern with the difficulty of achieving authentic humility was also a question that preoccupied Larkin here: "[We] are required lastly to give up pride, /and the last difficult pride in being humble".' [Raphael Ingelbien, *Misreading England: Poetry and Nationhood since the Second World War* (Amsterdam-New York: NY 2002), p. 19]

¹⁵⁷ 'Nearly always, love is treated with caution and ambivalence as if, like religion, it commits us to rituals which might promise to "solve and satisfy" but might also prove false.' Regan, 1992, p. 76.

Only the bright-tongued birds,

Only a moon with no home.'¹⁵⁸

Where the 'bright-tongued birds' refers to the lack of sincerity and truthfulness, 'a moon without home' signifies dissatisfaction and loneliness – often an invariable attribute of love.

Besides the lack of love, what has been pointed out is the widening distance between man and nature caused by the growing material pursuits. Hence, the brightness of the full moon¹⁵⁹ that should have been a source of peace and pleasure reminds the speaker of 'the diminished existence' below on the earth. Perhaps, Nature has taken its charms back, shutting its doors on man. Alternatively, man himself may have turned deaf and blind to the bounties of Nature.

'There were no mouths

To drink of the wind

Nor any eyes

To sharpen on stars

Wide heaven-holding

Only the sound

Long sibilant-muscled trees

¹⁵⁸ Larkin, XIII, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p.11.

¹⁵⁹ See Burnett, p. 338

Were lifting up, the black poplars

And in their blazing solitude

The stars sang in their sockets through the night:

'Blow bright, blow bright

The coal of this unquickened world.'¹⁶⁰ ¹⁶¹

Greed for power and material concerns has obstructed the view of nature that otherwise could have been a source of satisfaction and strength.¹⁶² The inspirational power of nature has been vividly conveyed through a lovely fusion of visual, auditory and tactile images; specially, linking 'wind' with 'drink' conveys a sense of nature's intoxicating and exciting effect. The poem is an excellent example of suggesting nature's innocent beauty as a substitute for the entire world of theology, philosophy and ethics.

As mentioned before, the mode of questioning the prevalent religious, cultural, social and political norms was caused by the contemporary austere and insecure situation. Besides personal problems chasing him since childhood, Larkin, like many others, must have been deeply affected by the saddening consequences of war. War, though not dealt with directly, clearly reflects in the disquiet marking his wartime poems. The

¹⁶⁰ The poem is rich with sound and sight effects: images like 'the stars wide heaven-holding', 'the sound of the long sibilant-muscled trees' and the 'blazing solitude [of] the stars' are striking. The repetition of sounds and words in the last stanza enhance the musicality of the lines. In addition, an intoxicating effect has been created through the '[drinking] of the wind'.

¹⁶¹ Larkin, 'Night-Music', *The North Ship*, Burnett, p. 10

¹⁶² Cf. W. Wordsworth's 'The world is too much with us'.

images of struggle accompanying a sense of frustration and unfulfillment characterise almost every poem:

‘So every journey I make
 Leads me as in the story he was led,
 To some new ambush, to some fresh mistake:
 So every journey I begin foretells
 A weariness of daybreak, spread
 With carrion kisses, carrion farewells.’¹⁶³

Reality versus myth or knowledge versus innocence has been depicted ingeniously in the speaker’s coming out of the fascinating world of fairy tales into the dullness of adulthood. With no idea of the significance of ‘the battered carcase of a carrion crow’ in an ‘unpolished pewter dish’ in a ‘black and candlelit room’ at the end of a tiring day, the rider’s heroic figure undertaking adventures was quite thrilling once. Life now seems a repetition of those nursery tales but with a different sense: having been through the futile struggles one finds how stale and illusory things are, and how the end is often not worth the effort. The realisation results in yearning for some meaning at a macro level.

The question about the meaning of life is inseparable from the issue of freedom. Is man free in his decisions and deeds or some divine

¹⁶³ Larkin, ‘Nursery Tale’, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p. 12.

interference in the form of destiny or fate is involved in man's struggles and sufferings? In some respects, it seems obvious: for example, one has no choice in his birth, the circumstances he is born in, his brought up and its influence on his subsequent life,¹⁶⁴ and finally old age and death. These various factors revolve around the question of free will and determinism.

The question has been effectively posed in a poem where struggle for survival has been depicted through the misty image of a lonely man out for work, awaiting train at a deserted platform in the early hours of a cold, rainy and windy morning. The situation's pitifulness is intensified through contrast with a house 'folded full of the dark silk of dreams, /A shell of sleep cradling a wife or child.'¹⁶⁵ The images, the richly connotative words combined with alliterative sounds, generate a lulling effect of being wrapped up in the comfort of soft, smooth and deep dark covers of a soothing sleep. However, it does not take long to see the 'cradling' 'shell' shocked by the cruelly beating 'wild' wind – any thought of ease and comfort becomes illusory. The situation concludes with some highly significant questions:

'Who can this ambition trace,
To be each dawn perpetually journeying?
To trick this hour when lovers re-embrace
With the unguessed-at heart riding
The winds as gulls do? What lips said

¹⁶⁴ The issue is a continuation of the stories in *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter*.

¹⁶⁵ Larkin, XXII, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p. 17.

Starset and cockcrow call the dispossessed

Onto the next desert, lest

Love sink a grave round the still-sleeping head?'¹⁶⁶

What 'ambition' drives man on a 'perpetual' journey from dawn to dusk? Would anyone opt for this ceaseless travelling through the 'desert' if given the choice? The setting and rising of astronomical bodies normally seen in geographical terms seems to have been implicitly linked with some mystery working behind all this; a somewhat metaphysical clue, though not in black and white, has been suggested indirectly. The word 'dispossessed' that implies having no possession or control adds to the sense: if man is 'dispossessed' then there may be someone or something controlling him. Though not an enough evidence to show Larkin believing in metaphysical things, the lines suggest at least his curiosity about 'something' existing 'somewhere' or 'nowhere'.¹⁶⁷ Being strictly rational does not mean a total eclipse of metaphysical intimation, just as being a believer does not mean a complete dismissal of rational faculty: one may have moments of unusual experiences and feelings.¹⁶⁸ In fact, clues like these provide a base for the current discussion. When may such visionary moments occur? Though nothing like definite, most probably when one

¹⁶⁶ Where man's desires have been presented in the image of ecstatic re-embracing of lovers in the morning hours, his actual condition has been shown as one facing a new desert to cover at each daybreak. The ominous combination of love and grave in the last line, not sparing even the lovers, has been used to emphasise man's pathetic situation.

¹⁶⁷ 'When Larkin discovered spiritual yearnings in himself, he adopted the same diffident and ironic tone with which he lambasted his modernist predecessors. He once wrote to his friend Jim Sutton: "I am delving into my soul with the hope of finding something. It will probably be an old tin kettle".' Ingelbien, 2002, p. 19.

¹⁶⁸ And in many different times and places / Truth was attained (a moment's harmony); / Yet endless mornings break on endless faces. Larkin, 'Many Famous Feet Have Trod', Burnett, pp.262-64.

feels utterly helpless or unable to explain a situation.¹⁶⁹ This for a believer may serve as a source strengthening his elliptical position around the axis of faith, whereas for a rationalist it may cause diversion at times, even if slight, from the seemingly linear course of rationality. Larkin's is, perhaps, the latter case.

Humanity's pathetic situation extends beyond merely social and political spheres: abiding by the laws of nature such as the rising and setting sun, or the rotation of day and night restricts life to a specific routine. The temporal and spatial limits sharpen the sense of being bound:

'If hands could free you heart,
Where would you fly?
Far, beyond every part
Of earth this running sky
Makes desolate? Would you cross
City and hill and sea,
If hands could set you free?'¹⁷⁰

Unlike the issues thought of as avoidable, discarding the yoke of space and time is unthinkable.¹⁷¹ The idea of freedom, therefore, seems just an

¹⁶⁹ See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap, 2007) pp. 5-6.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. 'Poetry of Departures' (Larkin, *The Less Deceived*, BNT, p. 39.)

¹⁷¹ 'This is the first thing/I have understood:/Time is the echo of an axe/Within a wood.' (XXVI, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p. 19.)

illusion anyway. All struggles are like moving in a circle, ceaselessly chased and encountered by issues in one form or another, without any real change.

The visible forms of 'the arrow of time', death, decay and old age that lie at the root of life's imperfection and the sense of unfulfillment, cover a considerable space in Larkin. Death – frequently presented as highly horrible and saddening – depicted as a stranger with covered face¹⁷² as well as a skilled card-player, visiting its victim in the dark night creates a somewhat gothic atmosphere:

'Are you prepared for what the night will bring?

The stranger who will never show his face,

But asks admittance; will you greet your doom

As final; set him loaves and wine; knowing

The game is finished when he plays his ace,

And overturn the table and go into the next room?'¹⁷³ ¹⁷⁴

The sense of mankind's sorry state gets intensified through transforming the dazzling brightness in the opening lines of the poem into the darkly fearsome situation in the end: the former showing life's exuberance whereas the latter describing its gloom and 'doom'. Images like these

¹⁷² Cf. the plural form 'stranger' in Larkin's 'The Old Fools'.

¹⁷³ Larkin, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p. 6.

¹⁷⁴ See 'the influence of Auden in the luckless conclusion' of the poem. A.T. Tolley, *My Proper Ground* (Canada: Carleton University Press, 1991) p.9.

pervade throughout the work. However, the dissatisfaction at the apparently eternal issues¹⁷⁵ originates mainly from Larkin's frustration over the contemporary age of turmoil: besides his personal problems, the sense of insecurity shaping into questions of existential significance is reflective of the contemporary depressed youth in general who could not see any ray of hope on the future's horizon.¹⁷⁶ Referring to it, Swarbrick says 'the immediate circumstances' contributed to the poems' 'opaqueness and sense of threat'.¹⁷⁷ The fact has been, in a way, confirmed by Larkin himself: 'One had to live through the forties at one's most impressionable time . . . a lot of poems I wrote . . . were very much of the age.'¹⁷⁸ After all, how can one, trapped in an atmosphere of uncertainty caused by the ongoing destruction, killings, scarcity and poverty, think or write about happiness?¹⁷⁹ The situation has been pictured in 'Winter'¹⁸⁰ showing 'shrivelled men [crowd] like thistles to one fruitless place' and 'each horse'¹⁸¹, like a passion long since defeated lowers its head.' Despite the exhaustive circumstances, humanity is depicted as throwing back an 'endless and cloudless pride' 'to the static gold winter sun'¹⁸²: the images aptly convey a courageous and challenging attitude against a bleak wintry unfavourable environment. The poem echoes the wartime cold, misty, struggling situation of *A Girl in Winter*.

¹⁷⁵ See Regan, 1997, p. 160.

¹⁷⁶ 'The insecurities of wartime Britain helped to shape a poetry of restricted choices, quietistic moods and disappointed ideals . . .' Ibid, p. 77.

¹⁷⁷ Andrew Swarbrick, *Out of Reach: The Poetry of Philip Larkin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 23.

¹⁷⁸ Ian Hamilton, 'Interview with Ian Hamilton', *London Magazine*, 1964, 4(8), p. 72.

¹⁷⁹ Larkin, *Jill*, p.12.

¹⁸⁰ Larkin, Burnett, p.8.

¹⁸¹ Cf. the horses in 'At Grass' '[standing] anonymous in the cold shade they shelter in'.

¹⁸² See Sinfield, p. 7.

Where most of the poems reflect the depressing effect of war years, 'Conscript'¹⁸³ deals with it somewhat directly. Despite the tall claiming heroic and chivalric tales, going to war can hardly be a choice: no sensible person would like to kill or die.¹⁸⁴ Why do people go to war, and what lies at the root of all fighting and killing? Contrary to the myth of original sin or man's evil nature – a face-saving substitute for the colonial myth of 'white man's burden' that was contradicted by the twentieth century great wars of the civilised world – the issue has been analysed quite logically in a social, political and psychological context. The poem, an ironically toned socio-political critique, is considered as Audenesque.¹⁸⁵ Pointing out the corrupting and manipulating influence of social and political institutions it reiterates the issue of freedom in a rational context.¹⁸⁶ The poem, a double-edged satire, criticises not only the conscripting agents, but also the subject for his willingness to go to war in the name of honour, bravery and patriotism:

'The assent he gave
Was founded on self-effacement
In order not to lose his birthright; brave,
For nothing would be easier than replacement,

¹⁸³ 'Larkin dedicated the poem to Sutton "as a token of high regard" (u/p letter, 19. Xi. 44), though [it] was written three years earlier in 1941 when Larkin was reading Sutton's poignantly expressed objections to army life.' Cooper, p.94.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Thomas Hardy's 'The Man he killed'.

¹⁸⁵ For detail, see page 339 of Archie Burnett.

¹⁸⁶ While discussing 'Ultimatum' and 'Conscript', Stephen Regan points out: 'The predominant images are those of confinement and entrapment. It is clear that the fears and constraints of these early works are not those of some timeless "human condition" but the immediate experiences of war.' (1992, p. 71)

Which would not give him time to follow further

The details of his own defeat and murder.’¹⁸⁷

The ironical tone reaches its satirical peak in the third line where enlisting is shown from the subject’s point of view as his ‘birth-right’ rather than duty; the ironical sense implied is a favour done to the individual by the state rather than the other way round, providing him an opportunity to fulfil his cherished desire for ‘self-effacement’. The conscript’s prompt ‘assent’ can be traced back to its very root in the introductory lines suggesting him as already victimised by the deceptive system:

‘The ego’s county he inherited

From those who tended it like farmers; had

All knowledge that the study merited,

The requisite contempt of good and bad;’¹⁸⁸

The subject has been a victim of social forces both formally as well as informally since his childhood: where the well-guarded asset, the ‘ego’s county’, he got in inheritance¹⁸⁹, the essential knowledge of ‘good and bad’ has been instilled in him through education. It is obvious how the ‘the

¹⁸⁷ Larkin, ‘Conscript’, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p. 7.

¹⁸⁸ Larkin, ‘Conscript’, Burnett, p.7.

¹⁸⁹ The ironical intention of describing ‘ego’ in aristocratic terminology is noteworthy.

brittle nature of preserving a selfish ideology'¹⁹⁰ has been criticised. The ideas of nationalism, narrow patriotism and egotism, ingrained in the susceptible minds of budding youth in educational institutions, are often the means exploited by greedy and hypocrite political systems for selfish interests.¹⁹¹ The false and empty concepts of dignity and honour are used as instigation to kill and be killed. The poem's anti-war, anti-heroic and anti-aristocratic spirit demonstrates a humanistic approach: peace and harmony can be brought only by subduing the false concepts of dignity, honour and selfhood to the idea of 'submission'.¹⁹² To ensure complete peace, prosperity and stability would mean ensuring a complete elimination of them. However, the foremost requirement in this respect is to accept man as a product of his social and political circumstances (not as the carrier of some 'original sin') – a continuation of the idea in the two novels.¹⁹³ Larkin's own life and personality was an enough evidence to convince him in this regard. The poem, therefore, is not simply about war and conscription but is quite vast and multidimensional – a 'complicated tangle of cause and effect'. One needs going to great lengths before blaming someone and something or, maybe none and nothing.¹⁹⁴

Larkin's feelings against conscription can be interpreted another way as well: dramatizing such feelings is, perhaps, just to overcome a sense of deprivation he probably had when weak eyesight – one of his complexes since childhood – stopped him from joining forces when most of his

¹⁹⁰ Cooper, p. 95.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 94-96.

¹⁹² 'Jardine criticises Larkin's writing for lack of "humane" qualities (Regan, 1997, p. 5) but these poems are as opposed to patriarchal culture as Woolf's *Three Guineas* . . .' Cooper, P. 96.

¹⁹³ '[All] of us are the captives of environment and programming . . . there is a wide range of experiment and experience that remains for ever invisible to us, because it falls in a spectrum we simply cannot see.' [Roger Ebert, *Walkabout (Movie) Review and Summary* (13 April 1997)

<<http://www.rogerebert.com/memoriarn>> [25 August 2016]

¹⁹⁴ Cooper, pp. 95-6.

friends got through it. He might have been true about his unwillingness to participate in war but rejecting something of one's own accord is different from being rejected. The poem, from this point of view, may be an attempt to cover the feelings of embarrassment or deprivation. However, its anti-war message is obviously stronger and more significant. Larkin's criticising chivalric ideas is in tune with the anti-establishment spirit and the Movement temperament displayed in his later works. Moreover, by the time it must have been realised by many that it was not the awe-inspiring 'masculinity' or 'sublimity'¹⁹⁵ but tenderness and 'beauty' that suited the requirements of the contemporary age to promote the cause of humanism.¹⁹⁶

Beauty together with love makes the world a bearable place to live in;^{197,198} creating as well as appreciating beauty is a process of mutual purification – an aesthetic exercise resulting in 'an entire release, an entire purification of the spirit'. The existence of such a practice, a sign of humanistic approach, serves as a bulwark against the tides of materialism. Larkin's highly aesthetic sense is an undeniable fact seen both in theory and practice. His principle of beauty is a reiteration of John Keats' 'beauty is truth, truth beauty'.¹⁹⁹ The poem about the Polish girl²⁰⁰ – an illustration of beauty appreciated and recreated – presents an excellent example in this respect. After reading the poem what 'flashes upon inward eye' is not 'the train's beats', the 'wilderness of cities' or 'the hammered miles', but

¹⁹⁵ See Cooper, p. 93.

¹⁹⁶ See Morrison, p.12.

¹⁹⁷ Cf John Keats, 'Endymion', *John Keats's Poems*, ed. by G. Bullett (Dent, 1944).

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Arthur Schopenhauer's idea of aesthetic contemplation and sympathy as a way of escape from suffering in Jacqueline Dale, *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁹⁹ P. R. King, *Nine Contemporary Poets: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1979), p.2.

²⁰⁰ Cf. 'I Remember, I Remember', 'The Whitsun Weddings', 'Here', 'Dockery and the Son' and the novels (*Jill* and *A Girl in Winter*) where the episodes of the train journey convey a sense of detachment or alienation.

the fluttering lips, the lightening eyelashes, the sharp vivacity of face bones and the 'hair, wild and controlled'.²⁰¹ The way the girl's beauty has been appreciated is matchless:

'And all humanity of interest
Before her angled beauty falls,
As whorling notes are pressed
In a bird's throat, issuing meaningless
Through written skies; a voice
Watering a stony place.'²⁰² ²⁰³ ²⁰⁴

The power of beauty dissolves any restrictive sense of the girl's foreignness²⁰⁵ as well as the ugly appearance of the 'landscape despoiled by industrialism'²⁰⁶. Presenting a Polish girl²⁰⁷ as a paragon of beauty as well as a muse should be quite an adequate answer to those accusing Larkin of misogyny and racism.²⁰⁸ Without this inspiration the wonderful fusion of visual and auditory images would never have realised.²⁰⁹ The harmony yearned for has, at least, been achieved poetically through aptly

²⁰¹ 'Though incomprehensible to him, [Larkin] still perceives how the girl's presence mysteriously transforms a blighted landscape.' Cooper, P.97.

²⁰² The lines refer to the triumph of natural over artificial (Cooper, p.98).

²⁰³ Cf. Larkin, 'For Sidney Bechet', *The Whitsun Weddings*, Burnett, p.54.

²⁰⁴ Larkin, XII, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p.11.

²⁰⁵ Cooper, p.98.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p.97.

²⁰⁷ See Cooper, p.98.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 94.

²⁰⁹ Regan, 1997, p. 158.

using appropriate sounds, words and images. The lines demonstrate a lovely example of beauty achieved through managing a balance between control and energy: the overflow of imaginative spur that is curbed through metrical form is not only Larkin's skill but his temperamental inclination for rational, sensible and systematic.²¹⁰ The phrase 'wild and controlled' in the opening stanza of the poem bears a great significance in this regard.

Though the beauty's 'watering' influence over life's 'stony' realities permeates throughout the collection, it seems to be chased consistently by the 'tapping' of the 'wintry drum':²¹¹

'All catches alight
At the spread of spring:
Birds crazed with flight
Branches that fling
Leaves up to the light –
Every one thing,
Shape, colour and voice,
Cries out, Rejoice!

²¹⁰Cf. Longinus idea of coordination and harmony between the spur and the curb that results in classical attributes. Longinus: *On the Sublime*, trans. by H. L. HAVELL, (London: MACMILLAN and CO., and New York, 1890), in <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17957/17957-h/17957-h.htm>> (accessed 25 August 2016)

²¹¹ '[What is more significant about the poem is that it constitutes an elegy for the war dead. The refrain 'A drum taps: a wintry drum' (recalling Walt Whitman's American Civil War poems in *Drum-Tap*) sets up the elegiac impulse. Regan, 1992, p. 73.

*A drum taps; a wintry drum.*²¹²

Love and beauty, like everything else, are subject to ‘the arrow of time’²¹³; rather, the pleasure they afford, at times, is overshadowed by sadness at the thought of their fleeting nature; their being essential for living cannot solve the fundamental issue. Nevertheless, their making life bearable is undeniable.

The questions of existential significance – rather than religious – are reflective more of the general secular attitude prone to inquire into the role of the church-based divine authority in solving man’s miseries. This was the natural outcome of the developing rational faculty, specifically during the struggling war years when people could not see the expected role of the church in its divine as well as ethical capacity to end the infernal situation. Nevertheless, it is important to see that Larkin’s questioning is of inquiring rather than revolting nature, aptly illustrated by ‘The North Ship’ expedition.

The quest for ultimate reality is symbolised in the form of a ship. A new alternative to the world system²¹⁴ would depend on the outcome of the expedition. The poem demonstrates one of the two options: following one’s own way of authentication rather than adopting some stereotype or conventionality. Though the latter one is easier, not demanding much trouble to seek and search, for a sceptic like Larkin following anything blindly is unlikely; perhaps, they are lucky who can live happily blind-

²¹² The line echoes Yeats’ ominous refrains. Burnett, p.337.

²¹³ ‘This is the first thing/ I have understood:/Time is the echo of an axe/Within a wood.’ (XXVI, Burnett, p.19).

²¹⁴ See (Cooper, p. 102)

folded by their belief. Rationality may have to go a long way to find the truth as it itself – like many things it rejects – cannot be taken as final and absolute. It is not the whole truth but only a means supposed to get to the truth, as imagination was to create a web of myths around the world. As rationality is not an end in itself, and Larkin is not the first and the last one yearning – the truth is yet to come.

The option for the route to the north has a significance: being less explored and mysterious, it is likely to have new possibilities; also, it is appropriate to suggest the difficulties involved on ‘the road not taken’. The east and west, well-trodden geographically, culturally, socially and politically, seem comparatively far easier but less promising. The sense of their having little potentiality is suggested through the early return of the ships. However, the North Ship is yet to come:

‘But the third went wide and far
 Into an unforgiving sea
 Under a fire-spilling star,
 And it was rigged for a long journey.’²¹⁵

The individual way of authentication symbolised here shows the spirit of an age in which any despotic or absolute ideas were challenged; the promises of peace, prosperity and progress based on political as well as scientific development were proved false; it was the need to re-evaluate the whole system that served as a propeller to the voyage north.

²¹⁵ Larkin, ‘The North Ship’, Burnett, p.21.

The wondering about life's meaning is to be continued in Larkin's subsequent work. The idea of humanism may tell us how to live but cannot answer why we live. What is the meaning of existence? What does life want us to do? The mystery is yet to be resolved. Nevertheless, 'submission is the only good': the issue of how to live is not less significant. Despite all the shortcomings, it can be set as an aim: one should love and serve selflessly, unconditionally. The role of humanity's interdependence for easing life's pains could not be illustrated more appropriately than the mutual involvement of dancer and audience. Once this relation – or illusion, if one likes – is broken, life would become unbearable:

'Butterfly

Or falling leaf,

Which ought I to imitate

In my dancing?

And if she were to admit

The world weaved by her feet

Is leafless, is incomplete?

And if she abandoned it,

And broke the pivoted dance,

Set loose the audience?

Then would the moon go raving

The moon, the anchorless

Moon go swerving

Down at the earth for a catastrophic kiss?'²¹⁶

To keep the wheel spinning, the pivot needs be kept intact the best possible way: the viewers' focus on the dancer's swirls should continue while 'the ship' is yet to come.²¹⁷

'Let the wheel spin out,

Till all 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 earth again.'²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Larkin, 'The Dancer', Burnett. P.12.

²¹⁷ The poem, in a way, also implies the necessity of understanding and relationship between the writer and the reader, a typically Movement's concern.

²¹⁸ Larkin, poem I, Burnett, p.5.

Chapter 3

The Sad-eyed, Clear-eyed

(I) Rejecting the Myths

By now, much change was noticeable in Larkin's observing and preserving the things around: unlike the misty and windy atmosphere in *The North Ship* (1945), the view in *The Less Deceived* (1955) was 'sad-eyed and clear-eyed'. Call it the return of the 'North Ship', the settling of the war-dust, the war-time unfulfilled promises or the consequences of prematurely 'increased optimism' in the immediate post-war years, Larkin interest had shifted from the voyages to the far-away mysterious northern regions to inland, a concrete and familiar world of trains, clubs, pubs and churches. Larkin, perhaps, realised by now that discovering truth required starting with exploring the things around – the numerous cultural, social and political narratives – rather than away.

However, this change of view could not be simply a coincidence; it must have been the outcome of a general mood of expectancy in view of the newly won victory and freedom turning into a state of despair due to the austere social and economic situation during the immediate post-war years. To establish the poems' spatial and temporal links, therefore, an account of the contemporary social milieu seems appropriate.

Unlike the pre-war social order and stability, post-war English society was characterised by an air of uncertainty. Where the contemporary mass observation is marked – despite the prevalent austerity – by an appreciation of the values of community life and regret for their fast fading on the one hand, it looks to the emerging secular and liberal trends

as well as the growing material progress on the other. In the latter case, it was mostly the ones from either working class or the middle-class dissidents who were eager to see the wartime promises of an egalitarian welfare state fulfilled soon and in true spirit. The difference of views, indicative of a widening gap regarding conservative and liberal attitudes, was predictive of a tremendous cultural, social and political change in the Britain of future.

Deviation from the war-time promises would have meant quite a risky pitch: the people who fought together and suffered equally expected to be treated equally.^{219/220} The determination for change revealed itself also in the landslide victory of the Labour party in the first post-war general election of 1945.²²¹ Consequently – appraising it as a need of the time – both the major political parties wisely came into consensus regarding the plan for a future welfare state based on the ideas of free health-care, free education, social security, full employment and equal opportunities in every sphere of life for all.²²² In a way, it was a consensus not only between the political parties, but also between the government and the public. Brimming with the spirit of the newly won victory and hope for a promising future, people accepted even some tough government policies of taxation and nationalisation – something deemed necessary in view of the war-wrecked economy. Accordingly, the government had to do legislation regarding health²²³, education, social security, employment and

²¹⁹ Nick Beams, 'World War Two: Lessons and Warnings' (18 November 2009) <<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2009/11/nbww-n18.html>> [accessed 13 December 2016].

²²⁰ The Socialist Newspaper (31 July 2014) <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/19030> [accessed 13 December 2016].

²²¹ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain: 1945-51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p.39.

²²² Brian Brivati, 'Every Loser Wins', *The Guardian*, Monday 4 April 2005, 16.42 BST, Politics.

²²³ BBC-History, *Britain: 1945 to Present* (2014) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/timeline/present_timeline_noflash.shtml> [accessed 25 August 2016]

women's rights on urgent basis and on a large scale. It was a truly laudable step in the immediate post-war years.²²⁴

However, difficulties were bound to be there as the nation was yet to recover from the war effects; besides introducing new strategic policies and planning, things were to be restored and rebuilt.^{225'} ²²⁶ The recorded public observations and experiences in this respect are quite enlightening; there seems something common at their very base: the feelings, whether of pain or pleasure, seem to underlie an air of eagerness and anxiety, indicating a situation of uncertainty, wondering or indirection – a state of yet to decide. This mood of the public reflects in the consecutive general elections of 1950 and 1951 also in which no party could emerge distinctively²²⁷: the Labours could not maintain their previously held position of 1945; consequently, the Conservatives replaced their shaky government after almost a year.²²⁸ The obvious reason for this unpredictability and uncertainty must have been the high expectations of the people versus the worse economic conditions²²⁹: they were too impatient to await the prospering of the newly won freedom from war that was yet to come out of a fledgling stage. Being conscious of scarcity, the tough economic policies the government implemented were of much annoyance to the affluent class; many food items and other stuff of daily

²²⁴ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996).

²²⁵ Roland Quinault, 'Britain 1950', *History Today*, 51 (4 April 2001)

<<http://www.historytoday.com/roland-quinault/britain-1950>> [accessed 25 August 2016]

²²⁶ Robin A. Brace, *1945-1955: A Door Left Open?* (2006)

<http://www.ukapologetics.net/1950sbritainandusa.htm>> [25 August 2016].

²²⁷ (Robert Pearce, 'The 1950 and 1951 General Elections in Britain', *History Today*, 60 (March 2008). <<http://www.historytoday.com/robert-pearce/1950-and-1951-general-elections-britain>> [accessed 25 August 2016]).

²²⁸ BBC Home, *On This Day 1950 – 2005: Churchill Wins General Election* (26 October 2005)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/26/newsid_3687000/3687425.stm> [25 August 2005]

²²⁹ BBC, *Politics 97: 25 October 1951*, (1997)

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/background/pastelec/ge51.shtml>> [25 August 2016])

use were still under control and rationing (Ironically, food rationing during the war years had proved good and nutritious for many who could not manage it otherwise). It was a chance for Churchill to exploit, criticising the Labours for the austerity people had to undergo during their reign²³⁰; working well, it subsequently 'led to thirteen years of conservative rule'²³¹.

During this critical time of social and political turmoil, many seemed wondering right at the very edge about the consequences of crossing over to the new but apparently empty land of promises yet to flourish. The complex situation must have been the outcome of a state of hope and fear, or that of suspension between nostalgic feelings for the pre-war stability and the long-cherished wartime aspirations for an already declared (1948) future welfare state that was yet to become a full-fledged reality²³². It was true in case of mostly those occupying a medial position between the elite and the working class – the middle class that makes the major chunk of a society. The working-class – having nothing to lose – were mostly clear, unanimous and determined about the way they were to follow: an egalitarian society, a reward that they must have thought of eagerly during the 'people's war'.

The general trend at the time was that of a shift from religious to secular, from conservative to liberal, from spiritual to material, from poverty to affluence, and from communal to individual. What fuelled and accelerated this slow and steady phenomenon must have been the pressure of the pent up frustrations during the war and the immediate post-war sufferings.

²³⁰ *ibid.*

²³¹ Vernon Bogdanor, *Britain in the 20th Century: The Conservative Reaction, 1951-1965* (13 December 2011, 6:00 pm) <<http://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/britain-in-the-20th-century-the-conservative-reaction-1951-1965>> [25 August 2016].

²³² David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain: 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

Like a river rushing out after a spell of being bound, they needed an outlet, regardless of any hindering factors or regulating authority of traditions, conventions and established ways that were losing their value – specially in the eyes of youth – anyway. Perhaps, the spirit of freedom was too persistent to bear the pre-war social norms and values anymore: it was conscience or being honest to oneself rather than the conventional forms of authority that was going to be the guiding principle in the emerging youth culture²³³. All this was definitely going to have a heavy impact on public attitude regarding religion and sex²³⁴ and, consequently, on the traditional concept of family²³⁵ and social life. War worked as a catalyst to a gradual and evolutionary process that otherwise might have taken longer: the work of, perhaps, centuries, was going to happen in a decade.

Religion that played a substantial role in shaping the social, cultural and political structure of English society was already being threatened by the growing rationality. However, the big question mark posed to it by the inhumanity seen during the World War could not be resolved convincingly for the somewhat rebellious and inquisitive attitude of the people, especially the young generation.²³⁶ Where sufferings in religious context are usually deemed as a divine warning or punishment²³⁷ – hence a way

²³³ David Kynaston, *A vanished Britain*, (09:52, 31 October 2009)

<<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1224231/A-vanished-Britain-50-years-ago-country-doors-left-unlocked-children-played-street.html>> [accessed 25 August 2016]

²³⁴ 'Alfred Kinsey opened society's eyes to what went on in people's bedrooms, with his two books in 1948 and 1953 which shot to the top of the bestseller lists on both sides of the Atlantic.' BBC Home, *When Britain Began Talking About Sex*, (Monday, 17 January, 2005, 11:03 GMT) <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4175625.stm>> [accessed 25 Aug. 16].

²³⁵ Hera Cook, *No Turning Back: Family Forms and Sexual Mores in Modern Britain* (06 November 2003) <<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/no-turning-back-family-forms-and-sexual-mores-in-modern-britain>> [25 August 2016]

²³⁶ Christie Davies, *The Death of Religion and the Fall of Respectable Britain* (Dec 31, 2004, 10:58/ Last Updated: Feb 8th, 2011 - 05:50:02) <http://www.pravmir.com/article_1.html> [25 Aug. 16]

²³⁷ (I)Heavenly Manna Ministries, *Christian Suffering: A Sign of God's Punishment?* (2003 – 2013) <http://www.heavenlymanna.net/christianArticle.php?article_id=329#.U5oyExDLLTo> [accessed 25 Aug. 16].

towards the strengthening of faith – in the present case they worked almost the opposite way for many: rather than divine fear, they infused either doubt or a straightforward negation of the divine existence. This was, perhaps, a culmination of rational attitude with its more perceptible roots in the Renaissance of the 16th century as well as the Victorian era – a period marked by numerous emerging scientific and philosophical theories about life and its origin.^{238, 239} The situation was going to provide a smooth, swift and steep sliding surface to the young or coming-of-age generation of the fifties. The future was going to be that of the prevailing agnostic, atheistic and multiple spiritual trends rendering belief as something private rather than public – a tendency from uniformity to diversity, from traditional to liberal, from collective to individual, and from society to solitude.

The shunning of faith in divine authority proved quite consequential: the spirit of rationality as well as ‘self-integrity’ was challenging traditional approach in every sphere of life. The ethical and aesthetic values in relationships were being replaced by norms that, unlike those nourishing life’s communal mode somewhat organically, served utilitarian interests; the sense of neighbourhood, mutual respect, sacrifice and altruism was giving way to trends competitive in nature.^{240, 241} The future prospect seemed featured by too much mobility and rush to spare time for

(II) Matt Slick, *If God is all powerful and loving, why is there suffering in the world?* (12 December, 2008) <http://carm.org/if-god-all-powerful-and-loving-why-there-suffering-world> [accessed 25 Aug. 16]

²³⁸ Richard Evans, *The Victorians: Religion and Science* (14 March 2011)

<<http://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/the-victorians-religion-and-science>> [accessed 25 Aug. 16]

²³⁹ Hamilton Institute, *Darwin’s Theory of Evolution and The Victorian Crisis of Faith: A Critical Reading of Dover Beach* (October 5, 2008) <http://www.hamiltoninstitute.com/darwins-theory-of-evolution-and-the-victorian-crisis-of-faith-a-critical-reading-of-dover-beach/> [accessed 25 Aug. 16]

²⁴⁰ Andrew Jackson, *The Changing Role of Designers in Post-war Britain*,

<http://www.vads.ac.uk/learning/designingbritain/html/crd_socreform.html> [26 Aug. 16]

²⁴¹ See D. J. Enright, ‘A Poor Boy Who Won a Scholarship’, quoted in B. Morrison, *The Movement: English poetry and fiction of the nineteen-fifties* (O.U.P, 1980) p. 67.

meditation and reflection in the static spheres of religion, ethics and aestheticism: there seemed an increasing inclination towards seeking fulfilment or satisfaction in the immediate and material.²⁴² The emerging material and dynamic environment resulted in new, fast ways. Attempts were being made to control time and space and, of course, age and death – things that were being sought not through the transcendental ways of mysticism but logical and scientific techniques. The shift in belief from prayers to practical, from supernatural to natural, and from ideal to physical and empirical seemed rising towards its climax at a speed unprecedentedly fast. This was going to influence the conventional concepts of family²⁴³, relationship, friendship and neighbourhood considerably by shaping the diminishing communal ways of life into individualism and isolation.²⁴⁴

However, the apparent ease and fastness caused by new scientific ways were, in a way, making life uneasy: the emerging new world was not only putting man on the course of an endless maddening race but causing frustration through its complex array of innumerable opportunities unmanageable to avail. Contrary to the socialistic ideas of the Labour government (1945-1951), future was going to be in the hands of highly affluent consumers and competitors, seeking their pleasure and satisfaction in higher life styles, new fashions, music and numerous expensive ways of leisure.^{245, 246} Interestingly enough, their ideal in this

²⁴² Thomson Gale, 'Social Mobility', *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (1968) <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>> [accessed 25 Aug. 2016].

²⁴³ Robin A. Brace, *1945-1955; A Door Left Open* (2006) <<http://www.ukapologetics.net/1950sbritainandusa.htm>> [accessed 26 Aug. 16].

²⁴⁴ BBC Home, *Seniors: 'Modern life is rubbish'* (1 October, 2004, 12:49 GMT 13:49 UK) <<http://www.derbygripe.co.uk/1950s.htm>> [26 Aug. 16]

²⁴⁵ 'Male Fashions in the 1950s', *Primary History, Never Had It So Good*, BBC Bitesize-Home, 1 May 2007.

respect was Americans, the newly emerging power after the World War that was going to have a considerable influence on English culture²⁴⁷,²⁴⁸, economy and politics in the coming years. No doubt, there were some hesitant, serious and sensitive souls who keenly felt – underlying all this ‘busy bustling’ – the loss of certitude, contentment and stability characterising the pre-war English society.

One of the main factors causing the feeling of loss was the diminishing British Empire as well. The independence of India in 1947 initiated a process of decolonisation that continued until the freedom of the rest of the colonies by 1964. Perhaps, Britain, after the Great War, could no longer afford keeping its previous supremacy as the world’s largest empire. Shrinking from the status of a vast and glorious Empire (where ‘the sun never set’) into a small – though easily manageable – welfare state must have been painful: in fact, it was having a considerable psychological, social, cultural and political impact.²⁴⁹ Things had to be readjusted and redefined in a way which, compared to the vast Victorian Vision²⁵⁰, needed to be quite limited in scope.²⁵¹ Myths such as the ‘white-man burden’, already crumbling, were completely consumed in the War flames.²⁵² For some, there might have been a sense of relief in this

²⁴⁶ Skwirk Online Education, *Fashion in the 1950s* (n. d.) <http://www.skwirk.com/p-c_s-14_u-189_t-506_c-1873/nsw/history/australia's-social-and-cultural-history-in-the-post-war-period/social-and-cultur> [26 Aug. 16].

²⁴⁷ <http://www.ehow.com/info_8440031_crazes-fads-1950s.html>

²⁴⁸ Skwirk Online Education, *Fashion in the 1950s*. <http://www.skwirk.com/p-c_s-14_u-189_t-506_c-1873/nsw/history/australia%27s-social-and-cultural-history-in-the-post-war-period/social-and-cultural-features-of-the-1950s/fashion-in-the-1950s> [accessed 29 Aug. 16].

²⁴⁹ SparkNotes, *Mrs. Dalloway: Themes, Motifs, and Symbols* (2016)

<<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/dalloway/themes.html>> [accessed 26 Aug. 16].

²⁵⁰ Duncan Bell, edit., *Victorian Visions of Global Order* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

²⁵¹ Morrison, p.1.

²⁵² BBC Home, *Britain's spiritual history* (2008-04-11/2014)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/history/spiritualhistory_1.shtml> [accessed 26 Aug. 16].

situation, thinking English life – like a ship coming to anchorage at the end of a perilous voyage – resuming its previous peace and freedom on the isolated island, its original abode.^{253 254} However, were things really going to happen the way expected in this context?

In fact, the tide seemed flowing the other way round now: the high influx of immigrants from the former British colonies was predicting a different story – the England of future seemed taking a multi-cultural form rather than regaining its original status of a typical English society.²⁵⁵ Whereas these people from Indian and African continents were in need of jobs, England, with its hell of a work regarding construction and reconstruction, was in need of their service.²⁵⁶ Once in, they seemed determined to settle rather than going back. Soon, the natives found them beside themselves in their race to seek a standard life-style.²⁵⁷ All this was going to have a tremendous cultural, social and political impact on English life.

Hence, 1950s, a decade of ‘changes, challenges and choices’, served as a smooth and swift course towards the ‘swinging sixties’. The inevitable, forceful, adventurous and exhilarating phenomenon was going to transform the very shape of English social life. Art and literature – like everything else – was undergoing the same process. Its new form should be in accordance with the emerging egalitarian trends of the new welfare

²⁵³ See George Orwell, ‘Shooting an Elephant’ (2015-09-24)

<http://www.orwell.ru/library/articles/elephant/english/e_eleph> [accessed 30 Aug. 16].

²⁵⁴ Richard Gott, ‘Let’s end the Myths of Britain’s Imperial Past’, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2011 20.30 BST, History.

²⁵⁵ Dominic Sandbrook, *Fifties Britain* (n. d.)

<<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/topics/fifties-britain.htm>> [26 Aug. 16].

²⁵⁶ BBC Home, *Britain’s Spiritual History: Immigration* (2008-04-11)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/history/spiritualhistory_1.shtml> [accessed 26 Aug. 16].

²⁵⁷ BBC News, *Short History of Immigration* (n. d.)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/uk/2002/race/short_history_of_immigration.stm> [accessed 26 Aug. 16].

state rather than the pre-war aristocratic approach. The new reading class of the welfare state, a result of the ongoing upward social mobility, was going to be vast and various: besides the previous leisure-seeking elite readers it was going to have its huge chunk from working class.²⁵⁸ ²⁵⁹

Naturally, the majority of them would be interested in reading stories of their own problems in their own language of daily communication rather than the highly intellectual and philosophical riddles and symbols that rendered the Modernists' work an air of mystery.²⁶⁰ Moreover, realistic approach and clarity was also in accordance with the growing scientific or rational attitude insisting on leaving the narrow, deep, dark cobwebbed dens of mysteries, myths, and superstitions for a broad light of visible reality. The fantasies and false play of mere sentimentalism was being replaced by serious as well as practical questions of social concern.²⁶¹

A careful, sensible, mature and democratic approach towards life was the need of the day: to ensure establishing a purely democratic society, eliminating fascistic attitudes and practices in intellectual spheres was as much necessary as it was socially and politically.²⁶² ²⁶³ Rather, the former were more dangerous as a source of germinating the seeds of fascistic attitudes imperceptibly not only through propagating ideas but also the language and style suggestive of a specific mentality.²⁶⁴ ²⁶⁵ Perhaps, nothing would have determined a proper direction in this sense if not the

²⁵⁸ See reference 203

²⁵⁹ Morrison, *The Movement*.

²⁶⁰ The Literature Network, Modernism (2016) <<http://www.online-literature.com/periods/modernism.php>> [26 Aug. 16].

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² See the views on the connection between Modernism and fascistic attitude, especially on Ezra Pound and his work in Morrison (*The Movement*, pp. 14, 91, 132-34, 140).

²⁶³ Elon Florence, 'The Movement Against Itself: British Poetry of the 1950s', *Southern Review*, 19.1 (January 1983), (p.88) <<http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/literary-criticism/15772787/movement-against-itself-british-poetry-1950s>> [26 Aug. 16].

²⁶⁴ Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (London: Penguin, 1992).

²⁶⁵ Morrison, pp. 172-173.

sufferings of the then recently ended war; this seemed an effective way to thwart any threat of further sufferings like those experienced during the war.

It was such cultural, social, political and aesthetic concerns that, perhaps, motivated the formation of a somewhat loose group of writers²⁶⁶, the Movement^{267,268}; surprisingly, the supposed members denied the existence of any such group^{269,270}. The term had been coined by J. D. Scott, the literary editor of *The Spectator* in 1954, and their writings were being published in various magazines since 1945; however, the group was yet to be identified popularly through the publication of two anthologies: *Poets of the 1950s* (D.J. Enright, 1955) and *New Lines* (Robert Conquest, 1956). Kingsley Amis, Robert Conquest, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, Thom Gunn, John Holloway, Elizabeth Jennings, Philip Larkin and John Wain were the prominent figures of the group whose works were anthologized in *New Lines*. What brought them closer was, perhaps, their distaste for thematic and stylistic excessiveness of the Modernists like Dylan Thomas (1914 – 1953), George Barker (1913–1991) and Stephen Spender (1909 – 1995)²⁷¹. Their aim was to restore the purity of English literature through its cleansing of the foreign influences that characterized the works of the contemporary literary legends like Eliot and Yeats. Where their love for Englishness can be seen in the revival of traditional literary forms and structures, their concern for the egalitarian trends is reflected in their

²⁶⁶ King, P. R., *Nine Contemporary Poets* (New York: Methuen, 1979), p.4

²⁶⁷ John Press, *Rule and Energy: Trends in British Poetry Since the Second World War* (London: O. U. P., 1963) pp. 45-46.

²⁶⁸ 'Donald Davie, himself deemed a Movement poet, argued that they had revived a Popian blend of accessibility, correctness and journalistic relevance; he called them "the New Augustans".' (Quoted in Richard Bradford, *First boredom, then fear: the life of Philip Larkin* (London: Peter Owen, 2005) p. 135.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, p.135.

²⁷⁰ See Regan, 1992, pp. 17-20

²⁷¹ Morrison, pp.30-31, 47, 145-156

ordinary, simple, direct and colloquial language and style in their works. Their essential Englishness is also discernible in the fact that none of them was from any other part of Britain except England, and most of them were from middle or lower middle class, educated from Oxford almost at the same time during war-years.²⁷² The origin of the group (mentioned in chapter one also) can be traced back to the informal literary gatherings at Oxford where views of the would-be literary group were shared and discussed often in an informal – rather a non-serious – atmosphere. Some of the participants in these discussions, notably Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis whose relation later on shaped into a life-long friendship, secured a distinctive place in the Movement of future. The humorous ways and ironical attitudes they shared and enjoyed in parodying the excessively figurative and sentimental style of the romantics was to become a permanent and fundamental feature of their future literary career.^{273, 274}

Although Larkin's literary career started with the publication of his two novels (published in 1946 and 1947 respectively) and *The North Ship* (1945), what strengthened his place in the literary world, and established him as a Movement writer is *The Less Deceived* (1955)²⁷⁵. Many of the poems included in the collection had already appeared in *The Grip of Light* (1948) and *XX Poems* (1951): the former was a collection of twenty-nine poems in typescript, whereas the latter, a privately published volume.

It is useful to go through some of Larkin's biographical facts – as they bear upon his work directly or indirectly – between *The North Ship* (1945) and *The Less Deceived* (1955). The publishing of his one book of poetry (1945)

²⁷² Ibid, pp.56-57.

²⁷³ See Larkin's parodying Keats' 'La Belle Dam Sans Merci' in Motion, p.58.

²⁷⁴ Bradford, p. 45

²⁷⁵ Motion, p. 269, 272, 291,301.

and two novels (1946-47) in less than three years was a remarkable achievement. Though the prose fictions were published after he joined the University College Leicester as a sub-librarian in September 1946, they were already completed in the independent atmosphere of Wellington. Here also happened his discovery of Thomas Hardy that – beginning with *The Less Deceived* – influenced his literary career considerably.²⁷⁶

Being at Leicester was a pleasant experience for Larkin as it was a release not only from the public dealings in his library job at Wellington²⁷⁷, but also from the boredom he felt after Ruth left for studies at King's College London. He enjoyed the atmosphere at the university where he found himself amongst not only an academic community but also an academic family. Here he met Monica Jones (1922- 2001)²⁷⁸, a lecturer in English who was three months older than him. Compared to other women in Larkin's life, she seemed much intelligent. Having great understanding, they enjoyed each other's company while taking coffee in Tattler, chatting in the library, watching cricket etc.²⁷⁹

In March 1948, his father's death because of cancer shocked Larkin extremely: though often alarmed by his father's severities, he had always looked up to him; handling responsibilities after his death seemed difficult²⁸⁰. It was one of those times in Larkin's life when he felt total emptiness: the independence he considered so essential for having a writer's career looked impossible now. Perhaps, it was to keep 'loneliness at bay' and bring about a balance in life that he entered into engagement

²⁷⁶ Motion, pp.140-41.

²⁷⁷ Bradford, p.65.

²⁷⁸ See John Sutherland, 'Monica Jones', *The Guardian* (Thursday 15 March 2001 18.00 GMT)].

²⁷⁹ Bradford

²⁸⁰ To be free of 'domestic anxieties' is one of the aspects of Larkin's longing for freedom that has been dealt with in 'Forget What Did'. Booth, p.367.

with Ruth.²⁸¹ The twelve months after father's death were bleak and almost sterile regarding literary output²⁸². 'He had bowed down, prematurely aged and powerless to recover his youth.'²⁸³

'Striving to succeed, he had failed; accepting failure, he [began] to triumph.'²⁸⁴ In the early months of 1950, after a long period of 'inertia', he wrote a great number of poems. However, with Ruth it did not seem to go well: Larkin was less sure of their future together.²⁸⁵ He got closer to Monica with whom, because of her independent nature like him, he seemed sure a situation like the previous one would never happen. Relation with Ruth, gradually losing its warmth, finally broke when he set off for Belfast.²⁸⁶

While leaving for Queen's university, 'he knew that another distinct period of his life was coming to an end. He reckoned it a frightful time as far as matters like love, father's death, looking after his mother, writing and professional career were concerned. Yet it had been indispensable. His trials had taught him to speak in his own voice.' By then, he had turned as one of 'the less deceived'.²⁸⁷

Belfast was going to be the beginning of a fresh start for Larkin. He liked the place not only for its beauty and good company, but also for its keeping him busy. Here was an opportunity for him not to repeat his past mistakes like the one with Ruth but focus more on his writing. Though

²⁸¹ Bradford, pp.76-78.

²⁸² Motion.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 179.

²⁸⁶ See Larkin's "Single to Belfast" (quoted in Bradford, p. 93)

²⁸⁷ Motion.

unable to stop himself from having affairs with Winifred Arnott²⁸⁸ and Patsy Strang²⁸⁹ while maintaining his relation with Monica Jones at the same time, he remained too cautious to take it to the level where it might pose danger to his freedom. His five years of freedom at Belfast were rich enough to stir his poetic imagination. Winifred's engagement and Patsy's departure with her husband to Newcastle intensified his feeling of loneliness, but served as a spur to his poetic instinct.

In November 1954, while leaving Belfast after his appointment as a librarian in the University of Hull in March 1955, he regretted his decision. Hull seemed comparatively inhospitable, and very demanding regarding the nature of job. Brynmor Jones' (the vice chancellor) keen interest in developing the library as well as his trust in Larkin in this respect must have been a challenging case for Larkin's high sense of commitment. The project of building a new library, requiring proper planning and supervision, soon engaged Larkin. His performance was extraordinary; '[turning] himself into his father's son: thorough, incisive, and autocratic',²⁹⁰ he proved to be an excellent administrator as well.

Although new responsibilities made Larkin more confident in the practical sense, his anxieties and 'delicate feelings' never left him. Soon, he would develop affairs with Maeve Brennan²⁹¹, one of the library staff. However, Monica's love but unmarried relation suited Larkin well. She was 'his most stimulating intellectual companion.'²⁹² Hence, enormous responsibilities, love and literary activities went on hand in hand. On December 22, *The*

²⁸⁸ Bradford, pp.98-99.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 121. Also, see pp. 94-98.

²⁹⁰ Motion.

²⁹¹ Bradford, pp. 182-190.

²⁹² Motion.

Times changed things considerably for Larkin the writer by including *The Less Deceived* – after its publication in November 1955 – in its list of the year's outstanding books. It became a great public demand: 'the first book from the Marvell Press was the best seller.'²⁹³

Where *The North ship*, despite its declared intention of 'not lift[ing] the latch', cannot help shifting experiences to the infinite dream world of love, passions and mysteries cast in highly lyrical forms, *The Less Deceived* demystifies them, confining them into a lyrical but realistic mode. Where the former's metaphoric style owes mainly to the Modernists, notably Yeats, the latter's concept and metonymic diction²⁹⁴ bear the influence of Thomas Hardy.²⁹⁵ ²⁹⁶ Larkin, referring to it, says he found in Hardy, 'a sense of relief that [he] didn't have to try and jack [himself] up to a concept of poetry that lay outside [his] own life'²⁹⁷. It is in this context when P. R. King says:

Although he had sympathy with many of the attitudes to poetry represented by The Movement, his work is generally more robust and wider-ranging than most of the poetry of *New Lines*. . . Larkin's relationship with The Movement was casual, not causal. His view of the poet's task owes more to his discovery of Hardy and antedates the formation of the Movement.²⁹⁸

As far as his subjects are concerned, they remained invariably almost the same as Larkin's approach towards life underwent little change. Time and experience, no doubt, served to broaden and enrich his ideas, and improve his expression, rendering his work mellowed, effective and convincing. The attitude towards life's limitations, man's helplessness,

²⁹³ Motion.

²⁹⁴ Regan, 1992, p. 45.

²⁹⁵ Philip Larkin, *Required writing: miscellaneous pieces 1955-1982* (London: Faber, 1983), p. 175.

²⁹⁶ Motion, p.140.

²⁹⁷ See Philip Larkin's appreciation of Hardy's poetry in *The Listener*, 25 July 1968, p. 111.

²⁹⁸ King, p. 5.

love, sex, society and mortality in *The Less Deceived* has been presented more maturely than in the previous works.

Where the windy, rainy, snowy, cold and misty world of *The North Ship* seems to signify the troubled, uncertain and confusing situation of the war years, *The Less Deceived* conveys the 'clear-eyed and sad-eyed' view of an experienced soul finally settled about life's uncertainty.²⁹⁹ The feelings of hope caused by the dazzling V-Day – suggested also by *In the Grip of Light*, the title of Larkin's earlier but unpublished poetry collection – soon turns out as *fata morgana*. Larkin's muse in *The Less Deceived*, therefore, sings in its usual sad tones mostly of life's infidelity: that appearance often deceives; reality often turns out as the opposite of expectations. No one's boat has ever come in; the promises for resolving man's problems rarely realise; the consistent struggles and long-cherished hopes lead often nowhere but into 'fulfilment's desolate attic'³⁰⁰. The pessimistic approach – attributed mainly to personal reasons as well as the contemporary bleak social and political atmosphere – expresses itself often unusually strongly: 'Nothing like something happens anywhere'³⁰¹.

However, these ideas are more than merely conventional or proverbial statements: they do not present simply the timeless condition of existence. Their significance lies in the originality they have been dealt with as well as the contemporary chaotic situation that informed them. 'Next Please' (1951) – one of the early-composed poems in the collection – depicts the immediate post-war period with respect to high hopes, disappointments and death very effectively. It shows how the falsity of hopes and death-

²⁹⁹ Cf. the situation of Catherine in *A Girl in Winter*.

³⁰⁰ Cf. P. Larkin's 'Deceptions' in *The Less Deceived*, in *The complete poems of Philip Larkin*, ed. by Archie Burnett (London: Faber, 2012), p. 41.

³⁰¹ Larkin, 'I Remember, I Remember', Burnett, P. 14

haunting atmosphere in the aftermath of the war might have turned the poet's view as 'sad-eyed and clear-eyed'.

The Sparkling Armada: Dissatisfaction with present projects often in the form of sentimentalising past or idealising future. Eternal longing for fulfilment – making one often forgetful of the pains of lost hopes and unfulfilled desires in past – stirs not only nostalgic feelings but also the 'bad habits of expectancy' that 'Something is always approaching'³⁰²: never learning from past failures and disappointments, one always expects the 'Sparkling armada of promises draw[ing] near'. In 'Next, Please' (1951), the image of the approaching ship signifying the consistently rising hopes – though conventional – has been used in a way that renders the poem original and appealing. With its horribly dark and gloomy mood, the poem presents a pessimistic picture of life not only existentially but also in a specific sense of social austerity in the immediate post-war period.

The high hopes enticed by the tall political claims and promises concerning the post-war welfare state – something eagerly looked forward to – must have had their role to intensify the general sense of the illusory aspect of life of which Larkin's share, as an artist and sensitive soul, must have been comparatively bigger. The use of first person plural 'we'—conveying 'a sense of solidarity' – extends the poem's range beyond personal: the poem deals with something general rather than individual. Interestingly, what has been blamed is the 'bad habits' rather than some natural or supernatural agency: 'we are wrong' not only because of our 'bad habits of expectancy' but also because we consider it our right to be rewarded

³⁰² The chapter 'Waiting for Something to Happen' in David Kynaston's *Austerity Britain 1945-51* seems quite relevant and illustrative regarding 'Next Please'.

for waiting so eagerly. The suggestion, perhaps, is that one should get used to the present reality, even if unpleasant, rather than living in the world of fantasies and desires.³⁰³ Stephen Regan, discussing the poem's social and political significance in this context, says: 'The existential concerns of such poems as "Next, Please" are closely attuned to the widespread spiritual and political quietism of the post-war years and need to be understood within that context.'³⁰⁴

The futility of eagerness with respect to high hopes has been further emphasised through referring to the fact of transience: repeating the same story of future ('the sparkling armada') turning into present ('wretched stalks/Of disappointment') and then into a regretful past of missed 'fat chances' and opportunities.³⁰⁵ Nevertheless, in the end, one ship is surely to anchor; however, that would not be the one awaited so long and earnestly – a shocking surprise, indeed:

'Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
No waters breed or break.'³⁰⁶

³⁰³ 'Freedom, in this instance, is a freedom from illusion, the freedom of individual awareness' . . . that "one cannot rely on anything outside [oneself] as an origin, as a source of value.'" Regan, pp. 90-91.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 1992, p.89.

³⁰⁵ '[The poem] examines the claim that "one day your ship will come in"' which finally ends in '[the] clash of popular wisdom and intellectual scrutiny, along with a sudden shift from colloquial banter to sudden meditation . . . a *frisson* of unease.' Ibid, p.90.

³⁰⁶ Larkin, 'Next Please', Burnett.31

Perhaps, nothing can describe death as horribly as the image in the above lines. The tragic irony is that the ‘sparkling’ thing expected to bring fortune turns out as something monstrous. The eerie stillness surrounding the ship – echoing the mystery of ‘North Ship’ – while conveying a sense of the complete extinction regarding not only desires and hopes but also life³⁰⁷, does away with, perhaps, any thought of after-life. Death for Larkin has no associations of eternity, of heaven or hell: his work is a negation of any utopian approach regarding life or after-life; ‘Here endeth’ any hope for the ‘Sparkling armada of promises’.

The poem – both thematically and stylistically – is an extension of the early works. Where in the context of the falsity of expectations and need for a realistic approach – the main issue of the currently-discussed collection – it is a continuation of the two novels, in its way of using the images and metaphors – unlike the metonymic style of its companion poems – it is nearer to *The North Ship*. It is the shocking revelation at every step, contrary to the protagonists’ and the speaker’s hopes respectively in both the novels and the poem, that turns the innocence of ignorance into a mature but gloomy outlook of how life actually works, playing with the emotions and sentiments of its victims. The ship is presumably the same one sent to the north that, after having been through the perils of the voyage, has turned ‘black-sailed’ and ‘unfamiliar’ – the ship of knowledge, or death.

Resuming the poem’s relevance to the current and contemporary³⁰⁸, it will not be out of place to say the world, having exhausted numerous innovative experiments in the hope of social and political reforms, should

³⁰⁷ Ibid, p.89.

³⁰⁸ See Regan’s (1992, p. 34) evaluation of C. B. Cox criticism on ‘Next, Please’.

come around; that the stream of life should flow at its own 'sweet will' – a natural and evolutionary process – without any interruption. Being highly overambitious and innovative pushes often towards the mythical and unrealistic aspects of life that are doomed to disturb life individually as well as collectively.

Hence, in a situation like this that Larkin turns to divesting the prevalent cultural, social and political myths based on a romantic and sentimental – at times hypocritical as well – approach towards life. However, underlying his logical and sceptic attitude, one cannot miss his longing for things otherwise: awareness of life's deficiency regarding fulfilment and freedom do not stop his consistent search for these rarities. The constant state of restlessness at times seems to render his work a metaphysical bent, often interpreted as a quest for ultimate reality. However, most of his poems in *The Less Deceived* often conclude on a compromising but regretful note.

To illustrate these points, the next few chapters are going to discuss some poems of social as well as thematic significance in the volume in detail.

(II) A Hunger for Seriousness: Religion, Sex, Art

The poems in *The Less Deceived* – besides delineating the poet's life – serve as a record of social, cultural and political moods and trends of English society at a time considered as highly transitional in the context of religious, ethical and sexual attitudes. They evoke the image of a soul searching for its identity in the shreds of traditional values blown around by an irresistible wind of change in the wake of the war. Perhaps, it was an urge to find a hold – an emotional and spiritual anchorage or repose – that inspired poems like 'Church Going' (1954) and 'Reasons for Attendance' (1954).

A Serious House on Serious Earth: 'Church Going', Larkin's 'Betjeman poem'³⁰⁹, was published in *The Spectator* (18 November 1955) as well as *New Lines* (1956).³¹⁰ Discussing the poem's title, Richard Bradford quotes from Larkin's letters to Patsy Strang (6 March 1954):

[Larkin] reports on his week in the Midlands mainly spent with his mother. On Easter Tuesday they had paid their annual visit to the 'family graves' in Lichfield, and the Easter weekend had involved 'a queer mixture of hell and a rest cure, with a bit of gardening and church-going along with the big meals'. The 'church-going' rests among his weary report on family obligations like a diamond in the mud. We will never know if Larkin recollected his use of it in that passage, but three weeks later he wrote to Patsy 'I have been writing a long poem about churches recently that I hope will be finished tonight'. It would be his most celebrated early piece.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ Burnett, p. 369

³¹⁰ Ibid., 368

³¹¹ Bradford, p. 125

An interesting aspect of the title, pointed out by Osborne (1929- 1994), is its pun or double meaning: 'Church Going' may be understood both ways: the diminishing significance of the church (religion) in the eyes of public at the time, and the regular attendance at the church.³¹² ³¹³In addition, a third implication, conveying a neutral sense, may be the speaker's actual visit to the church as mentioned in the above extract or in the poem itself. As far as the former two meanings are concerned, there is no doubt about their relevancy as when the poem was being composed, church attendance had declined sharply³¹⁴; in 1950s, only ten percent of the population were churchgoers³¹⁵.

Various factors, mentioned by Larkin himself in his letters as well as interviews, have been held as likely inspirational to the poem. In another letter, he tells Patsy: '[It] arose in part from reading an appeal made by the archbishop of Canterbury about 14 months ago for money, without which he said about 200 churches were in imminent danger of ruin.'³¹⁶ A supporting evidence in this respect was a cutting of *The Times*, 7th May 1954, 'headed "Save Our Churches" . . . announc[ing] a campaign on behalf of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust' that was sighted in Larkin's hand once. It stressed the need to save the "great heritage . . . such a loving and lovely part of England . . . from ruin and decay".³¹⁷ It is interesting to notice an article like this in Larkin's hand, definitely arousing

³¹² John Osborne, *Larkin, Ideology and Critical Violence: A Case of Wrongful Conviction* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2008), p. 96

³¹³ '[The] punning title refers not so much to a static condition as to an active cultural and theological process.' Regan, 1992, p. 35.

³¹⁴ BBC-Home, *Britain's Spiritual History*

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/history/spiritualhistory_1.shtml> [accessed 29 Aug. 16].

³¹⁵ Arthur Marwick, *British society since 1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p.16.

³¹⁶ P. Larkin, 'Letter to Patsy 18 June 1955', *Selected Letters 1940-1985*, ed. by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 1992) p. 244.

³¹⁷ Burnett, pp. 370-71.

some questions in anyone's mind. Why did he care? If he was going to make some donation in response to the archbishop's appeal. Whatever, from poems like 'Church Going' Larkin seems well aware of the church's central role in maintaining the ways of English community life, and this must have been one of the reasons for his interest in the issue. Similarly, discussing the poem at different times, Larkin links it also with his shocking experience at seeing a ruined and discarded church during a cycling tour in the country while serving at Queen's University, Belfast. However, it would not be wrong considering the poem as a product of the accumulative influence of several factors rather than one; all the references above seem appropriate to contribute to a background that might have inspired the poem.

Larkin relates some interesting events as how people viewed the poem – to his disappointment – as religious. A subscriber of *The spectator* – after the poem was published in the paper – sent him the Gospel of St. John as a gift.³¹⁸ Another interesting incident he relates was his having hot arguments with an American poet, John Malcolm Binning (1916 -1998), who insisted on the poem as having a religious character. Annoyed by his doggedness Larkin responded: 'Ah no, it is a great religious poem; he knows better than me – trust the tale and not the teller, and all that stuff'.³¹⁹ An extract from his interview (1981) is very relevant in this respect:

I am not someone who has lost faith: I never had it. I was baptized – in Coventry Cathedral, oddly enough: the old one – but not confirmed. Aren't religions shaped in terms of what people want? No one could help hoping Christianity was true, or at least the happy ending – rising

³¹⁸ Anthony Thwaite, 'P. Larkin's interview, 1964', *Further Requirements: Interviews, Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews*, 2nd edition (Faber and Faber: 2002), p. 83.

³¹⁹ Burnett, p. 370.

from the dead and our sins forgiven. One longs for these miracles, and so in a sense one longs for religion. But 'Church Going' isn't that kind of poem: it's a humanist poem . . .³²⁰

The idea of being 'a humanist poem' is strengthened further when Larkin argues that the 'serious air' of the poem 'conceals the fact that its tone and argument are entirely secular',³²¹ and considers the turning of churches into mosques and bingo halls as 'the end of a civilization'³²². Equating 'the turning of churches into mosques and bingo halls' with the vanishing of a civilisation shows the poet's concern more about the decaying English ways rather than the divine aspect of Christianity. 'Religious 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 bother about that kind of thing, that I'm deliberately ignorant of it.'³²³ Moreover, the word 'mosques' is of special significance as it shows the writer's awareness and worry regarding the immigrants' inflow that predicted a great change in the cultural norms of English society. However, having such concerns should not be taken in the sense of 'prejudice' or 'racism' for they can be expected of anyone sensible enough to discern the indigenous cultural values and symbols – though collapsing already in view of the growing materialistic interests – going through a process of modification under the influence of increasingly multicultural trends. Larkin, in fact, could not bear seeing Englishness – so dear to him – losing its purity and virginity. Concerns like these were not out of place: the tremendous developments in the latter half of 20th century – marked by not only highly commercial and liberal interests but also the alien cultural colours – are evident enough in this respect and, perhaps, justify Larkin's

³²⁰ Thwaite, 'Larkin interviewed in 1981', pp. 56-7

³²¹ Ibid., 2002, p. 83

³²² University of Oxford, Bodleian, MS Eng. C. 7439/67, Letter to Monica Jones, 29 May 1969.

³²³ 'Larkin to Judy Egerton 7 Sept. 1964', *Selected Letters*, Thwaite, p. 319.

worries then. His using the word ‘shocking’ in the context of his reaction towards the decaying church – in one of the above-mentioned extracts from his interview – is demonstrative of his deep concern regarding the vanishing traditions, at least, in an aesthetic if not ideological sense.

A view from the Movement’s perspective would also be helpful to assess Larkin’s attitude towards religion and tradition. Most of the Movement writers were agnostic except Elizabeth Jennings (1926 – 2001), ‘a practicing Christian’, but their attitude towards religion was ‘balanced between an undemonstrative agnosticism on the one hand, and a susceptibility to the continuities of Christianity on the other: it is reverent as well as irreverent’³²⁴. One of its reasons must have been the unusually strong religious attitude in the Oxford of 1940s where many of the prospective Movement writers were studying at that time: the war sufferings and Eliot’s *Four Quartets*³²⁵, quite popular those days, seem to have their role in this respect. Majority of the intellectuals at the university seemed so much associated with Christian ideals that to students like John Wain (1925 – 1994) literature and Christianity seemed inseparable.³²⁶ Wain’s nostalgia for the pre-war English religious society is evident in an extract from his memoir, ‘Along the Tightrope’ (1957):

Before 1914, if a tradesman wanted the custom of solid citizens, he had to turn up at church, and see to it that his family turned up with him. A doctor or a solicitor who wanted to establish his practice couldn’t afford to be known as a freethinker; his place was at the morning service with the respectable world. So the churches were always full. Then came the war, and a general untying of this kind of social corsetry; the churches attracted one in ten of their previous congregations, mostly older people.³²⁷

³²⁴ Morrison, p. 228.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ John Wain, *Sprightly Running*, quoted in Morrison, p. 227

The Movement view nineteen fourteen (1914) – the breaking out of the First World War – as ‘a crucial turning point’ in English life, a dividing line they found quite appropriate and convenient for their nostalgic references.³²⁸ The extract shows how religion was woven with the secular aspects of English society, binding the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of life together in a harmonious whole. In other words, as a means of identity as well as a criterion for social status, it played a central role in rendering a structure and stability to the pre-war English society. Church served as the core of communal life: it provided a platform for all – irrespective of age or gender – on daily or, at least, weekly basis. Even if some would never go to church throughout the year, they could not ignore important occasions like Christmas, baptism, marriages and funerals. Church attendance, besides divine concerns, guaranteed one’s place in society, and provided an opportunity to the public for knowing and understanding each other. For many, like the Movements, it must have been the social as well as aesthetic rather than religious aspect of the church wherein their interest lied.³²⁹

Science, progress and, finally, war had a drastic impact on the communal codes of English life. The growing scientific and sceptic attitudes had already started questioning everything; anything out of the sphere of reason and rationality was becoming outdated and baseless.³³⁰ Rationality instilled in people a spirit of freedom: a freedom of self that was paving the way towards individualism and isolation³³¹. Satisfaction became a matter of ‘self-integrity’ rather than that of faith or traditions: the

³²⁸ Larkin, ‘MCMXIV’ in *The Whitsun Weddings*, Burnett, pp. 60-61.

³²⁹ Regan, 1992, p. 24.

³³⁰ BBC-Home, *Britain Spiritual History* (2014)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/history/spiritualhistory_1.shtml> [27 Aug. 16].

³³¹ ‘[The] music of “Church Going” conveys “the isolation of contemporary man”.’ Regan, p.37.

measuring standard of values started shifting from traditional to rational authentication or individual conscience. Consequently, self rather than society or religion was going to play a decisive role in the world emerging out of the wreckage of War.³³²



(Coventry Bombing)³³³

The speaker in 'Church Going' (1954) is one of the wandering solitary souls in the post-war years, attracted by an old 'discarded' church. To have a proper understanding of the poem, it seems appropriate to deal with a few significant questions. Why does the speaker visit the church? How does he find it? What does he conclude about the place in the end?

Most probably, the visit is motivated by a sense of curiosity, something concerning the question of 'self-integrity': the urge to see if there really is something appealing enough to satisfy the believers. It is important to note it is not the first church but 'another church' he visits: 'Yet stop I did: in fact, I often do, /And always end much at a loss like this, /Wondering what to look for'³³⁴. Why does he pay frequent visits to the churches if he cannot see any point there? Perhaps, not to give up until seeing some

³³² See Regan, 1992, p. 88.

³³³ Web Images, *Coventry Bombing World War Two* (2016) <content/uploads/2010/11/Ruins-of-Coventry-Cathedral.jpg> [accessed 27 August]

³³⁴ Larkin, 'Church Going', Burnett, p.35-36.

point. However, an answer in this respect comes from the speaker himself also: 'It pleases me to stand in silence here'. Interestingly enough, the 'silence', described as 'tense and musty' in the opening stanza takes no time in turning to a source of pleasure; in fact, this strain sustains throughout the poem: the awkward, casual and somewhat irreverent impulsive response in the first three stanzas develops into a serious and reflective mood as the poem moves on.³³⁵ The remaining lines contain some profound questions regarding the status of the churches in the contemporary age of growing secular, agnostic and atheistic attitudes as well as in future when they may 'fall completely out of use'. If they would be let as 'rent-free to rain and sheep' or avoided as 'unlucky places' except 'A few cathedrals [kept] chronically on show/Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases'³³⁶.

The third stanza – retaining the questioning pose – is suggestive not only of the role of superstitious fears regarding the origin of religions but relating them particularly to women. Perhaps, it was superstitions – a crude or lesser form of belief, the fear of something invisible – finally refining into a socially acceptable form of faith or religion; the ending of religion may be the same process in reverse: the wearing-off of faith back into various forms of superstitions. Replacing proper religious practices with superstitious rituals like 'touch[ing] a particular stone' for blessings or 'pick[ing] simples for [curing] cancer'^{337 338} or spending wakeful nights to

³³⁵ The movement from a casual first response to a serious reflective mode is a pattern followed in most of Larkin's poems – something that contributes to a realistic and logical way of dealing with a subject.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Mentioning 'cancer' is significant not only generally but also specifically in the poet's case. Cancer was/is an incurable disease, and, perhaps, it is the same situation of helplessness (already discussed in chapter 2) where one starts looking beyond the rational. In specific sense, Larkin, having seen his father's death caused by cancer, was obsessed with the fear of death by it (Motion), and in the end, he died of oesophagus cancer.

see the spirits of saints or dear ones imply a decaying religion. Hence, the speaker's wondering about churches turning into places for such superstitious activities at some point in future shows his keen observation and awareness how rituals and traditional ways of life based on religion were going out of practice in English society.

Does relating superstitious attitude with women signify anything particular?³³⁹ Can it be viewed in the context of 'Faith Healing'? Perhaps, both the poems imply women, due to their soft and sensitive nature – most probably an outcome of the status assigned to them for generations in the age-old patriarchal system – as more susceptible to superstitions or religious matters.³⁴⁰ Where the present situation suggests their deep sense of love and sacrifice for their children, 'Faith Healing' shows them in need of love themselves. Women's proneness to religious or superstitious attitudes is, most probably, their intense desire to love and be loved; their spiritual inclination seems an outcome of their insatiability in this respect – something in which they find the world deficient.

The poem seems to present two facets of Larkin's personality: the initially casual and mocking tone seems bearing the influence of his father's strongly masculine, satirical, cynical and atheistic attitude, whereas the subsequent serious, gentle and brooding one must have partaken of his mother's extremely feminine and rather Anglican inclination³⁴¹. However, he goes neither for the frivolous nor religious: the poem concludes in a

³³⁸ It may also be important to note that the British Medical Committee in Feb. 1954, the year of the poem's composition, reported a link between lung-cancer and smoking. Alan Palmer, *The Chronology of British History*. (London: Century Ltd., 1992). pp. 407–408.

³³⁹ The situation depicted here is reflective of the 'woman mystics' of Mediaeval Britain. http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/history/spiritualhistory_1.shtml [27 Aug. 16].

³⁴⁰ Dr Sheridan Gilley, review of *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding secularisation 1800-2000*, (review no. 236) <<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/236>> [accessed 26 August, 2016]

³⁴¹ Motion.

medial way characterised by seriousness and sobriety. The speaker wonders who the last churchgoer would be. 'Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique, /Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff/Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh . . .' Or someone like the speaker himself, 'Bored, uninformed', but interested in the place because 'it held unspilt/So long and equably what since is found/Only in separation – marriage, and birth, /And death, and thoughts of these'. Hence, it is not simply 'silence' inside the church that is appealing but something more significant about the place. He wonders how it brought the folk together at traditional cum religious ceremonies marking life's major and essential events – occasions for sharing feelings of pleasure as well as pain. However, they are gone, though the place – in ruins, no doubt – is still there: the 'accoutred frowsty barn' that was 'a serious house on serious earth' once – a fact that the speaker comes to realise after a while of reflection.³⁴² Perhaps, there would always be someone whose 'hunger' for seriousness may lead him/her 'to this ground' considered 'proper to grow wise' once. The ironical sense of towing 'grow wise' with 'so many dead [lying] around' is, perhaps, to emphasise the discarded condition of the church that must have seen its best days once. The sight of graves – taking the ending line literally rather than ironically – may be serving also as a source of lesson (or wisdom): 'Here endeth' everything, a lesson for the living ones.

Even if 'entirely secular', '[the poem] nevertheless manages to justify if not the ways of God then, at least, the place of church'³⁴³. The reverence

³⁴² "'Church Going embodies what Arthur Marwick calls "secular Anglicanism": it concedes that "belief must die" and yet it cannot relinquish the spirit of tradition that the Church of England represents.' Regan, 1992, p. 87.

³⁴³ Morrison, p. 229.

for the church as a symbol of the traditional English ways and a binding force for community life has been suggested also through the serious and stately tone and diction of the last stanzas. The speaker's confusion in the opening stanzas – though mainly the outcome of his ignorance regarding church or religious matters – represents the contemporary age when church attendance was getting lower and secular trends were growing higher. The new generation was interested either in the various ways of entertainment like music, cinemas, clubs, theatres and television – at the time a latest addition that was going to be an essential item of the household soon³⁴⁴ – or pursuing a higher standard of living. Wherein did Larkin's interest lie? The speaker's visit to a youth club in another poem, perhaps, concerns this question.

Art, if You Like: In 'Reasons for Attendance' (1954)³⁴⁵, the speaker finds himself outside – rather than inside as seen in the case of 'Church Going' – a youth club, seeing the sexy young couples sweating while dancing through a window. In a letter to Patsy, dated 23 January 1954, Larkin describes it as 'a poem of sombre turn'³⁴⁶. The opening lines 'describe looking through the windows of the old Students' Union in University Square [Belfast] while a Saturday night hop was in progress'³⁴⁷. Focussing on a few questions can be helpful and enlightening here as well. What brings the speaker towards 'the lighted glass'? How does he respond to

³⁴⁴ Pauline Weston Thomas, *1950s 'Never Had it so Good'* (10 June 2005/March 2009)

<http://www.fashion-era.com/1950s/1950s_8_society_never_had_it_so_good.htm> [27 Aug. 16].

³⁴⁵ "'Reasons for Attendance' is a curious title, sounding too much dutiful for the occasion, but its significance becomes clear in the speaker's attempt to rationalise his own position in relation to the young dancers, while "attendance" carries the secondary meaning of "attention" and so registers the speaker's determination not to be deceived.' Regan, 1992, p. 94.

³⁴⁶ Thwaite, 1992, p.222.

³⁴⁷ Arthur Terry quoted in George Hartley, *Philip Larkin 1922-1985: A Tribute* (London: Marvell P. 1988), p.96.

the activities inside? Why he prefers to be 'out there' rather than 'in there'? How does the experience conclude?

What 'draws [the speaker] a moment to the lighted glass' is 'the trumpet's voice, loud and authoritative'. This time it is the sight of 'dancers – all under twenty-five . . . sensing the smoke and sweat, /The wonderful feel of the girls' that invokes his reflective mood: what can be a proper option: standing alone outside in the cold or joining the warm company of the youth who seem 'dancing solemnly on the beat of happiness' inside. However, the reality of their being happy becomes questionable with the words 'seem' and 'or so I fancy'. The first response, the trumpet's appeal, is impulsive: it is yet to be decided where happiness for the speaker actually lies. The second response, after coming close to the window – like the initial frivolous attitude in 'Church Going' – seems prejudiced: 'to think the lion's share/Of happiness is found by couples – sheer/Inaccuracy!' Perhaps, the apparently biased attitude is just to emphasise the claim 'what calls [him] is that lifted, rough-tongued bell/ (Art, if you like).' Obviously, his interest lies in 'Art' rather than sexuality. However, with a sceptic as well as democratic approach towards life, he is too careful to say anything absolute or certain; soon, the idea of happiness or satisfaction turns out as a matter of 'self-integrity', of being true to oneself rather than to some universal, social or cultural code³⁴⁸:

' . . . Therefore, I stay outside,

Believing this, and they maul to and fro,

³⁴⁸ Regan, 1992, p. 94.

Believing that; and both are satisfied,

If no one has misjudged himself or lied.³⁴⁹

'Reasons for Attendance', like most of Larkin's poems, presents a 'dialogic imagination': the two voices being those of 'the trumpet' and the 'rough-tongued-bell'. 'The trumpet' with its 'loud and authoritative' voice seems to stand for the strong irresistible liberal tides subduing the traditional trends. Its voice, strong and appealing, engages even the one having 'a hunger for seriousness' for 'a moment'. However, as usual in Larkin, time and distance make all the difference here as well: what attracts him does not seem that charming from near, or its charm is only momentary. He prefers the 'rough-tongued bell' or 'Art' for its sober and enduring influence. The choice is reflective of the Movement's balanced attitude: a serious and aesthetic concern that may be described as a fusion of the chiming church bell and the 'loud and authoritative' buzzing of 'trumpet', a combination that neutralises or dilutes the extremities of religious as well as bestial instincts. In fact, it seems an appropriate option to serve 'a hunger for seriousness' in an age of disbelief, or relieve the 'agony of disbelief'.³⁵⁰

Being lonely, inside the empty church ('Church Going') or outside the club ('Reasons for Attendance'), provides Larkin with silence and space to observe and reflect about the phenomenon of life objectively away from its 'busy bustling'. The pleasing solitude and 'silence' in the former case, and fondness for the individuality of 'Art' in the latter show the poems'

³⁴⁹ 'Reasons for Attendance', Burnett, p.30.

³⁵⁰ '[The] imagery suggests that the trumpet is also a secular version of the church and that the poet's calling is a kind of religious vocation, being self-denying and self-sacrificing'. (Regan, 1992, 95)

concern as almost the same: pursuing an alternative that may satisfy one's sense of fulfilment in an age that has lost the elements of contentment. Choosing 'Art' is quite compatible with the growing individuality and isolation of modern life.³⁵¹ It not only relieves, as confession made at church, through sharing one's experiences and feelings honestly – something essential in view of the fast fading community life – but also gives the satisfaction of doing something true, of preserving life's uncertainties in a way of which one feels certain. Unlike life, art's certainty lies in 'artistic sincerity', of being true to oneself as well as to others.

The speaker's visit to the church or youth-club underlies obviously the quest for fulfilment. He does not find it in the former, as he is unable to believe in what he cannot comprehend, though he acknowledges the social significance of the place for its central role in maintaining the ways that ensure the values of community life. He does not find it in the club either as he regards sex as one of the highly illusory aspects of life, though he may have some likeness for 'the trumpet's voice' (perhaps, what he dislikes is its modernity suggested by its 'loud and authoritative' sound)³⁵² as a form of 'Art' in literal sense.

Preferring art to sexual pleasures echoes 'Waiting for Breakfast'³⁵³ wherein the speaker asks the 'tender visiting' – probably the muse of poetic inspiration calling him after a gap of almost twelve months³⁵⁴ – if he should send his love 'terribly away', implying, perhaps, an impaired sense of love or life in general necessary for creativity.³⁵⁵ To be an artist or

³⁵¹ Regan, 1992, p. 94-95.

³⁵² Larkin's taste for jazz in its classic version, perhaps, has a relevance to the lines.

³⁵³ *The North Ship*

³⁵⁴ Motion.

³⁵⁵ Morrison, pp. 127-128.

poet one needs to have an impaired sense of life: a life lived as 'part invalid, part baby and part saint'³⁵⁶. Interestingly enough, this is how Larkin actually lived – the life of a hermit. It also explains why his love affairs were not wholehearted, and how he managed to keep a distance in such matters through having several girl friends at the same time, perhaps, playing them against one another³⁵⁷.

Hence, it was more than merely a question of living independently and freely, though a somewhat self-imposed restriction. Does it imply preferring a romantic – something characterised by longing and pining, a sense of lasting thirst – rather than a sexually fulfilling aspect of love that Larkin considers important for creativity? Perhaps, like Keats, for Larkin the beauty of life lies in longing rather than fulfilment that often leaves one with parched lips.³⁵⁸ Remoteness in time and place counts greatly in the context of appearance and reality: things longed for often leave one with a sense of emptiness when achieved³⁵⁹.

Larkin's life was rich enough regarding an impaired and flawed sense of life since the very beginning: the boredom and fear of childhood, the tense relationship between parents, the weak eyesight, the stammering tongue, the somewhat disproportionate figure (a slightly longer back than legs) – facts that Larkin was, perhaps, extremely conscious of – and an unsociable, isolated and boring family life.³⁶⁰ Such feelings kept on

³⁵⁶ '[The poem] certainly says more about me than anything else (except 'To Fail'). The last line is "exactly me".' The Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Eng. C. 7409/82, Larkin to Monica Jones, 22 Oct. 1954.

³⁵⁷ Motion.

³⁵⁸ 'Then if there was no difference between love fulfilled and love unfulfilled, how could there be any difference between any other pair of opposites? Was he not freed, for the rest of his life, from choice?' (John Kemp in *Jill*)

³⁵⁹ See *A Girl in Winter*, p. 163

³⁶⁰ Motion, pp. 14-15.

building with the subsequent unpleasant events, particularly war, as life progressed. The fact is referred to in 'The Ugly Sister' (*The North Ship*):

'Since I was not bewitched in adolescence
And brought to love,
I will attend to the trees and their gracious silence
To winds that move.'³⁶¹

One can see how the lines explain the way Larkin tried all his life to fix this sense of deficiency through searching its remedy in various aspects of life ranging from religious to sexual (something that can also be seen in the case of John Kemp in *Jill*). The sense of unfulfilment, strengthening its roots, keeps on appearing in his work in the form of restlessness. Like an irritant drifted inside an oyster shell stimulating the formation of a precious pearl³⁶², Larkin's longing³⁶³ for fulfilment becomes a source of creativity: the thoughts and feelings presented in beautiful images, rhymes and rhythms are, perhaps – like the defence mechanism of the oyster against the intruder – a means of assuaging the sense of emptiness. The value of the irritant should be gauged through the final product, if not the irritant itself that, no doubt, remains as somewhat strange, vague and incomprehensible, disturbing the inner self of its bearer.

³⁶¹ Burnett, p.14.

³⁶² The idea of pearl formation is derived from John Steinbeck's novel *The Pearl* (1947).

³⁶³ Hamilton Institute, *Darwin's Theory of Evolution and The Victorian Crisis of Faith: A Critical Reading of Dover Beach* (October 5, 2008) <<http://www.hamiltoninstitute.com/darwins-theory-of-evolution-and-the-victorian-crisis-of-faith-a-critical-reading-of-dover-beach/>> [accessed 27 Aug. 16].

This urge drives Larkin's speaker towards the church as well as the youth-club and manifests itself not only in 'Church Going' and in 'Reasons for Attendance' but many other poems. In other words, Larkin's poetry is nothing but an expression of a painful sense of unfulfillment. This is what explains his going for art or poetry rather than faith in an unknown divinity or the illusion of sexual concerns: perhaps, he finds to some extent in art what he feels himself incapable of finding in religion or sex; or, it provides him, at least, with a provisional alternative in the absence of anything fulfilling or absolute. The point is quite relevant and illustrative regarding Larkin's response in the context of the rising secular and libertarian trends in the contemporary society.³⁶⁴

The Fulfillment's Desolate Attic: Sex: The aesthetic, sober and humanistic approach in the above poems shows how Larkin sees life in a different way than the contemporary secular as well as conventional attitudes. Where the urge for fulfilment expresses itself often in a highly sentimental, imaginative or utopian form, with him, it never crosses the limits of rationality; it is a world of harsh reality rather than captivating illusions he prefers to write about³⁶⁵. His role is that of a detached soul observing and preserving on the base of self-integrity. With an attitude like this, he turns to the story of a raped Victorian girl, trying to console her in a way that changes the whole perspective and intention with which, perhaps, the incident was documented.

'Deceptions' (1950) – a response to the story – while showing sex as one of the supreme forms of illusions, emphasises the issue of unfulfillment

³⁶⁴ David Kynaston, *A vanished Britain* (09:52, 31 October 2009)

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1224231/A-vanished-Britain-50-years-ago-country-doors-left-unlocked-children-played-street.html#ixzz3589YAwL7> > [accessed 27 August].

³⁶⁵ Cf. Katherine's accepting the real rather than illusory aspect of life in *A Girl in Winter*.

once again. That it is not only the victim but also the culprit who suffers: where the former is oppressed apparently by the latter, the latter is fooled by sexual desires.³⁶⁶ Rather, the latter seems more deceived³⁶⁷ as he, while ‘stumbling up the breathless stair’, would never have thought of ‘burst[ing] into fulfilment’s desolate attic’. One can see how the oxymoron has been used to convey the sense of an abysmal state of disappointment. In a way, the poem seems to suggest that the actual oppressor is sexual desires that prey upon the rapist and the raped one both.

The poem’s uniqueness lies in its apparently unsentimental and cold logical way of treating a documented incident of Victorian England that, most probably, was supposed to arouse feelings of sympathy for a girl trapped in the world of professional prostitution. However, it is a broadly humanistic rather than a specifically moral, social or legal concern with which Larkin views the incident. The speaker, no doubt, sympathises with the girl but cannot help his awareness of the assailant’s feelings of disappointment. Responding to the picture of poverty, indifference and injustice in Victorian society³⁶⁸, the poem asks for a deep insight into the complex affairs of humanity rather than taking things simply at surface or conventional level. While feeling sympathetic towards the girl’s tragedy, the speaker tries to bring our attention also to humanity’s sorrow state generally that is hardly ever considered in such situations. However, by doing so he does not mean to relieve the rapist of what he did. Rather, he

³⁶⁶ Cf. ‘Design’ by Robert Frost.

³⁶⁷ The point is significant as it refers to *The Less Deceived*, the title of the volume that was originally the title of this poem. The phrase is meant for the rape-victim whereby the speaker is trying to console her. *The Less Deceived* also alludes to a significant scene in *Hamlet* where Ophelia, in response to Hamlet’s confession of not loving her, says ‘I am the more deceived’.

³⁶⁸ Graham Holderness, ‘Reading “Deceptions” – a dramatic conversation’, *Critical Survey* (1989), p. 125.

is trying to console the victim that the oppressor has his punishment in a way that no one may have imagined:

Slums, years, have buried you. I would not dare
 Console you if I could. What can be said,
 Except that suffering is exact, but where
 Desire takes charge, readings will grow erratic?
 For you would hardly care
 That you were less deceived, out on that bed,
 Than he was, stumbling up the breathless stair
 To burst into fulfillment's desolate attic.³⁶⁹

The sexual assault, considered as an act of highly offending and criminal nature, is shown as the cause of suffering for the culprit as well.³⁷⁰ Hence, it is not simply an individual case but the entire humanity that comes under the poem's wider cover of sympathetic consideration: in the 'desolate attic' of illusions, all suffer equally.

However, more than sex, the spirit of the poem implies a warning against high hopes – something characterising the immediate post-war public mood – in general sense as well: high hopes and ambitions are but often a continuation of sufferings. It is better to have a 'clear-eyed and sad-eyed' view rather than getting drunk with the Utopian ideals of freedom and a golden future; that highly romantic claims and ideas often lead into bog or

³⁶⁹

³⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 127.

a blind alley³⁷¹, a situation already experienced in the form of a World War then. Being realistic, reasonable and cautious was need of the day.

'Church Going', 'Reasons for Attendance' and 'Deceptions' are linked by a quest for fulfilment. However, the difference between the speaker and the assailant in 'Deceptions' is respectively that of awareness and ignorance: what the former knows, the latter may yet to experience. Where the speakers' experiences in 'Church Going' and 'Reasons for Attendance' get distilled into preference for traditional and aesthetic rather than transcendental and ascetic or sexual respectively, the assailant in 'Deceptions', on the contrary, goes for sex that leads him finally into the 'desolate attic'. The relation between 'Reasons for Attendance' and 'Deceptions' particularly is their attitude towards sex wherein the detrimental factor is self-integrity rather than fulfilling some religious, moral or social requirement. However, where the former leaves a space for personal opinion ('Therefore I stay outside, /Believing this, and they maul to and fro, /Believing that; and both are satisfied, /If no one has misjudged himself. Or lied.')³⁷², the latter leaves no such space. Nevertheless, having nothing to do with any religious, moral or social authority, the poems exemplify a humanistic and democratic approach in their own ways – the one emphasising the significance of 'self-integrity' whereas the other suggesting a broadly humanistic rather than a narrowly conventional or orthodox outlook. That it should not be simply the act, but also the urge behind the act – most probably, a human frailty – that needs to be considered. It is essential to remember that by pointing out

³⁷¹ The image has been used by Winston Churchill in the context of Lenin's taking his nation to a 'blind alley' in the heat of pursuing communistic ideals. W. Churchill, 'Lenin', in *Modern English Prose*, ed. by Guy Boas (Macmillan, 1963).

³⁷² Burnett, p.30.

the rapist's disappointment in 'Deception' the speaker is not taking sides with him but just showing an aspect of the case that is hardly ever thought about – life's irony that should be seen beyond the ethical and legal limits.

All the three poems suggest – in view of the overall sad picture of human destiny – an attitude characterised by reason, moderation, compromise, generosity, tolerance, forgiveness, love and mutual respect. Going for communal rather than religious ('Church Going'), and artistic rather than 'bestial' ('Reasons for Attendance') manifest preferring a reasonable as well as medial position over extremity in any form. But, more than that, Larkin's greatness lies in presenting life as it is rather than instructing or showing how it should be (longing for 'should be' or fulfilment implies life's deficiency, but he is well-aware what matters is reality)³⁷³. Stating one's personal choices without any didactic intention, and letting others a chance to have theirs is contrary to imposing attitude; though the guiding principle suggested is to stick to 'self-integrity' as well as rational approach.

Obviously, it is not simply thematic concerns but also the choice of diction that helps in determining a poem's attitude towards the contemporary prevailing social and cultural trends; the poems discussed until now are quite rich in this respect. Perhaps, it will not be wrong if the diction in 'Church Going' is described as simply serious and secular rather than sacred or transcendental (The various church items serve simply as a catalogue, having no religious significance for the speaker). However, in the case of 'Reasons for Attendance' and 'Deceptions' it can be described as both serious and erotic.

³⁷³ Unlike the Romantics Larkin does not believe in perfectionism or idealism, though he longs for it.

Being erotic and serious simultaneously reflect the traits of not only Larkin's personality but also the contemporary environment: the shifting from religious and conservative to secular and liberal was both inviting and disquieting. It was not simply a matter of being nostalgic for past or desirous for a glamorous future, but – having been through the sufferings of the then recently ended war – also of a sense of fear of going astray while stepping on an unfamiliar risky ground lest it turned out slippery. Similarly, being wary of epicurean pursuits for the sake of some serious cause (definitely 'Art' for Larkin) does not mean a complete omission of the former; feelings get springy if tried to suppress. There should be a way to channelize them, which in Larkin's case seems either pornographic stuff³⁷⁴ or sexually charged diction in much of his work. However, Larkin's opting for serious rather than sexual concerns may be linked also with his emotional complex that (as already explained) manifests itself as an urge for fulfilment.

Nevertheless, sexual instinct has to show itself one way or the other, directly or indirectly. The combination of alliterative sounds and sexually charged words in 'Reasons for Attendance' is quite illustrative in this respect: 'to watch the dancers – all under twenty-five – /Solemnly on the beat of happiness. /Or so I fancy sensing the smoke and sweat, /And the wonderful feel of the girls'³⁷⁵. Similarly, in 'Deceptions', the first stanza and the last three lines seem to convey a sense of voyeurism:

'Even so distant, I can taste the grief,

³⁷⁴ Besides things of literary value, P. Larkin and Robert Conquest shared an interest in pornographic stuff. (Motion).

³⁷⁵ Burnett, p.30.

Bitter and sharp with stalks, he made you gulp.

. . . And light unanswerable tall and wide,

Forbids the scar to heal, and drives

Shame out of hiding.³⁷⁶

The vivid imagery evoking sensuality is too obvious to go unnoticed.³⁷⁷ The same is true about the poem's last three lines: 'That you were less deceived out on that bed, /Than he was, stumbling up the breathless stair/To burst into fulfilment's desolate attic'. The lines seem bursting with the lustful energy the words and images bear in this particular context. Such sexual overtones seen in several other poems like 'Reasons for Attendance', 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album', 'Dry Point' etc. – having a comparative obliqueness corresponding with a time that was yet to enter the libertarian mode – look forward to the frankness and liberty of '*High Windows*' with its being under the spell of the 'swinging sixties'.

The concept of 'the rough-tongued bell' – an outcome of the attitude towards religion and sex, life's determining factors – extending to Larkin's preferences in life generally is natural and predictable. In fact, the idea permeates the conclusions of most of the poems in the collection in which various forms of the conservative and liberal aspects of life appear in conflicting situations.

³⁷⁶ Burnett, p.41.

³⁷⁷ Holderness, p.124.

(III) From Conflict to Compromise

The chapter is an attempt to see the poet's response towards life in general as well as specific sense while exploring the issues revolving around empirical versus theoretical, seriousness versus sensuality and playfulness, egalitarianism versus elitism, limitations versus desires, Commitment versus freedom, rationalism versus romanticism, nihilism versus eternalism, present and past, and so on. These concerns frequently appearing in Larkin have been discussed from a conflicting opening to a somewhat compromising conclusion with respect to some of the significant poems in the volume. It is important to see, however, that the compromising attitude in Larkin actually speaks of a humanistic and democratic approach in the face of life complexity.

A Real Girl in a Real Place: 'Sex, 'Art' and nostalgia for the pre-war ways of community life find their place in 'Lines on a Young Lady's photograph Album' (1953)³⁷⁸ as well; the poem – a combination of three in one – can be rightly described as having three-fold significance. The central object is the photograph album of Winifred Arnott (1929-2014)³⁷⁹, Larkin's colleague at Queen's university Belfast: seeing her various youthful poses arouses not only the speaker's feelings of praise but also his desires discernible in the sexual overtones of the poem's diction. The speaker also appreciates how truthfully photography, unique of its kind ('as no art is'), preserves life without exalting or disparaging it – an objective and

³⁷⁸ The poem's mood may be viewed in perspective of a comparative political stability under the new regime of Winston Churchill and the coronation of princess Elizabeth (2 June 1953), televised, watched and celebrated countrywide.

³⁷⁹ 'As a young woman in Belfast in the 1950s, Winifred inspired five of Philip Larkin's poems – more than did any of the other women in his life. The "sweet girl-graduate" (in Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album) was also the subject of Latest Face and of Maiden Name (with "its five light sounds"), of He Hears That His Beloved Has Become Engaged and, written on the day of her wedding, Long Roots Moor Summer to Our Side of Earth.' <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/aug/28/winifred-dawson>> [accessed 10 Nov. 17]

scientific approach quite in keeping with Larkin's idea of poetry.³⁸⁰

However, what gives the poem a serious turn and depth is not only the appreciation of photography but the regrets regarding the helplessness to recap one's past or be a part of someone's past or future: where past is over, future is uncertain. Presenting time and space as the *sin-qua non* or preconditions of life, it emphasises the idea of man's helplessness: something of which one must have been highly conscious in the fifties of great political, social, cultural and economic crises. In fact, the period reflected a situation when moments of excitement – if not completely vanished – get shorter than usual, leaving space for long heavy spells of gloom. This happens in most of the poems in *The Less Deceived*.

As already mentioned, the pleasure from the young lady's photos is not simply because they share with the speaker a part of her youthful past but also because they are sexually motivating. Compared with the previously discussed poems, the images here seem quite bold and vivid: the very first stanza opening with 'At last you yielded up. . . which once open, sent me distracted. . . glossy on the thick black . . .' leading to 'Too much confectionary, too rich:/I choke on such nutritious images' is quite self-evident in this respect. The intensity of desire can be felt in the strongly physical suggestions of "choke" and "hungers"³⁸¹. Using such words with sexual associations seems to imply something mischievous as well: the photo/photos might have served as a part of Larkin's pornographic stuff, which explains why Winifred – suspicious of his louche intentions, perhaps – was unwilling to let him see the album (implied by 'at last you yielded up').

³⁸⁰ King, p.2.

³⁸¹ Regan, 1992, p. 98

Similarly, in the next stanza, the speaker's 'swivel eye hungers from pose to pose'. The various snapshots showing the girl with a 'pigtail, clutching a reluctant cat' (perhaps, as a school-going girl), or in 'furred' dress, 'a sweet girl-graduate' (most probably as a college student) or 'in a trilby-hat' (on some beach, perhaps) and 'lifting a heavy-headed rose' (see the sexual undertones) 'strike at [his] control' 'from every side'. The implications of 'strike' and 'control' – sexual attitude in traditional versus liberal sense – can be felt throughout the poem until they gradually and imperceptibly merge into the issue of man's helplessness regarding time and space.³⁸²

As already discussed, the sexually charged words and phrases in Larkin are quite illustrative of his psyche with respect to sexuality. Larkin's attitude towards sex is not that of an antagonist but a sceptic soul seeking fulfilment in any possible way ranging from sexual ('Reasons for Attendance') to spiritual ('Church Going').³⁸³ In either case, the role he seems to enjoy is often that of an observer and preserver rather than a doer. In fact, a status like this provides him a chance of independent speculation otherwise difficult to do.

Concern for independence, perhaps, also accounts for his initial interest in homosexuality and lesbianism, turning into a fondness for pornographic stuff later; the sexual overtones in his work – another alternative in this respect – may also serve as an independent means of release.³⁸⁴ Attitude regarding sexual as well as spiritual, in a way, reflects also the confusion of the contemporary age regarding these matters when desire for freedom –

³⁸² One of the issues regarding helplessness in the face of time and space is when and where is one born. These questions have obviously a determining role in one's life.

³⁸³ Although the metaphysical seems totally beyond the access of his understanding.

³⁸⁴ John Bayley, 'Becoming a girl', *London Review of Books*, 15.6 (25 March 1993)
<<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v15/n06/john-bayley/becoming-a-girl>> [accessed 27 Aug. 16].

an urge to get rid of the conventional bonds that was bound to bring a tremendous change in its wake – has reached a climactic point.³⁸⁵ A transitional stage is, no doubt, difficult because of its uncertainty; one cannot help looking back right at the very edge while going down ‘the long slide’.

Hence, there is something more than merely the speaker’s lustful attitude, signified by an allusion to the Victorian cultural environment. The ‘sweet girl-graduate’ from Tennyson’s *The Princess* (1847) – rooted in a highly conservative atmosphere – seems a check on the hungry male gaze, the ‘swivel eye’ that hints at the emerging libertarian attitude in the post-war years.³⁸⁶ The sense is conveyed also by the somewhat prejudiced middle-class attitude towards the young people around the girl: ‘. . . these disquieting chaps who loll/At ease about your earlier days:/Not quite your class, I’d say, dear, on the whole’³⁸⁷. The idea gets further strength by the nostalgic feelings, evoked by the pictures’ settings, for England of the old times: ‘Or is it just the past? Those flowers, that gate, /These misty parks and motors . . .’³⁸⁸ Also, as Regan points out, the girl is presented ‘not just an object of male desire but an emblem of irrevocable national past’³⁸⁹. Once again, as in the preceding poems, there appears a sense of conflict in the speaker’s attitude – conservatism versus libertarianism. As usual, it is the serious and sober that is opted for, something already suggested by

³⁸⁵ ‘[The poem] provides a good opportunity for discussing the sexual politics of the poetry in relation to the social and cultural context of the 1950s.’ Regan, 1992, p. 97.

³⁸⁶ ‘[The poem] belongs to a particular discourse of sexuality in which an emerging libertarian attitude is balanced against traditional ideas of sexual courtship and conduct. By 1974 this oblique eroticism had given way to the expletives of *High Windows*.’ Regan, 1992, p. 98.

³⁸⁷ Burnett, p.27.

³⁸⁸ See reference no. 228

³⁸⁹ Ragan, 1992, p. 98

the poem's title that is reminiscent of poetry in the eighteen and nineteen centuries.³⁹⁰

The 'hunger for seriousness' seems working here as well: the sexual overtones are soon succeeded by seriousness and sobriety. Checked by a conservative attitude and driven by a desire for fulfilment, they turn into an appreciating tone for photography as a unique form of art (the 'rough-tongued bell'), nostalgia for traditional ways of English life and man's helplessness in view of time and space as *sine qua non*.

Apostrophising and appreciating photography as 'faithful and disappointing' (using oxymoron for getting the required sense speaks of the writer's skill) for its recording things exactly as they are correspond with Larkin's insistence on 'fidelity to experience' in poetry that, he thinks, should preserve experiences and feelings truthfully. What is praised particularly is its capturing of not simply beauty but also 'blemishes' – a preference for real rather than ideal that affirms the idea of the 'rough-tongued bell' once again:

'But o, photography! as no art is,
Faithful and disappointing! that records
Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds,
And will not censor blemishes
Like washing-lines, and Hall's-Distemper boards,

³⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. 97-98.

But shows a cat as disinclined, and shades
 A chin as doubled when it is, what grace
 Your candour thus confers upon her face!
 How overwhelmingly persuades
 That this is a real girl in a real place.'³⁹¹

The last line explores Larkin's concern for 'empirically true' to the very core, confirming 'his muse [as] the muse of memory', his 'poetry as an act of preservation, a way of defeating time' and his pursuit for beauty in real rather than ideal. The 'tradition of poet as a visionary or seer' is clearly rejected once more: the role of an artist should be to 'record and preserve life rather than to enact or transcend it'.³⁹² One can see how the lines embrace the 'non-conformist, cool, scientific and analytical'³⁹³ ways of the Movement.

Photography is unique of its kind: combining technical skill with aesthetic interests, it partakes of the scientific and artistic both, putting precision beside pleasure. Appreciating pleasure and precision as the main concern of 'Art' implies a 'castigating of the modernists' movement in arts', an antagonistic attitude towards 'the abstract movement in twentieth-century painting, [and] some of the more esoteric poetry of [the] century' that 'deliberate[ly] attempt to obfuscate and bewilder, to mystify and outrage'.³⁹⁴ The use of words and phrases like 'records', 'not censor

³⁹¹ Larkin, 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album', Burnett, p. 27

³⁹² King, p. 2.

³⁹³ George Hartley, 'Poets of the Fifties': *Spectator*, 27 August 1954, p. 260.

³⁹⁴ King, p. 2.

blemishes', 'a real girl in a real place' and 'empirically true' are of great significance in this respect. Linking the 'rough-tongued bell' with 'photography' strengthens Larkin's idea of poetry as 'an affair of sanity, of seeing things as they are'³⁹⁵; that one '[does] not have to try and jack [oneself] up to a concept of poetry that lies outside [one's] own life'³⁹⁶. Concern for clarity makes Larkin avoid anything that is sentimental or irrational.³⁹⁷

Treating photography in a mock-heroic manner may imply a critical attitude also towards the 'traditional elitist distaste for photography' and preference for painting as a form of high intellectualism. The fact has been referred to in *The Intellectuals and the Masses*: 'For many intellectuals, the camera epitomised mass man's lack of imagination', something 'favoured by clerks, suburban dwellers and similar philistine types'.³⁹⁸ The poem, through elevating photography as a unique and distinctive form of art, 'argues that mass culture can also be art. Larkin exploits the precision of the photograph to rewrite traditional idealisations as false . . .'³⁹⁹

It is interesting to see where the poem checks the emerging libertarian attitude and shows nostalgia for the pre-war stability and structure of English life on the one hand, it criticises the false idealisations and intellectual pretensions of those considering themselves as the solo entrepreneurs of intellectual and aesthetic (fine arts) pursuits on the other. This confirms Blake Morrison's observation about the Movement's reaction towards tradition: the Movements' hostility was not concerning

³⁹⁵ *The Listener*, 25 July 1968, p. 111.

³⁹⁶ Larkin, 'Big Victims: Emily Dickenson and Walter de la Mare', *New Statesman*, 13 March 1970, p. 368.

³⁹⁷ '[Larkin's] somewhat slender [literary] output is a result of the scrupulous awareness of a man who refuses to be taken in by inflated notions of either art or life.' King, p.1.

³⁹⁸ Carey, J., *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1992), pp. 31-2.

³⁹⁹ Stephen Cooper, *Philip Larkin: Subversive Writer* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006) p. 126.

tradition but an attitude that was characterised by snobbishness and a sense of superiority towards public.⁴⁰⁰

Larkin's conservative as well as democratic attitudes are not a blind following of some political or social ideal but logical and calculated. It has much to do with the already mentioned 'self-integrity', something that should be at the cost of neither a sober democratic spirit nor a sensible traditional approach. An attitude free of the extremities of the liberal as well as the arrogance of the traditional; a balanced and humanistic approach accommodative for both the beauties and blemishes of life. Such an approach towards life is reflective of the writer's awareness that going for only one of them may disturb life's balance – a natural and humanistic setup. The apparent conflict between restraint and liberty finally diffuses into a compromise: a state where individual freedom may be manageable within a harmonious whole.⁴⁰¹ A situation where truthfulness and humanity as the foremost principles may guarantee a state of peace and security.

Despite the capability to record and preserve – an attempt to defeat time – art and photography cannot overcome the temporal and spatial barriers; the moments captured through photography or art in general are impossible to restore in actual sense. The wish to be there and then when the 'disquieting chaps' '[loll]/At ease about her' results in regretful feelings 'without a chance of consequence'. The painful knowledge of 'what was/won't call on us' 'leaves us free to cry'. However, where 'a past that no one can share' often evokes regrets, present as well as future asks for commitment; Larkin, as usual, finds himself at ease in the former

⁴⁰⁰ Morrison.

⁴⁰¹ Morrison, 1980, pp. 74-76.

situation.⁴⁰² Being 'free to cry' is convenient than going for commitment (that often turns out as illusory subsequently). Handling a girl's picture in bathing costume or pornographic stuff is easier than dealing with an actual person or getting seriously involved in commitments regarding sexual affairs – or any sort of affair – respectively; a better option, perhaps, to maintain one's independence as well as avoid a world of loss and disappointments. The choice, no doubt, may have its drawbacks: it may deprive one of immediate pleasures, but they, after all, are momentary too. Better to have an 'impaired sense' of life than chasing illusions of perfection: where the former may cause a creative impulse and its consequent pleasure, the latter surely leads to a world of maddening race.

Perhaps, it is the sense of freedom, and the creative potential functioning as a means of preserving that, alleviating the intensity of the speaker's regretful mood, restores his initial mischievousness in the last lines:

'You balanced on a bike against the fence

To wonder if you would spot the theft

Of this one of you bathing . . . ,

It holds you like a heaven, and you lie

Unvariably lovely there,

⁴⁰² Regan, 1992, p. 99.

Smaller and clearer as the years go by.’⁴⁰³

Though the lines appreciate art (photography) as a way of preserving past, pun on ‘lie’ suggests life’s insubstantiality as well: where present belies past, future is uncertain; an alluring future turning into a dull present and subsequently into a past lamented for lost chances is a frequent subject in Larkin. Despite functioning as a preservative, art can do nothing about the impermanence lying at life’s very root. (What is one left with when the ways adopted to avoid or lessen the sense of life’s illusory aspect are illusory themselves?) The ending-lines, therefore, are characterised by a merging of slightly sad and sexual tones. Larkin’s ‘less deceived superego’⁴⁰⁴ – the intension to be ‘sad-eyed and clear-eyed’ – does not spare even ‘Art’, one of the few things he looks to as a means of satisfaction. Art and artist are as faulty and fallible as the rest of the things and people respectively⁴⁰⁵; the objects we are committed to are merely provisional arrangements to live for. Treating anything as absolute, ideal or ultimate would be like adding to the already existing myth-kitty.

Nothing Uncustomary: Life’s significance lying in ordinary, average and every day matters is the topic of discussion also in ‘Born Yesterday’ (1954). The poem, like ‘Deceptions’ and ‘I Remember, I Remember’, is unique for treating a conventional subject – welcome to a new-born – in an unconventional and original way. Having several drafts dated differently from 17 to 20 January 1954, the poem appeared in *The Spectator* as

⁴⁰³ Burnett, p. 28

⁴⁰⁴ Booth, p. 367.

⁴⁰⁵ King, pp. 1-2.

well.⁴⁰⁶ Occasioned by the birth of Sally Amis (1954 – 2000), Kingsley Amis's daughter, the poem wishes her grow up as a happy rather than extraordinary intelligent, famous and beautiful person.⁴⁰⁷ ⁴⁰⁸ Talking about the poem's title, Osborne comments that Larkin underwrites his theme – 'those taken for "dull" sometimes lead triumphant lives' – by alluding to *Born Yesterday*⁴⁰⁹, a popular movie of the time that 'captivated' the audience with the 'story of a "dumb blonde" outwitting manipulative men'.⁴¹⁰ Being the antithesis of 'not born yesterday' – a conventionally emphatic expression for showing one's wisdom based on experience – the title implies an ironic intention.



Sir Kingsley Amis and Sally Amis⁴¹¹

The language and theme of the poem corresponds with the already declared 'clear-eyed and sad-eyed' motive, a realistic approach towards

⁴⁰⁶ 193. 6579 (30 July 1954), 144. Mentioned in Burnett, p.366.

⁴⁰⁷ Sophia Brookshire, *Analysis of Philip Larkin's "Born Yesterday: For Sally Amis"* <<http://easylitnotes.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/analysis-of-philip-larkins-born.html>> [accessed 27 Aug. 16].

⁴⁰⁸ Though what happened to Sally Amis was otherwise, leading to her tragic death. For detail, see Martin, Amis, 'The Sexual Revolution Killed My Sister', (11 September, 2016) <http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/01528/amis001_1528046c.jpg> [11 Sep. 16].

⁴⁰⁹ 'George Cukor's film . . . which picked up an Oscar and four further Oscar nominations in 1951, made the curtailed title famous.' Burnett, p.366.

⁴¹⁰ John Osborne, *Larkin, Ideology and Critical Violence: A Case of Wrongful Conviction* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.80.

⁴¹¹ Web Images, "Born Yesterday: For Sally Amis" <http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2009/11/27/article-1231509-00C75DDDD00000190-568_468x302.jpg> [accessed 27 Aug. 16].

life. Better to go for 'ordinary', 'average', 'balanced' and 'flexible' rather than chasing the ideals (or idols) of beauty, 'innocence', 'love' or intellect – the 'usual stuff' making one go through hard and painful experiences often leading to loss. The poems wishing for the newborn 'customary', common, ordinary, workable and practical attributes seems a way quite uncustomary:

'May you be ordinary;
Have, like other women,
An average of talents:
Not ugly, not good-looking,
Nothing uncustomary
To pull you off your balance,
That, unworkable itself,
Stops all the rest from working.'⁴¹²

Words and phrases such as 'ordinary', 'like [others]', 'average', 'balance' etc. reflect the very spirit visualised about the post-war welfare state supposedly based on the virtues of moderation, equality, fairness and justice. Moreover, the poem seems to suggest, in view of the newly emerging political, social and cultural concepts, the moderate characteristics advisable for a modern welfare state citizen: someone whose approach towards life should be logical and practical rather than transcendental, sublime, sentimental or highly intellectual.

⁴¹² Larkin, 'Born Yesterday', Burnett, p.33-34.

Besides its social and political significance, the poem conveys a concept of freedom in individual sense as well: a freedom in the limited sense of being a non-conformist – of being ‘flexible’, not a hardliner, leaving space for more possibilities. In view of life as being a complex – rather than black and white – phenomenon, it is quite a realistic attitude. Pursuing some ideal – or being in an enviably ideal status – is like being restricted, or deprived of the freedom to explore and have the joy associated often with ordinary, flexible, moderate, compromising and conciliatory ways that are more humane. In fact, life is too unsubstantial to afford anything ideal or absolute culturally, socially or politically, something of which the Movement writers – with a background of Victorian vision versus the then ongoing decolonisation – were well aware.

Regarding the contemporary social and political significance, the poem has the potential to be further elaborated. Like the rest of the volume, the emphasis on limited, average, medial and ordinary seems to underlie also an impulse to re-evaluate, redefine and readjust the cultural, social and political perspective at a time when the widespread redness of the British Empire on the world map was shrinking rapidly to a mere spot. The change from the vast empire to a confined welfare state was not simply geographical but also ideological and emotional. The remote, vague, idealistic and far-reaching imperial outlook was being replaced by a clearer and concrete sense characterised by immediate, material and moderate concerns. In fact, the brutal and shocking experiences of war left them with no more excuses – such as the myth of ‘Whiteman’s burden’ – to justify their rule over the world any more. Moreover, they may have realised that after the war they were no more in a position to retain the politically awakening colonies that had also been promised freedom –

most probably, in return for their services in the war – after a peace settlement. Moreover, how they could retain the very thing – the menace of imperialism – they fought against for so long, suffering a huge life-loss and destruction. The infinite Victorian vision, in this scenario, needed to be trimmed and brought within the realm of reason and reality. Larkin, like other Movement writers, was doing it through his work,⁴¹³ illustrating it by not only what he said but also the way he said it: the clarity, logic and simplicity contained in the traditional metrical form are reflective of the inevitable but reasonable aspect of modernity bounded by an outlook tilting towards English conservatism.

Nothing Like Something Happens Anywhere: The urge for a realistic and rational has been emphasised also through an ironical treatment of the highly romantic and sentimental approach of 'I Remember, I Remember', a poem by Thomas Hood (1799-1845). In his poem with the same title Larkin's motive, rather than targeting Hood, is to point out the general contemporary literary approach towards life purely based on romantic clichés – the various forms of conventional, traditional or myth-making trends – rather than genuine and authentic experiences of everyday life. Subjects like childhood memories and native places – obviously the burden of Hood's poem – are often cast in the old romantic frame of sentimentalism in a way that makes them otherworldly and far from reality. The question is if such trends are universally true in everyone's case.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ Larkin's voice became 'one of the means by which his country recognized itself'. Motion, 1993, p.343.

⁴¹⁴ 'I was thinking how very peculiar it was that I myself never experienced these things, and I thought one could write a funny poem about it. So I did. It wasn't denying that other people did have these experiences, though they did tend to sound rather clichés.' P. Larkin, 'Letter to Judie Johnson, 13 April. 1965', Thwaite, 2002, pp.31-32.

For Larkin, unlike Thomas Hood, Coventry – his hometown – was ‘where [his] childhood was unspent’. The inquirer’s question (“‘was that . . . where you “have your roots”?’”) while referring to the poet’s hometown elicits – contrary to the reader’s expectation – a shocking but realistic response. The implication obviously is not the speaker’s unpleasant childhood only but also his distaste of the romantic stereotypes often carrying readers away in a sentimental flow without a second thought. The idea gets further emphasis by the moving train and a series of negations throughout the poem, serving as a complement to the sense of detachment or disassociation.

The rootlessness suggested in the poem, though having a universal significance regarding life’s impermanence, is of great relevance to the contemporary age as well. Besides personal reasons – the oft-mentioned ‘boredom’ and ‘fear’ as a child, for example – the then cultural, social and political chaos had its psychological and social impacts also in this respect. The memories of the hugely damaged Coventry during the World War must have been too painful (mentioned in *Jill* indirectly) for Larkin to think of any pleasantly romantic associations regarding his native town or childhood. Similarly, the fading of the pre-war established ways of English life into mere memories in the post-war era must have been no less agonising for him. Consequently, settling oneself in an unsettled and transitional phase of civilisation must have been difficult for a sensitive person like Larkin. The sense of detachment reflected in his work, therefore, must be speaking of a pain deeply rooted in his memories of loss.

Nothing would have expressed a situation like this more emphatically and bitterly as the proverbial ‘Nothing like something happens anywhere’. The

strongly negative statement serves as a seal to not only the poem but life also – the last nail on the coffin of a false or make-believe world of romanticism or idealism. The statement – an extremely pessimistic expression – applies also to the situations in poems like ‘Church Going’, ‘Reasons for Attendance’ and ‘Deceptions’. Rather, the intensity gained through compressing a few simple words together convey the very essence of the whole collection. Combining ‘nothing’, ‘something’ and ‘anywhere’ is an effective way to reinforce a sense of loss, uncertainty and emptiness.

(IV) The Padlocked Cube of Light: The Urge for Freedom

‘And how remote that bare and sunscrubbed room,
Intencsely far, that padlocked cube of light
We neither define nor prove,
Where you, we dream, obtain no right of entry.’⁴¹⁵

Larkin compromising attitude in the face of life’s complexity does not mean the extinction of his urge for freedom. His opting for rational, empirical, ordinary and matter-of-fact is not a choice but something that cannot be helped. In fact, his awareness of no freedom or fulfilment in real sense intensifies his longing for it that manifests itself in the form art. His artistic activity is actually a way to mitigate the sense of deprivation and deficiency. Poems like ‘Toads’ illustrates it through exploring the issue of commitment versus freedom quite convincingly. In a similar vein, ‘Wedding Wind’ and ‘Maiden Name’ have do it in the context of married life.

Heavy as Hard Luck: ‘Toads’ is one of the poems that expose the reality of highly esteemed commitment often associated with work through severely criticising it. Composed sometime between 13 and 16 March 1954, the poem was also published in *Listen* (1.2, summer 1954, 15-16); a time when Larkin, perhaps bored with his job as a sub-librarian for more than four years at Queens University Belfast, was applying for the post of a librarian at the University of Hull later that year. Contrary to his fear lest the interviewers at Hull, aware of the poem somehow, may not have a

⁴¹⁵ ‘Dry-Point’, Larkin

very good impression of his attitude to work, the interview was a success: they either had not have the chance to see the poem or, in other case, may have 'recognised it as a typical example of Larkin's ironic self-mocking style'.

The poem, a true product of the contemporary age, keeps on questioning the conventional and orthodox attitudes as well as the myth-making and idealising trends. The spirit of individual freedom, an oft-debated topic of the time, underlies here as well. Why is it necessary to work? The speaker is sceptical of idealising the concepts like punctuality, commitment, devotion, serving the public etc. commonly associated with work ethics. He, for instance, would never have worked, if it were not 'for paying a few bills', something 'out of proportion' though.⁴¹⁶

Stephen Regan, while discussing the poem's '[emerging] from a familiar post-war context' and its 'anxiety about work' says 'it shares a fundamental concern with a great deal of 1950s literature.' An example he cites in this respect is *A Taste of Honey* (1956) in which 'a working-class mother tells her daughter: "There's two w's in your future. Work or want . . ." (Delaney, 1987, p.29).'⁴¹⁷ That 'both words carry significance in Larkin's poetry' is a very apt observation: besides their pervasiveness regarding life's limitations in general sense, poems like 'Toads', 'Wants' and 'Toads Revisited' present this issue particularly.

Regan, extending the argument further, says "'Toads" is a good example of a familiar and recurring debate about individual rights and

⁴¹⁶ 'As time goes on, I feel furious about the toad work – how it lumbers enormously over our lives. I don't mind the time it takes, but I do mind the worry. That's really serious, because it spoils most of the time it doesn't take.' University of Oxford, Bodleian, MS Eng. c. 7415/103, Letter to Monica, 12 March 1957.

⁴¹⁷ Regan, 1992, p. 84.

responsibilities in a modern democratic society'⁴¹⁸. In the growing craze for secular trends when – in a somewhat revolting spirit – most of the religious, ethical and traditional values were being put behind as unnecessary restraints on individual freedom, the 'toad-work', because of the growing material concerns and multiplicity of needs, was digging its claws deeper and deeper. Viewed in the context of a fresh zeal of the rising aspirations of the emerging welfare state's citizens and the ongoing reconstruction of the war-stricken country, work-worship was occupying a central position in social life more than ever before. Moreover, another reason behind the craze for the earning-based work was a sense of competition encouraged by the political motto of equality of opportunity and meritocracy: the claims about replacing the previous privilege-based system with the one based on ability was a ray of hope for the underprivileged or working-class. Where such assurances, on the one hand, aroused in public a new sense of awareness about their rights, on the other, they produced in them consciousness concerning responsibilities and duties towards the state that, in a way, was having its rebirth out of the ashes of the War. However, was there really going to be such an ideal situation based on harmony amongst wants, work and reward (or it was just another illusion)? Even if so – of course, not an ideal but better situation – would it be the end of discontent in general sense?

The issue reminds not only of a man's 'perpetual' 'journeying' out for work in the early hours of a cold, rainy and windy 'darkening autumn' dawn, 'restlessly waiting a train' on 'a deserted platform',⁴¹⁹ but also of

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ XXII, *North Ship*

Katherine's attitude to work.⁴²⁰ Although her dislike for work results mainly from the unfriendly atmosphere of the work place and Mr Anstey's rude, insulting and bullying attitude. Perhaps, like the speaker in the poem, she also would not have worked if it were not 'for paying a few bills'. This has been demonstrated also through her nostalgia for the care-free summer holidays with Funnels while stuck in the tough situation of winter section of the story, hoping to come out of it soon until she finally realises it is more a matter of compromise or adjusting oneself to one's situation rather than running away from it. However, in the case of people like Mr Anstey – again a negative rather than positive attitude – it may be otherwise: 'Work, paradoxically enough, is a comfort. One wakes up waiting to cut one's throat; one goes to work, & in 15 minutes one wants to cut someone else's throat – complete cure!'⁴²¹ Then there are some like Jane Fennel (*A Girl in Winter*) for whom – though not having bills to pay, and wealthy enough – being jobless is boring; but she feels bored with work-routine as well. (Where satisfaction actually lies?) Jane's complex seems to be that of many including the speaker of the poem: he, like Katherine, needs to pay bills etc., but even without such material needs he feels work essential: one has to do it even if one does not like it just as one has to live even if one finds life boring and burdensome.

It is noteworthy that all these situations tell of a state of unfulfillment – already discussed in religious as well as sexual context – lying at the root of Larkin's life and consequently his literary work. Work-worship may serve – in an age of disbelief – as an alternative to meet man's inherent need for commitment but, unlike 'Art', it cannot be a substitute to fulfil

⁴²⁰ *A Girl in Winter*

⁴²¹ Larkin, Letter to Winifred Arnott, 16 Nov. 1976, Thwaite, 1992, p. 551.

aesthetic needs. This confirms once again how Larkin, despite his professional commitment as a librarian, prefers creative concerns to religious, sexual, earning-based or material pursuits.

Dealing with work as a subject for poetry not only speaks of the poet's personal experience as a librarian but also voices the concerns and worries of the contemporary people in general. Having been through the sufferings of war and facing the failures of high expectations aroused in the heat of the newly won victory, they seem to have grasped the reality. Wants – something difficult to shake off – restrict life to an invariable working routine that is time as well as energy consuming. One of the reasons behind them is obsession with an eternal sense of being insecure. The fear of some unknown catastrophe, death, disease, war, society, solitude, some individual, starvation, isolation, boredom etc. – things manifesting life's insubstantiality in various ways and degrees – keeps one in a state of permanent frustration and dissatisfaction, and consequently in a ceaseless search for a state of being safe and secure. (Does one ever have a sense of safety or security?) However, in the speaker's case it seems more a question of survival – of the needs supposed as essential for living – that makes him tolerate the toad's 'sickening poison' 'six days of the week'.

In other words, what lies at the basis of work-worship is an urge for freedom. However, having freedom in real sense seems an impossibility: the entire life passing in striving and planning to avoid some visible or invisible, known or unknown trouble from somewhere rational or irrational do not let one have a sense of fulfilment and freedom. Work, one of the ways to avoid them, is, therefore, usually not a choice but

compulsion – something one feels the need to do. Though supposed as a means of avoiding problems, it is often a problem itself – just another illusion.

The idea in the poem is applicable not only to Larkin – who, despite choosing ‘Art’, was serving as an efficient librarian – but to many others of the age who, unlike those of the past believing in the romantic ideal of an independent and leisurely literary life, were doing jobs as well.⁴²² That the contemporary writer was serving also as an employee somewhere shows the myth of the higher class leisure-spirit – deemed essential for literary activities – being replaced by a post-war egalitarian spirit. Similarly, the phenomenon is quite evident of the social mobility where, besides many other things, art was also shifting into the hands of those who – thought of as lesser in imaginative or intellectual sense – were supposed suitable for ordinary tasks not necessarily requiring one to be highly talented in creative sense. In fact, the Movement writers seemed determined to change the concept of high intellectualism by dealing poetry as a matter of daily life and social interest: their subjects (‘a real girl in a real place’) as well as colloquial style⁴²³ are quite illustrative in this respect. Leaving the elevated status of a seer and visionary, the Movement writer came down to the level of a man who, besides spiritual, emotional, imaginative and aesthetic interests, also has ordinary material needs essential for a financially secure life. ‘Toads’, in a humorously ironical tone, reflects the psyche of a new welfare-state citizen who understands how significant, even if boring, work is to realise one’s aspirations for having a standard life-style.

⁴²² Morrison.

⁴²³ See Regan, 1992, p.86.

As a title and extended metaphor, 'Toad' is quite illustrative of the work attitude in cultural context as well as meaningful in the sense of the growing material pursuits of the time: where the former – based on public opinion – is self-explanatory, the latter can be discussed appropriately in an interesting brief biographical context of the poet. An extract from John Welford's seems quite relevant in the former case:

In Western tradition, the toad has long been seen as an unwelcome presence that can bring harm to people. It has been associated with witchcraft, as noted by J. K Rowling in her "Harry Potter" series, in that the toad is one of four creatures (the others being the cat, the rat and the owl) that trainee witches and wizards are allowed to have as "familiars". It was believed to spit poison, and John Milton in "Paradise Lost" has Satan disguised as a toad speaking "poisonous" words into Eve's ear. Toad secretions can certainly be used to produce hallucinogenic substances, so it is not surprising that such legends have persisted.

Larkin uses the toad as a symbol for something dark and brooding that squats, motionless and cold-blooded, next to (or inside) one and which cannot be shaken off, much like Eve's toad . . .⁴²⁴

One can see how aptly the sense of annoyance has been conveyed through using words like 'dark', 'brooding', 'squats', 'motionless' and 'cold-blooded'. They help one to the very core of what the image of toad is intended for: a sense of boredom, staleness and suffocation is exactly what one often feels with the monotony of routine workload.

An event that happened during Larkin's visit to Germany with his father in 1936, recounted by Graham Landon⁴²⁵, seems interestingly relevant to link the title and the context of the poem. In *Wernigerode* (a city in Germany), they met one *Herr Niemand*. During their discussion about the work ethic, *Niemand* turned to Philip – a boy of fourteen years then – and said, "We

⁴²⁴ John Welford, *Toads*, by Philip Larkin (Tuesday, 2 February 2016)

<<http://greatpoetryexplained.blogspot.co.uk/2016/02/toads-by-philip-larkin.html>> [accessed 27 Aug. 16].

⁴²⁵ Quoted in Burnett, p. 377.

have an amusing slang word for money in Germany – *Kroten* – toads. If we work hard, we can earn *eine Menge Kroten* – a packet of money. And if a lazy worker has only a few coppers in his pocket we would say *er hatte nur noch paar kroten in der Tasche* [He has nothing but a couple of toads in his pocket]”. Strangely enough, as pointed out by Burnett, Landon did not think of connecting the anecdote with the poem’s title despite its concern ‘with the need to work in order to pay bills and earn pension’⁴²⁶.

The title, viewed in these contexts, suggests how one freedom is gained at the cost of another freedom: while trying to get freedom from wants, one has to surrender to work-routine; what is considered as freedom is actually a *modus vivendi*: for earning ‘toads’ one will have to tolerate the work-toad’s consistent squatting. Looked at in this perspective, the title, perhaps, implies the work-toad (workload) as poisonous for creativity as well.

The image of the toad soiling ‘six days of the week’ ‘with its sickening poison’ suggests the speaker’s dislike as well as rebellious attitude towards the oppressing work-routine – something quite contrary to the contemporary practical sense of competition and demand for employment not only by men but women as well. The poem, in a way, spoils the post-war work-spirit meant to construct a long-awaited and eagerly longed-for welfare state out of the rubble of War: the ‘clear-eyed and sad-eyed’ view can foresee where the high hopes often lead to; that all such ‘stumbling up the breathless stair’ takes one nowhere but into a ‘desolate attic’ (‘Deceptions’). ‘We are all rats in a big machine that feeds us’⁴²⁷ and of which it seems unlikely to come out. The emptiness remains

⁴²⁶ Burnett, p. 377.

⁴²⁷ Larkin’s letter (u/p letter, 7. Xii. 42) quoted in Cooper, p. 110.

as the desire for fulfilment or freedom is insatiable and ceaseless: the apparent changes are often nothing but barter, exchanging old problems for new ones.

While thinking of various ways of escape from work, the speaker's words start resonating with highly ironic implications:

'Lots of folk live on their wits:

Lecturers, lispers,

Losels, loblolly-men, louts-

They don't end as paupers;'⁴²⁸

The lines resume the idea in the first stanza of using 'wit as a pitchfork' to 'drive the brute off'. There are many like lecturers, lispers, losels⁴²⁹, loblolly-men⁴³⁰ and louts managing to live through using wit and words rather than doing any work in real sense. The repetition on L-sound not only enacts the talking technique of the witty and clever covering for work through their speaking skill but also, being consonantal with the poet's surname, includes him in the list of the wit-livers – a good example of Larkin's honesty and self-mocking attitude. Once again, the Modernists' idea of the poet's elevated position gets deflated: a poet is someone like anyone; similarly, poetry – commonly deemed as something serious – has

⁴²⁸ Larkin, 'Toads', Burnett, p.38-39.

⁴²⁹ 'A Middle-English word for a worthless person.' Garrison Keillor, 'Toads' (8 August 2002) <<http://www.humanities360.com/index.php/analysis-of-toads-by-philip-larkin-7854/>> [accessed 27 Aug. 16].

⁴³⁰ An untrained medical orderly on board an early naval ship who would presumably had to bluff his way to persuading his patients that he knew what he was talking about. Ibid.

been described, humorously enough, as a way of avoiding doing anything in practical sense. Hence, antagonism against idealising or myth making, a typical Movement trait, does not spare even the 'rough-tongued bell' or 'Art'.

Including lecturers among wit-livers is, perhaps, 'a tongue-in-cheek dig at the university teachers whose demands for the tracking down of obscure references would be one of the reasons for a sub-librarian feeling besieged by toads!'⁴³¹ There is, perhaps, also a satirical allusion to the trend of poet-cum-lecturer getting quite common in the contemporary age: Larkin was against the introduction of the practical criticism of poetry as a subject that, he thought, would lead to creating deliberate ambiguity in poetry, especially in the case of poets serving as lecturers. Poetry, in his opinion, was for enjoyment in public rather than a problem solved in a classroom. The intention in the above lines is mainly satirising these trends rather than proposing them as a means of freedom from work.

Another alternative can be that of doing nothing, of going for neither wit nor work:

'Lots of folk live up lanes

With fires in a bucket,

Eat windfalls and tinned sardines-

They seem to like it.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

Their nippers have got bare feet,
 Their unspeakable wives
 Are skinny as whippets - and yet
 No one actually – starves – ⁴³²

However, there is a great difference between 'like' and 'seem to like'; the latter implies the same air of uncertainty pervading through almost the entire volume. Moreover, phrases like 'bare-feet', 'unspeakable wives' and 'skinny as whippets' seem intended at conveying otherwise: the repercussions of not working.

Work or no work, which one is a better option? Going for the first one is, perhaps, not simply out of a fear of starvation but more: it is a world of 'dreams', the 'bad habits of expectancy'⁴³³ – which in the present case is to confirm one's pension after retirement and all the 'stuff' associated with it – that check a rebellious attitude. Here is the oft-seen conflict between the romantic ideal of freedom and the rational attitude of check and balance once again: the work-toad, complemented by an inner toad of 'dreams', blunts the sharpness of the free spirit, bringing the rebellious and rational selves round to a compromising position – a conclusion almost the same as seen in the already-discussed poems.⁴³⁴ How can one imagine freedom in a world where one has to face check and balance at every step? The romantic ideal of total freedom is far from reality: better

⁴³² The sense the lines carry seems to echo Tennyson's 'Lotus Eaters'.

⁴³³ Larkin, 'Next Please', Burnett, p.31.

⁴³⁴ "'Toads" [is] a quietistic poem that manages to subdue its own rebellious instincts.' Regan, 1992, pp.92.

to have a realistic approach than facing a disappointing finale – an idea quite relevant in the post-war context of youthful craze for a free and vibrant future.

Restrictions resulting often in imaginative flights corresponds with the link between an 'impaired sense of life' and creativity.⁴³⁵ Confinement to work place for the sake of having money, fame, girl, and an enviable life – the oft-struggled for common and ordinary goals – usually run parallel with a desire for freedom or escape. Rather, limitations serve as a spur to the spirit of freedom, fulfilment and creativity. In Larkin, longing for love and the seemingly transcendental aspirations for 'unfenced existence' originate likewise. Where the former results from commitment to poetic creation at the expense of love and sex ('Waiting for Breakfast' and 'Reasons for Attendance'), the latter – as seen in 'Church Going' and 'Here' – is invoked by an inability to comprehend the phenomenon of life. With Larkin – or with anyone probably – it is a sense of deprivation and confinement serving as a driving force for creativity^{436, 437}: what he deals with is not love, faith, freedom or fulfilment but a lack of them.

However, what does escape or freedom mean? The term is relative and, like many other things in Larkin, causes often a paradoxical situation: for example escape from society versus escape from solitude, escape from work routine versus escape from the boredom of idleness⁴³⁸, escape from love affairs versus longing for love and escape from conventions versus nostalgia for English communal life. Similarly, the idea of freedom in real

⁴³⁵ Larkin, 'Waiting for Breakfast', Burnett, p.31.

⁴³⁶ 'Deprivation is for me what daffodils were for Wordsworth.' [P. Larkin, *Required writing: miscellaneous pieces 1955-1982* (London: Faber, 1983) p. 47.]

⁴³⁷ "I think writing about unhappiness is probably the source of my popularity, if I have any after all, most people are unhappy, don't you think?" Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Poem VI (*The North Ship*), 'Verse de Society' (*High Windows*), 'Poetry of Departures', 'Toads Revisited' etc.

sense as freedom from wants and dreams is a dream in itself too. The question is what one wants to escape from and where to. However, with life a paradox itself, having a paradoxical approach means apparently a realistic approach. The best course, perhaps, is accepting life as it is – a maze wherein following a specific and exact way seems impossible; of which, the ambition and struggles to get out lead one often to another complex – an endless series of illusions stretching to the very end of life, and then the illusion of after-life. A compromising and reconciling attitude would spare one, at least, the pains of false hopes and futile adventurism that often bring one round to the same state of emptiness and longing wherefrom one wants to escape.

The Fifth-hand Opinion: Like 'Toads', 'Poetry of Departures' (1954) implies a 'sense of resentment at the limitations of contemporary social experience' but ends in a quietist mood.⁴³⁹ The tension between the romantic and anti-romantic inclinations demonstrated in the early works like *The North Ship* has been elaborated further. However, rather than adopting the extremities of 'not lift[ing] the latch' (rational approach) or running 'Through fields, pit-valleys' (romantic or idealistic pursuits), here, it is more a concern for accommodation, an attempt to fuse the romantic and anti-romantic ('the rough-tongued bell') that is deemed proper, practicable and realistic.⁴⁴⁰

The desire to escape the dullness of known and familiar in pursuit of vague and unknown for newness is a never-ending urge: but the new and strange turning old and familiar does not take long to resume almost the

⁴³⁹ Regan, 1992, p. 84.

⁴⁴⁰ 'By the final stanza, the poem has succeeded in neutralising the popular declaration of personal freedom or escape, not by refuting it but by accommodating it.' Ibid, p. 91.

same state of dissatisfaction and longing. The poem – though ironical – is concerned with neither rejection nor acceptance of either but points out the illusory aspect of both.⁴⁴¹ Idealising anything, whether familiar and established or new and unusual, as fulfilling conclude often in a feeling of loss. Desire for having a well-ordered life and the urge to escape from the dull routine are two sides of the same coin: the same ceaseless stimulus to seek satisfaction. Alternatively, it is the question of perspective, of being away or distant from something yet to experience.⁴⁴² However, considering anything as having a fixed and absolute value is against the notion of relativity that lies at the very heart of life. ‘Self-integrity’ retains its ‘pseudo-religious’⁴⁴³ and determining role here as well: to be less deceived, one should be true to oneself than following clichés or ‘fifth-hand’ opinions.

The poem uses irony as a double-edged sword quite skilfully. Examining the oft-expected response of appreciation for someone having broken and left the ‘enervating routines of a dull life’, it targets both the escapist thinking of oneself as having decided boldly and rightly, and the one feeling wise for being contented with having a neat, well-ordered and disciplined life. The exaggerated but expected – or even natural and impulsive – response in the first stanza shows clearly the humorously ironic intentions:

⁴⁴¹ ‘It is not surprising, in view of the sustained debate about freedom after 1945, that so many of Larkin’s poems should carefully weigh a desire for escape and release with a dutiful commitment to the status quo.’ Ibid. p. 91.

⁴⁴² ‘Rather than denying either of the poem’s alternative impulses, the paradoxical phrasing of “a life reprehensibly perfect” holds them in careful abeyance and shows the speaker’s imagined resolution to be tentative and precarious.’ Ibid. p. 92.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

'Sometimes you hear, fifth-hand,

As epitaph:

He chucked up everything

And just cleared off,

And always the voice will sound

Certain you approve

This audacious, purifying,

Elemental move.'⁴⁴⁴

The vagueness and unreliability implied by 'fifth-hand' in the very first line contradicts the pre-supposed certainty of eliciting a much expected approving response – a satire on those who, often tired of their existing familiar situation, so readily and eagerly agree with anything reflecting their wishful thinking. The ironical tone is reinforced by a succession of highly connotative and forceful words: 'audacious, purifying, /Elemental move' echo of the fantasy flights of adventure fictions rather than representing the matter-of-factness of the Movement writings. The gravity of the word 'epitaph' intensifies the tone further through suggesting as if that is the only way out – or the best and ultimate alternative to get rid of worries – with no chance to pull the escapist back; as if his subsequent life would be nothing but steeped in blessings.

⁴⁴⁴ Larkin, Burnett, p. 39.

The second stanza openly declares feelings of dislike for a life-style invariably ordered and disciplined: 'I detest my room,/Its specially-chosen junk,/The good books, the good bed,/And my life, in perfect order' – an ideal for many, no doubt, but familiar, routine and boring for the speaker or, perhaps, anyone already having it.⁴⁴⁵ However, '*He walked out on the whole crowd*', implying a bold and revolting situation as man vs society in a fiction, renders it somewhat impossible. Equating it with the impact of expressions like '*Then she undid her dress,/Or Take that you bastard*' in some fiction 'leaves [the speaker] flushed and stirred', uncertain as to whether he would be able to undertake it; what kept him 'sober and industrious' until now was a seeming impracticability like this. However, determined at last, he says:

'But I'd go today,
Yes, swagger the nut-strewn roads,
Crouch in the fo'c'sle
Stubbly with goodness, if
It weren't so artificial,
Such a deliberate step backwards
To create an object:
Books; china; a life
Reprehensibly perfect.'

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, pp.91-92

The masculine casualness suggested in the above lines echoes of John Kemp's yearning for Christopher Warner's 'square, stubbly jaw' and 'a swagger in his bearing' (*Jill*).⁴⁴⁶ The speaker's admiration, envy and consequent desire for freedom or escape remind of Kemp's annoyance with his socially and financially restrained life as well as his longing for a carefree and lavish life-style that those like Christopher and his company seemed enjoying. (Was Christopher Warner content with his life-style?) The images are, perhaps, reminiscent also of the soldiers with 'stubbly' faces participating in the war, or presented as hero-figures in the contemporary war-stories or movies⁴⁴⁷. The lines, like the first stanza, suggest not only how vulnerable one is to the romantic clichés of masculinity, audacity and revolt, but show also man's consistent state of dissatisfaction with what he is, and longing for what he is not. They suggest a ceaseless search for 'something' often turning out as 'nothing', an insatiable 'hunger' keeping man rolling from post to post until the end.

Though carried away as usual, the speaker soon checks himself. He realises that these illusory projections of desires or wishful thoughts are doomed often to deceive and disappoint; the opinions based on fifth-hand experiences are often as unrealistic as a fictitious story of adventure. There is nothing fixed or absolute to stick to but only relative, a matter of 'have and have not', a question of perspective, of remoteness in space and time. The romantic idea of escapism, finally, seems as 'artificial' and 'reprehensibly perfect'⁴⁴⁸ as that of a well-ordered and disciplined life.

⁴⁴⁶ Cooper, p.36.

⁴⁴⁷ The idea is no less relevant in the context of Larkin's rejection from the army on medical grounds (though, apparently to his relief) and, consequently, the poem may imply a slight sense of deprivation and an attempt to compensate for it.

⁴⁴⁸ 'In attempting to accommodate both conformist and non-conformist positions, the poem has to move beyond cliché and resort to a language of paradox.' Regan, p. 92.

The poem is a reiteration of staying 'clear-eyed and sad-eyed': to be less deceived, one should be rational and true to oneself rather than accepting the authority of some conventional and popular opinion or idea blindly. The desire for fulfilment – Larkin's main concern – even if not fully met with the option taken, lies, at least, in being true to oneself. 'Poetry of Departures' is not about right or wrong alternative but the falsity of the very idea of having alternatives. Things meet almost the same end either way; unfulfillment leading to unfulfillment dissolves any sense of difference between the beginning and the end⁴⁴⁹: the beginning of every next episode in life is almost the same as that of the previous one – an endless series of illusions.

Larkin's artistic truthfulness and honesty – the only possible way, perhaps, mitigating his sense of unfulfillment – lie in the fact that where his ideas about sex or day to day life are mostly based on personal experience or observation (not 'fifth-hand', of course), those regarding religion are based on his inability

The Chicken Run: While dealing with the issue of fulfilment in various religious, traditional and secular spheres, it is not surprising to see the curious and creative soul ransacking – despite being a confirmed bachelor himself – married life as one of the alternatives. 'The Wedding-Wind'⁴⁵⁰ (1946) was composed at a time when Larkin's relation with Ruth Bowen was in progress and, perhaps, the possibilities of marriage were being considered; it may be viewed also in perspective of their future engagement – though broken subsequently – after his father's death

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. John Kemp's situation in the end of *Jill*.

⁴⁵⁰ See Kynaston, pp. 206-209.

(1948). In fact, the failure itself speaks of how uncertain he was about the decision. The role of a period of loneliness and depression after his father's death – being in dire need of some caring company, and seeing it in the person of Ruth was natural at the time – cannot be ignored in going for this unusual decision⁴⁵¹ in favour of a thing he remained so wary of all along. In fact, the sphere of wedded state was not that unfamiliar: he had had enough of it from his parents' tense relationship and its adverse influence on his personality.

Describing the poem as 'fuller, richer in reference' with a 'successful use of the floods & the wind as fulfilment & joy'⁴⁵² should not sound surprising. It was composed at a time that – besides being steeped in the glory of the newly won victory and the consequent high hopes for a bright future – was marked by a sense of fullness regarding Larkin's newly-secured independence (as a librarian at Wellington), his literary achievements (an unusual creative overflow)⁴⁵³ and, above all, his affair with Ruth Bowen. However, underlying the apparent plenitude, there is a sense of restlessness and confusion reflective, perhaps, of the speaker's sceptic mood – a consequence of life's insubstantiality looming large in the contemporary perspective of war^{454, 455}. Besides its significance with respect to the poet's personal as well as contemporary social context, the poem reflects the main literary influences of the time. For instance, to a

⁴⁵¹ The unpleasant experiences of married life that he saw in his parent's case had, perhaps, already made him careful in this respect: 'Certainly the marriage left me with two convictions: that human beings should not live together, and that children should be taken from their parents at an early age.' Brynmor Jones Library, 'book 5', Larkin.

⁴⁵² Bodleian MS Eng. C. 740/1, Larkin to Monica Jones, 26 Nov 1950.

⁴⁵³ *The North Ship* (1945), *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947) were published consecutively within a period of three or less than three years.

⁴⁵⁴ The horrors of war and the austerity of immediate post-war years were directly responsible for the general mood of scepticism.

⁴⁵⁵ 'The new-found delight of the bride seems to offer hope and resilience, and a way of contemplating "even death", but the poem nevertheless ends with a question mark.' Regan, 1992, p. 76.

question regarding the poem's similarities with 'certain scenes in Lawrence's *The Rainbow* . . . specially the marriage between Tom and Anna', Larkin said, "'Wedding-Wind" dates from the late forties, by which time I had certainly read *The Rainbow*. I think the comparison is reasonable enough'⁴⁵⁶ ⁴⁵⁷.

'Wedding-Wind'—'Larkin's only poem with a recognizably female speaker'⁴⁵⁸— and 'Maiden Name', are the two poems in the volume where the poet, a bachelor himself, deals with the subject of married life. Stephen Cooper's comments, while discussing *In the Grip of Light* (1946), provide a context that is quite enlightening regarding the poem:

Common to nearly all of the poems in *In the Grip of Light* is the theme of entrapment and the quest of new directions and meanings. The volume reflects the different modes of perception that the post-war world spawned, though there is also a personal dimension to the interest in alternative identities and roles. Larkin was unsure of a total commitment to marriage in 1946, and this was also the year in which his interests were torn between poetry and prose. Moreover, Larkin was obsessed with the perspective of a socially isolated female who is jostled by a hostile patriarchal culture. These elements are of crucial significance to 'Wedding-Wind' which unites a sceptical attitude to marriage, discomfort with the subjugation of women and a blending of narrative and lyric strategies.⁴⁵⁹

The alliteration in the title – conveying the impetus of the persistently blowing wind in literal sense – signifies not only the sexual consummation and excitement of the 'wedding-night' but also a sense of transformation from the freedom of girlhood to the restrictions and responsibilities associated with womanhood. Despite the bride's apparent pride and pleasure while engaged in the housework the following day, one cannot help seeing an inherent confusion, anxiety and a sense of struggle felt in

⁴⁵⁶ Burnett, p. 358.

⁴⁵⁷ Regan, 1992, p. 42.

⁴⁵⁸ Simon Petch, *The Art of Philip Larkin* (Sydney University Press, 1981), p. 47.

⁴⁵⁹ Cooper, p. 110.

words and phrases like ‘Stupid’, ‘twisted’, ‘seeing nothing’, ‘restless’, ‘sad’ and ‘lack’ in the very first stanza describing the windy ‘wedding-night’ – an occasion supposed to be of great celebration. This gets stronger in tone as the poem proceeds, describing the daily chores: ‘He has gone to look at the floods, and I/Carry a chipped pail to the chicken-run, /Set it down, and stare’. Where the ‘chipped pail’ and chicken-run seem to hint at life’s imperfections and limitations, the word ‘stare’ – suggestive of deeply serious consideration – and the ensuing questions seem to reflect her doubts of the new state of existence she is in:

‘Can it be borne, this bodying-forth by wind
Of joy my actions turn on, like a thread
Carrying beads? Shall I be let to sleep
Now this perpetual morning shares my bed?
Can even death dry up
These new delighted lakes, conclude
Our kneeling as cattle by all-generous waters?’⁴⁶⁰

The ‘passion’ and romance of the wedding-night – ironically, a disturbed one – soon turns into the ‘reality’ of a ‘perpetual morning’ that implies a sense of tiring struggle. The idea gets support from Cooper’s suggestion also that ‘the girl’s “stare” witnesses her reappraisal of the conventional married life’⁴⁶¹ of which she is a part now. Moreover, the questions in the end – rooted in the fundamental issue of life’s imperfections reflected

⁴⁶⁰ Larkin, ‘The Wedding Wind’, Burnett, p.28.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, p.112.

through the 'restless' wedding-night and the dull domestic chores on the very first morning of married life – expand the subject to something deep and eternal. It is important to see that 'the poem is sensitive to the husband's plight as well as the wife's'.⁴⁶² The very first day foreshadows the future of their matrimonial life: where on the husband's part it is supposedly heavy responsibilities of masculine nature, the wife's share – keeping in line with 'the hens' processed life' of 'regenerative function' (suggested by the 'chicken-run')⁴⁶³ or the horses' confinement in the stable – may not be less in magnitude.

Unlike the poet – having a sympathetic understanding of the reality – the speaker, a simple pheasant girl, seems a bit unsure: perhaps, she is somewhat disappointed at not finding it the way she might have been dreaming of. Contrary to the myth of romance, love or sex, wedding seems a name fit for sacrifice and compromise.⁴⁶⁴ ⁴⁶⁵ However, there is another possibility as well: following life's customary ways in accordance with the expectations as well as satisfaction of society, she may have deliberately – though regretfully – ignored the known reality of these time-honoured conventions or 'innate assumptions . . . hardened into all we've got'.⁴⁶⁶

The poem – like the preceding ones – seems to suggest that the supposed means of fulfilment often turn out as compromising situations – something implied in the image of 'kneeling as cattle', or the "'new delighted lakes" of the "'perpetual morning" of oppressed life'⁴⁶⁷ ⁴⁶⁸. The

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ See Philip Larkin, *Required Writing: 'An Interview with the Observer'*, p.54.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Larkin, 'Dockery and Son', Burnett, p.65-67.

⁴⁶⁷ Cooper, p.113.

word 'perpetual' echoes, once more, the 'perpetual journeying' of a man out for work, 'walking on a deserted platform' in the early hours of a cold wintry dawn – supposedly a time for lovers to re-embrace with a renewed spirit – leaving 'a wife or child' in a 'shell of sleep' that, ironically, is consistently beaten by the wild wind.⁴⁶⁹ The possible ironical sense of phrases like 'all-generous waters' and 'delighted lakes' contribute further to the tone. Perhaps, as symbolised by the wedding wind which is both 'soothing and unsettling', the future of the newly married couple in the poem is going to be likewise.⁴⁷⁰

There is something interesting to note while comparing the male speakers of the poems like 'To My Wife' (Feb 1951) and 'Marriages' (Jan 1954) with the female one in 'Wedding Wind': the cynical attitude of the former two is clearly differentiable from the innocently pleasant – though confused – attitude of the latter. However, there is a big difference between 'cynical' and 'confused': where the former reflects the cold attitude of experience, the latter speaks of innocent ignorance. Perhaps, it implies the female speaker as compromising, sacrificing, patient and faithful rather than complaining or grumbling – attributes making a good wife in a traditional and patriarchal sense. The poem, in a way, shows not only Larkin's understanding of women's psyche – insatiable and vulnerable regarding love – but also his positive and sympathetic attitude in this respect. Also in 'My Darling', compared to the honestly confessed hypocrisy of the male lover, presents the female beloved as simple, fair and gullible. In fact,

⁴⁶⁸ "'Wedding Wind" . . . [is] found to contain "rare moments of experiential surprise" and a language which is both domestic and religious.' Regan, 1992, p. 42.

⁴⁶⁹ XXII, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p.17.

⁴⁷⁰ 'Like the mothers in "The Afternoons" . . . both partners are pushed "To the side of their own lives" by the pressure of orthodox roles.' Ibid.

women's deep urge for love is referred to directly or indirectly on several other occasions also:

'In everyone there sleeps
 A sense of life lived according to love.
 To some it means the difference they could make
 By loving others but across most it sweeps
 As all they might have done had they been loved.'⁴⁷¹

Poems like these reflect the essence of Larkin's observation and ideas about women and their place in the contemporary society of which the chauvinistic atmosphere at his own home was also an example.⁴⁷² His own tactfulness towards his girlfriends was no less of an example in this respect that he was painfully aware of, and for which, perhaps, he had his own personal reasons.⁴⁷³

What is important to see is that such compromising situations do not mean the end of an instinct for freedom that, no doubt, consistently oppressed by the 'depreciating luggage'⁴⁷⁴ of customs and conventions, never cease to exist. In 'Wedding Wind', it is implied in the restlessness of the horses and the wind 'Hunting through clouds and forests'. No doubt,

⁴⁷¹ Larkin, 'Faith Healing', Burnett, pp.53-54.

⁴⁷² Motion.

⁴⁷³ 'Larkin's fear of commitment was motivated by something purer than the opportunism of a bachelor shagger. The poet genuinely feared that, once a woman moved in, his muse would pack her bags.'

Andrew Motion, *A fanfare for the common man* (Saturday 5 July 2003 17.03 BST)

<<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jul/14/poetry.philiplarkin>> [accessed 27 August].

⁴⁷⁴ Larkin, 'Maiden Name', *The Less Deceived*, Burnett.

sexual consummation, another implication of the 'high wind' in the poem's context, is also supposed to be an instinctive impulse for release and freedom, but its customising into marital relation – especially in its orthodox sense – tempers its naturalness and spontaneity, just as a bird's flight restrained by its trimmed wings, or the chicken run. Marriage as an important aspect of Larkin favoured communal life in 'Church Going' and the anxiety underlying it in poems like 'Wedding Wind' may leave one with a question though. It does not need reminding, however, that Larkin's poetry is far from being prescriptive.⁴⁷⁵ Accepting life as a complex phenomenon, it proposes 'self-integrity' as a decisive factor in matters of choice; being true to oneself may help to mitigate a sense of being deceived often resulting from following cultural and social myths or 'fifth-hand' opinions blindly. However, he does not present it as a panacea, a means of salvation or freedom.

Likewise, being a bachelor himself does not mean Larkin presents singleness as the best option universally. What he seems to suggest results from his concern to be less deceived: one's approach towards life should not be nourished by high hopes or expectations that are often the outcome of romantic attitudes and the widely spread popular myths. Expecting something as a heal-all or someone as a healer is simply utopian, wishful thoughts far away from reality. The poem, like the rest of the collection, seems to suggest vigilance against the delusive aspect of life – a mood appropriate concerning the contemporary high expectations of the public as well as personal experiences of the writer. The overall pleasant impression of the bride's feelings seems dented, though apparently slightly, by feelings of uncertainty or fear generally associated with life –

⁴⁷⁵ 'Larkin's poetry is mostly exploratory rather than prescriptive.' Regan, 1992, p.92.

something not letting one relish even the rarely occurring moments of life usually supposed as brimming with happiness.⁴⁷⁶

The speaker in the poem seems to be in the line of Larkin's other female characters like Katherine (*A Girl in Winter*) and the Polish girl (*The North Ship*). All the three have been created almost at the same time – the immediate post-war years – and placed almost in the same situation. The first two – being war refugees – are alien to the place, society and culture, hence feeling isolated wherein they find themselves. However, it is not only a question of being alien but also of their being the victims of social injustice in the form of patriarchal and conventional attitudes. Where in Katherine's case it appears as Mr Anstey's consistently bossy and bullying behaviour, in the other's it seems implied in the words and phrases like 'wilderness of cities', 'hammered miles' and 'stony place' that convey a sense of harshness. Unlike them, the bride in 'Wedding-Wind' is not an alien in the sense of being amidst a foreign culture, but seems a victim of her native cultural ways. Her newly married status – on the very first day – is like her entering a new but, most probably, difficult stage of life. Ironically, – contrary to her expectations, perhaps – it does not seem a very good 'bargain': rather than its 'conventional depiction . . . as a generous tonic'⁴⁷⁷ marriage seems to have been suggested as a state of 'subservience and monotony'⁴⁷⁸ – a compromise.

The Depreciating Luggage: Belief in cultural, social and political myths has been deflated in 'Maiden Name' (1955) as well. Like 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album', this poem has also been addressed to Winifred

⁴⁷⁶ See Bradford, p.69.

⁴⁷⁷ Cooper, p.113.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

Arnott after she was married. Marriage, contrary to the popular opinions as well as romantic promises of love, sex and security of homely life it generally holds, is presented as a loss of freedom, identity and youthful beauty: the idea has been wittily and beautifully conveyed through playing upon 'maiden name':

'Marrying left your maiden name disused.
 Its five light sounds no longer mean your face,
 Your voice, and all your variants of grace;
 For since you were so thankfully confused
 By law with someone else, you cannot be
 Semantically the same as that young beauty:
 It was of her that these two words were used.'⁴⁷⁹

The youthful beauty signified by 'face', 'voice' and 'the variants of graces' has been aptly linked with the maiden name having 'five light sounds' (Winifred Arnott) where 'light' – contrary to 'depreciating luggage' in the poem's concluding lines – signifies an independent and carefree unmarried life. Moreover, one cannot ignore the piquant ironical sense of 'thankfully' used as a qualifier with 'confused/By law with someone else'. Using 'law' and 'confused' together in the context of matrimonial relationship emphasises the orthodox or imposing aspect of traditions as unnatural and against the instinct for freedom. The confused name, conveying the sense of a confused life, not only anticipates the idea of marriage as 'dilution' of self rather than 'increase' ('Dockery and Son') but

⁴⁷⁹ Larkin, 'Maiden Name', *The Less Deceived*, Burnett, p.33.

also reminds of the bride's confusion – implying the loss of identity – in 'Wedding Wind'.

The conventionally assigned masculine and feminine roles contradicts the sense of harmony, love, peace and pleasure often associated with marriage in popular myths. Many of the relevant poems in the volume regarding the subject bear almost the same sense: what 'Wedding Wind' conveys in an indirect, disguised, sympathetic and ironical manner, or 'Dockery and Son' (March 1963) somewhat sceptically, 'Maiden Name' states in a stark, though light, manner. The light and everyday manner not only adds to the beauty of the poem, but also makes the seriousness of the issue less perceptible; perhaps, the intention is to enact the easy way that brings about, ironically, such a deep and decisive change in a woman's biological, psychological and social life. The apparently simple change in name signifies something consequential – a departure from youth, beauty, freedom and past ways of life. A reader's comment interestingly fits in the context:

I like everyday poems too, and I thought of this one when I read *Night Vision*. I guess it's not really an everyday poem – giving up your maiden name doesn't happen every day – but the images used are everyday. This isn't a profound reflection on the loss of identity. Or maybe it is; except that big words aren't used. Instead, there are simple, everyday pictures of school prizes and tartan ribbon. This doesn't seem a poem with a forceful message to propagate. But maybe it does just that, in its everyday way.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁸⁰ Priscilla Jebaraj, *Maiden Name – Philip Larkin* (n. d.)
 <<http://wonderingminstrels.blogspot.co.uk/2001/09/maiden-name-philip-larkin.html>> [accessed 28 Aug. 16].

Presenting profound issues in simple language and style is a skill, practiced in the rest of Larkin's poems also. The everyday or realistic impression is enhanced through using a subject which is the 'real girl' of 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album', Winifred Arnott, a part of Larkin's life at some stage. Her maiden name, though no more used, is still a source of freshness and pleasure for the speaker the same way as her photos are in the other poem: it will never lose its associations:

'It means what we feel now about you then:
How beautiful you were, and near, and young,
So vivid, you might still be there among
Those first few days, unfingermarked again.
So your old name shelters our faithfulness,
Instead of losing shape and meaning less
With your depreciating luggage laden.'⁴⁸¹

For the speaker it is easier to relish the past associations evoked – like the photo in 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph' – by the 'five light sounds' of the maiden name rather than the settled (or unsettled) situation of a highly committed love affair or married life. 'The mediations of distance', both temporal and spatial, 'rescue one from the compromising immediacy of the *instant* and "special one/Who has an instant claim/On everything. . .down to [the] name"'⁴⁸².⁴⁸³ This sense of detachment or

⁴⁸¹'Maiden Name' by Larkin in Burnett, p.33

⁴⁸² Stephen Regan, *Philip Larkin: Contemporary Critical Essays* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), p. 179.

dissociation implies the spirit of freedom, the room for 'alternatives' otherwise usurped by life's conventional, stereotypical or orthodox modes – 'an abandonment of all claims to the 'unfenced existence' so hauntingly evoked in "Here"'⁴⁸⁴. The oblique but intense sensuality inherent in the words and phrases such as 'unfingermarked', 'losing shape' and 'depreciating luggage laden' evoke, show an emerging libertarian attitude like the rest of the relevant poems: something that Larkin, perhaps, cannot help. He seems to be as much obsessed with the issue of sex as with the complex of faith and the fear of old age and death; rather, they have an essential role in arousing as well as pursuing the question of fulfilment.

Poems like 'Maiden Name' and 'Wedding Wind', in a way, answer those projecting a misogynistic aspect of Larkin's personality by highlighting his attitude towards married life, his pornographic interests, inclination for onanism, and his humorous or half-humorous – often quite obscene – remarks about fair sex in his informal letters to his friends. Here, at least, one has an example to see that his dislike for married life has nothing to do with women but lack of fulfilment as well as the consequent responsibilities restricting one's life: the poem implies marriage as a restrictive factor in the case of both women and men. Rather, the poems seem antagonistic more towards the patriarchal attitudes that apparently conflicts with Larkin's image as having a conservative approach.

However, being conservative does not necessarily mean having a patriarchal approach that Larkin detested specifically about his father's

⁴⁸³ '[The] poem reveals a sceptical evasion of commitment and action; it strongly asserts its preference for what is 'past and gone', unashamedly idealising the younger woman whose "old name shelters our faithfulness".' Regan, 1992, p.99.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 102.

domineering attitude, especially towards his mother and sister. Moreover, the seeming contradictions in Larkin are a realistic approach, rather than a defect, towards life's too complex phenomenon to express straightforwardly in a formula: Larkin's keen sensitivity in this regard accounts for his denial of any definite ideology whether religious, philosophical or political. His work demonstrates the consistent struggle of a soul that – in the absence of anything definite or absolute – is looking for some moderate alternative amongst various ways that, one way or the other, are characterised by some form of extremity. Even here – while advocating for 'self-integrity' and 'self-possession' – he tries to avoid anything that may convey a sense of imposition. 'Self-integrity' or 'self-possession' – despite its complexity like other things – is at least clear in its intention: an attempt – using a rationally humanistic rather than sentimental approach – to cope with life's limitations by being vigilant against its mythical and illusory aspects.

It is not simply wedded life but life as a whole, and the orthodox attitudes in relations particularly the poem questions: the wish for balance and harmony running through most of Larkin's work persists here as well. The aesthetically moderate as well as realistic view determining the conclusion of conflicting situations runs here also. Obviously – aware of life's complexity – Larkin avoids adopting a hard line in any respect.

Fable, Unmolesting Meadows, Bridles: In Larkin, going for limited or rational is not a choice but compromise with the inevitable; what makes him compromise is, perhaps, the realization that going out of the sphere of reason leads nowhere.⁴⁸⁵ The situation seems implied in his nostalgic

⁴⁸⁵ Larkin, Poem XXIII, *The North Ship*, Burnett.

feelings for the imperial Britain in 'At Grass' (May, 1949) as well.⁴⁸⁶ The images evoke almost the same feeling of loss set in a quiet, peaceful and resigned mood. The poem, interpreted often at two levels, emphasises either the somewhat regretful feelings, or the quiet, carefree and relaxed moments of life enjoyed after a tiring and eventful phase of intense desires, high hopes and the struggles to achieve.⁴⁸⁷ However, doing away with anyone of the above senses seems improper; rather, having them together seems sensible, realistic and in keeping with life in its entirety.

The feelings of loss and resigned mood are a logical and natural descent after having been through a climatic stage of emotive, imaginative and physical prowess.⁴⁸⁸ In a way, the two emotional modes – longing and lethargy – together suggest a state of equilibrium and quietism seen in the preference for mildly traditional and aesthetic concerns in the rest of the collection. The impact, consequently, is neither the intensity of loss nor the excitement of freedom from responsibilities⁴⁸⁹, but a sober, serious and calm sense of a carefree attitude that is quite in harmony. The mellowed atmosphere of the poem in this respect is exemplary.^{490, 491}

Whether it is an energetic, ambitious and eventful youth turned into a slow, sluggish, isolated and uneventful old age, or a vastly expanded imperial power reduced to a limited and self-contained welfare state, both implications – reflecting the insubstantiality of existence – are connected.

⁴⁸⁶ Morrison, pp. 82-84.

⁴⁸⁷ Regan, 1992, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁸⁸ Regarding its melancholic mood 'At Grass' has been described by critics as 'a poem of post-imperial *tristesse*' (Morrison, p. 83) as well as compared to a 'post-coital' condition in the context of the loss of British Imperial power. Neil Corcoran, *English Poetry Since 1940* (London; New York: Longman, 1993).

⁴⁸⁹ See Morrison, p.82.

⁴⁹⁰ Alvarez, while comparing 'At Grass' with Ted Hughes's 'A Dream of Horses', describes the former as 'elegant and unpretentious and rather beautiful in its gentle way.' A. Alvarez, *The new poetry: an anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp. 30-1.

⁴⁹¹ See Regan, 1992, pp. 29-30.

However, where the former signifies a timeless issue, the latter relates to the contemporary political and social environment in Britain. As far as old age and death are concerned, they are – like an integral and ever-haunting part of life in actual sense – an inseparable part of Larkin's work: explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously, death pervades his entire work. What accounts for it is, perhaps, the writer's pessimistic temperament as well as the insecure, death-haunting atmosphere of the war that spanned over almost all those years during which he was coming of age.⁴⁹² Besides the oft-mentioned childhood boredom and fear, the shocking experiences and gloomy atmosphere of wartime must have had quite an active role in moulding Larkin's sad and serious attitude towards life. Where old age – or thought of nearing death – sets one almost free from worldly aspirations and the corresponding efforts, its triggering nostalgic feelings for past is also natural: both the modes, managing their way through the poem, reflect a realistic approach.

The sense of freedom versus the sense of loss – in a sad but soothing tone – is quite evident in the diction, images and rhythm of the lines. The flashback technique sets, as in *A Girl in Winter*, the still, murky and 'anonymous' state of the horses against a luminous, dynamic and known world when the horses were fit to fight and ready to race. Where their static present is suggested through 'the cold shade', the distressing wind and 'the dusk [that] brims the shadows', their magnificent past is reflected in 'classic Junes', 'crowd and cries', 'the cups and stakes and handicaps/Whereby their names were artified' and 'the long cry/Hanging unhushed till it subside/To stop-press columns on the street.' However, the sense of regret for a glorious past has been rather softened by a

⁴⁹² See Regan, 1992, p. 38.

deeper sense suggested through words and phrases like ‘fable’, ‘faint afternoon’ and ‘fade’ in the second stanza: accepting life as fundamentally insubstantial may help one – by replacing high hopes and expectations with a realistic approach – to avoid severely shocking situations one faces frequently. The mood is further moderated through presenting ambitions, glories and fame as oppressive because of their restrictive nature; things at times ‘thrust upon’, rather than opted through an inner urge, by various cultural, social, political and religious factors.⁴⁹³ Freedom and self-integrity as essential requirements to explore self-identity⁴⁹⁴ appear here as well:

‘ . . . , and stand at ease,
Or gallop for what must be joy,
And not a fieldglass sees them home,
Or curious stop-watch prophesies:
Only the grooms, and the grooms boy,
With bridles in the evening come.’⁴⁹⁵

Taken literally, the horses are no more bothered by the ‘fieldglass’ or ‘stop-watch’ that restricted their eventful youth but their being visited by ‘the grooms, and the grooms’ boy, /With bridles in the evening’ checks the sense of pleasure inferred from a ‘gallop for what must be joy’ for them. The idea of freedom is as provisional and illusory as life itself: there is not

⁴⁹³ See references 44, 45.

⁴⁹⁴ ‘Liberated from the past and from the demands of time, they have finally become themselves in a pastoral world of innocence and permanence.’ Simon Petch, *The Art of Philip Larkin* (Sydney U.P, 1981) pp. 59-60.

⁴⁹⁵ Larkin, ‘At Grass’, Burnett, p.45-46.

much life may offer as a reason for overexcitement.⁴⁹⁶ Though the ex-race horses may have got free of many of the restrictive factors in the form of roles assigned, it cannot be in an absolute or perfect sense. Viewed in a broad and deep sense, it is a question of something more than merely the manmade restrictive customs or established ways of life; something mysterious like death or the associations of death, the limitations inherent in the very nature of life itself. Putting aside these inevitable and restrictive factors, the horses are relieved, at least comparatively, to follow their natural and instinctual ways to some extent: having ‘slipped their names’, grazing in the ‘unmolested meadows’, they ‘shake their heads’, perhaps, to avoid the ‘memories [that] plague their ears like flies’ (Past memories, pleasant or unpleasant, are annoying and saddening anyway).

The poem, at symbolic level, seems to present England’s contemporary political picture.⁴⁹⁷ After an adventurous and eventful era of imperialism and its encumbering responsibilities, England, in a way, was going to have freedom – a relief from the tiring imperialistic duties – while resuming its original English self that, being akin to the soil, may flourish into an ease and comfort of homely feeling once again. The idea is in tune with the reasonable, practical, moderate and mature view the Movement deemed essential to cope with life in its twentieth century modern democratic version. However, the sad and nostalgic mood – reflective of man’s helplessness in the face of life’s limitations – implied in the poem cannot

⁴⁹⁶On symbolic level, ‘The “bridles” of the closing stanza are a more appropriate image of welfare state dependency than of ideal freedom’. Regan, 1992, p. 83.

⁴⁹⁷ ‘The emotion of the poem is in excess of the facts as they appear, is more than an emotion about racehorses in old age.’ Morrison, 84.

be ignored.⁴⁹⁸ Where being rational, logical, practical and compromising demonstrates Larkin's realistic approach, yearning for the things unknown and beyond rational boundaries shows his consistent urge for fulfilment. 'At Grass', in its nostalgia for the past imperial glory⁴⁹⁹ and compromise with the present, is one of the many poems characterised by a conflicting situation between finite and infinite, ephemeral and eternal, mundane and glorious, and material and spiritual in various degrees. However, in the present case, the context of racehorses as well as the artistic and emotional homogeneity has rendered the conflicting situation subdued and mild. The sense of yearning for a glorious past has been mitigated by a sense of love for England and Englishness⁵⁰⁰ implied in the detailed description of the racehorses and their achievements.⁵⁰¹ ⁵⁰² The conclusion seems analogous to those of the poems like 'Church Going' and 'Reasons for Attendance' where the aspiration for spiritual and sexual fulfilment – before getting fully aflame – consumes itself in social and aesthetic concerns respectively. It is important to see that like 'Art', love for Englishness and English landscapes ('unmolested meadows', 'classic summers') in Larkin also mitigates the sense of loss or unfulfillment⁵⁰³ – something evident enough in 'At Grass'.⁵⁰⁴

⁴⁹⁸ 'Tom Pauline agrees with Morrison that Larkin's "sad lyricism is rooted in a culture" and that what it frequently evokes is "a sense of diminished purpose and fading imperial power".' Regan, 1992, p. 81.

⁴⁹⁹ Morrison, pp. 82-84.

⁵⁰⁰ "'At Grass", "MCMXIV", "How Distant" and "The Explosion" are born of an "elysian" mood and might be regarded as modern version of "the old medieval romance"'. Seamus Heaney, 'The Main of Light', *Larkin at Sixty*, ed. by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 1982) p.137.

⁵⁰¹ Accounts of horse race, a typically traditional English sport evincing Larkin's love for Englishness, have been described in *A Girl in Winter* and frequently mentioned in the conversations in Christopher Warner's company in *Jill*.

⁵⁰² Larkin's poetry shows 'a preference for English provincial settings over those of "abroad"'. Regan, 1992, p.24.

⁵⁰³ Corcoran.

⁵⁰⁴ Regan, 1992, pp. 82-83

What is remarkable about the poem is its confining a lot in little: with its youthful energies, engagements, commitments, longing for fulfilment, quite old age and nearing death, life is but a fable that ends the unending urge for freedom in death.

Without a Proper Ground: Larkin's strategy to attenuate the sense of unfulfillment corresponds with the ways life treats him. He, at least, tries to keep himself clean and clear in the face of life's hostilities, restrictions and impositions. This can be seen also in his going for the careers of a writer and a librarian: where the former served as an independent means for his spiritual and emotional catharsis, the latter ensured his freedom by keeping him away from much social interaction and influence often associated with work or workplaces. His life, like his poetry, seems to suggest that the thought of anchoring to something absolute or perfect for having fulfilment is incongruous with the very nature of life that is based on relativity. The idea works its way especially through 'Places Loved ones' (1954).

Like the rest of the poems, personal freedom, neutrality⁵⁰⁵ and the sense of detachment have been emphasised in 'Places Loved Ones' as well. Such an attitude – rooted in life's lack of fulfilment – plays a key role in furnishing Larkin's approach towards life. The same motive and attitude ranging from personal to social and political spheres evince Larkin's genuineness and artistic sincerity; rather, his work seems an enactment of his life.

⁵⁰⁵ '[Larkin's] early poetry, in particular, clearly coincides with the Movement ideology . . . specially in its struggle for neutral ground.' Regan, 1992, p.24.

Though the idea of freedom versus commitment – or the issue of detachment versus attachment – is implied in almost all the poems, ‘Places Loved Ones’ deals with it explicitly. Going for someone or something as ‘special’ is like depriving oneself of a sense of freedom to choose amongst an apparently wide range of alternatives and possibilities – the ‘peacock-fan’⁵⁰⁶ – that life seems to offer. In fact, such choice-making decisions rely on either pretensions or momentary sentiments, and the stimulus to choose lies in a ceaseless urge for fulfilment. However, are not life and fulfilment poles apart? In view of life’s lack of permanence, it seems foolish to think of any repose for one’s aspirations or expectations. Not having something as final or absolute has, at least, the advantage of always feeling free to choose, let alone going for right and wrong⁵⁰⁷.

It was not only the loss of life and property – no doubt, extremely shocking – but also a loss of trust and belief, a psychological and emotional crisis, that the war left in its wake. The loss of nears and dears as well as the destruction of cities and towns not only sharpened the sense of life’s impermanence but also caused confusion about the role of Faith, God and goodness in a situation prevailed by evil. Viewed in the contemporary cultural, social and political perspective, poems like ‘Places Loved Ones’, despite a light tone, have their gravity. The growing tendency of disbelief in religion, traditions and conventions were weakening the ties that play a cemental role in a community-based life. Consequently, the ideas of stability and endurance in relationship, losing

⁵⁰⁶ Larkin, ‘To My Wife’, Burnett, p.274.

⁵⁰⁷ ‘Strange to know nothing, never to be sure/Of what is true or right or real, /but forced to qualify *or so I feel/Or Well, it does seem so:/Someone must know.*’ Larkin, ‘Ignorance’, *The Whitsun Weddings*, Burnett, p.67.

their significance, were being replaced by a sense of immediacy, opportunism, materialistic concerns as well as a spirit of dissociation and independence. Such attitudes – affecting the concept of marriage, family, neighbourhood and community adversely – were resulting in liberal, libertarian and commercial trends that valued personal freedom and material concerns more.

The growing urge for individual freedom – crossing the barriers of customs and traditions – seemed swinging towards the other end: the structure of pre-war English society, already shaken during the war years, started crumbling in the decade that followed. The general atmosphere of disbelief, particularly visible during the war and post-war years, led to the rejection of religious, social and political authority based on a particular set of conventions. In fact, the traditional web that had a pivotal role in shaping communal life got its strength mainly from the church, the ‘proper ground’ that once ‘held unspilt/ . . . marriage and birth/And death and thoughts of these’⁵⁰⁸. However, the significance of this religious as well as social nucleus in day-to-day life was diminishing due to growing self-consciousness and individualism: that man’s identity lies within rather than in the prevailing myths of social norms; that attitude towards life should be rational rather than traditional or sentimental. ‘Places Loved Ones’ illustrates the motive of many poems like ‘I Remember, I Remember’, ‘Maiden Name’ and ‘To My Wife’:

‘No, I have never found
The place where I could say

⁵⁰⁸ Larkin, ‘Church Going’, Burnett, pp.35-36.

This is my proper ground,
Here I shall stay;
 Nor met that special one
 Who has an instant claim
 On everything I own
 Down to my name;

 To find such seems to prove
 You want no choice in where
 To build, or whom to love;⁵⁰⁹

Where the recurrence of 'proper ground' seems of special significance with regard to its previous use in 'Church Going', the succeeding lines can be linked with poems like 'Wedding-Wind', 'Maiden Name', 'To My Wife' and 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album'. These poems, directly or indirectly, convey not only a sense of being offended by the orthodox aspects of cultural, social and political institutions but also account for some of the obvious facts in Larkin's personal life such as the state of bachelorhood and isolation he preferred as a way of living in the context of freedom. The idea in these poems is a reiteration of Katherine's ideas in *A Girl in Winter* or an anticipation of the attitude towards marriage in 'Dockery and the Son'.⁵¹⁰ In a way, these poems – though somewhat oblique and implicit – look forward to the liberal tendencies in the cultural, social and political spheres in the immediate future of fifties and onward.

⁵⁰⁹ Larkin, 'Places Loved Ones', *The Less Deceived*, Burnett, p.29.

⁵¹⁰ '[Sexual] relationships involve a relinquishing of identity and power, a deep-seated fear about the loss of freedom.' Regan, 1992, p.93.

In fact, fifties are going to be a landmark regarding the kick-off of future changes in the concepts of family, gender roles, sex and sexual politics, faith, friendship, social structure and the youth attitude – a process marked mainly by a spirit of independence.

In Regan's opinion, the freedom Larkin is concerned about, even if personal rather than political, is important because it reflects the spirit of the age: the idea of 'self-integrity' or being true to oneself, featuring almost all his work, signifies the cracks appearing in the established structure of norms and ideas already shaken during the war-years. In a way, the war served as a critical point in the English social, cultural and political history: the physical destruction caused by war corresponded with an inner spiritual and psychological disintegration that needed to be dealt with appropriately. What was deemed necessary in this respect was to be vigilant about the illusions caused by over-ambitiousness, high expectations and sentimentalism. Presenting life in spiritual, mythical and idealistic forms of piety, heroism, honour, bravery and perfection – something practised in art and literature by the Modernists of the forties – has always been immeasurably harmful to humanity.⁵¹¹ Divesting life of its mythical aspects and accepting it in its wholeness – keeping in view its limitations along with one's desires and hopes – is an appropriate and sensible approach that not only clarifies vision but also strengthens to face life as it is. The idea makes the burden of almost all the poems in *The Less Deceived*: despite the over-consciousness regarding the lack of fulfilment or perfection, one has to compromise with life, though not without regrets⁵¹².

⁵¹¹ See Regan, 1992, p.93.

⁵¹² See Larkin, Poem XXIV, Burnett, p.18.

What is true about life in individual sense should be true in general sense as well.⁵¹³ Hence, the significance of Larkin's response towards religion and sex – the very stuff of life's fabric – cannot be ignored even if it is in personal capacity: both serve as the essential determinants in the scheme of life, individually as well as socio-politically.⁵¹⁴ Besides suggesting a realistic but aesthetic way that partakes of the reasonable aspects of both of them, Larkin leaves the right to choose one's way of life to personal judgement and satisfaction: a democratic attitude checked by the virtues of sincerity and truthfulness as suggested in 'Reasons for Attendance'.

Scenting the Purer Water: Almost the same idea – the one in 'Next Please' – finds its way through 'Wires' (1950). Both the poems are concerned with dissatisfaction, hope and disappointment. Where the former presents it symbolically in a long wait for something good ending ironically in disappointment and death, the latter shows it allegorically in the futility of youthful and ambitious ventures ending in painful experiences, wisdom, passivity and ageing – the flame of passion extinguishing gradually into the inertness of old age and finally cold death.⁵¹⁵ That the poems – lacking any concreteness with respect to time and place – seem comparatively metaphorical and fantasised is understandable in view of their composing at a relatively earlier stage of Larkin's poetic career⁵¹⁶. Despite all this 'the wide prairies', the 'electric fences', the scent of 'purer water', the 'muscle-shredding violence' and the 'widest senses' – unlike the vague, mysterious, sinister and evil suggestiveness of the death-haunting imagery in 'Next

⁵¹³ James Booth refers to the neo-Marxists as saying: '... all art is propaganda, the personal is always political.' Michael Baron, *Larkin with Poetry: English Association conference papers* (Leicester: The Association, 1997), p.10.

⁵¹⁴ Religion and sex have been presented as oppressors in 'High Windows' (Larkin, *High Windows*).

⁵¹⁵ Regan, 1992, p. 83.

⁵¹⁶ The poems were published in *XX Poems* (1951) as well.

Please’ – provide ‘Wires’ with a clarity and concreteness seen in the rest of the poems in the volume.

What makes ‘Wires’ interesting is the supposed old age wisdom versus the youthful ambition: the conventionally high-valued wisdom and knowledge often felt proud of is something gained – rather imposed – ironically at the cost of youthful ambition, energy and innocence, a price too high.⁵¹⁷

Wisdom is nothing but a loss of the spirit to explore, an awareness of being surrounded by ‘fences’ resulting in a careful and hesitant attitude: the situation refers not only to the imperfection of life in general sense but also the contemporary cultural, economic, social and political situation. That the youthful curiosity and struggles to have access to the ‘purer water’ lying ‘beyond’ or ‘anywhere’ are futile – an echo of the ‘sparkling armada’ in ‘Next Please’ – reasserts ‘Nothing like something happens anywhere’.

Flying high results often in the turning of wings to ashes. In view of the time of its composition (1950), the poem relates to the war and post-war situation: the contemporary ventures for the realization of various political and social ideals like Fascism, Nazism, socialism or capitalism etc. led to nothing but misery⁵¹⁸ and, perhaps, to maturity for some. Being wary of running anymore after such *phantasma* was the need of the day. Moreover, the sense of a rising youth-culture in the post-war period – particularly in the fifties – may not be out of question in the poem’s context: the contemporary political, social and cultural chaos in the aftermath of war was shaping into new trends motivated mainly by a craze for freedom and liberty, and searching for new possibilities. The

⁵¹⁷ “‘Wires’ builds on the wisdom that “the grass is always greener on the other side”.’ (Regan, 1992, 90)

⁵¹⁸ Larkin, poem IX, *The North Ship*, Burnett, p.9.

poem, while presenting a sad picture of life in general as well as specific sense of the contemporary situation of austerity and struggles, implies also an inclination towards social and political quietism that again is a compromise rather than a choice: the mad pursuit for ideals turns out often as futile.⁵¹⁹ The poem, as usual, illustrates Larkin's rational and cautious attitude in the face of life that may be expected of anyone grown up during the war and post-war years.

Besides life's apparent limitations in the form of various cultural, social and political issues, there is something more fundamental making the idea of freedom in real sense an impossibility. The fear of death, an obsession for Larkin, is as much a part of his work as that of life. Though an integral part of the work as discussed before, it has been particularly focussed in some of the poems in the volume. The following chapter is going to discuss how death renders life a futile practice to live.

⁵¹⁹ See Regan, 1992, p. 83.

(V) The Total Extinction: Perception and Reality

The Desire for Oblivion: Where there are 'Wants', there are 'Wires': a combination, perhaps, inevitable for life's phenomenon to continue; in fact, it is the pair of these two that creates a challenging situation of struggles – a necessity to play the drama of life. The absence of anyone of them would mean perfection and fulfilment or, perhaps, the end of life itself. Rather, the secret of life's continuity seems lying in the sense of unfulfillment or imperfection. But the state of helplessness caused by the 'electric wires' – the barriers (or traps) set by life in various ways – at times takes an extreme form of nihilism, a wish for the end of life, a death-wish.

The fact has been illustrated in 'Wants' (1950). A few points need to be focussed here as well. (a) Why does one feel eager to be social? (b) How does the wish to recoil from society emerge in man normally supposed to be a social being? (c) How does a zeal for living turn into death wish? The questions are one way or another associated with the issue of transience or death that itself makes part of the last question.

The earnestness to be an active participant socially is mainly motivated by a desire to assert as well as justify one's existence: perhaps, it is an assurance not only to those around but also to oneself of being a significant part in life's mechanism like others, or more useful than others are. The urge lying behind pursuing occasions to celebrate, have sexual relations, engage in family affairs and numerous other routine matters – like work in 'Toads' that the speaker compromises with in the end – is an attempt to avoid the thought of mortality always lurking in some corner of mind consciously or unconsciously. However, despite these attempts, one

cannot get rid of a feeling of hollowness. Then there are situations when absence of fulfilment turns into a wish for solitude, of being away from the people – a death instinct; social involvement feels as something futile, meaningless and burdensome. The wish for solitude emerges from not only an urge to be free, self-possessed and see objectively but also due to finding life's emptiness.⁵²⁰ This state of mind makes one feel – even amongst the multitudes – beyond or beneath the immediate, present and apparent. The next as well as ultimate step to solitude – or social death – is physical death:

‘Beneath it all, the desire for oblivion runs:

Despite the artful tensions of the calendar,

The life insurance, the tabled fertility rites,

The costly aversion of the eyes away from death -

Beneath it all, the desire for oblivion runs.’⁵²¹

The realistic approach is strengthened by presenting a psychological issue – with no effort to philosophise or mystify – in the context of ordinary and mundane features of life. The ‘invitation cards’, ‘the printed directions of sex’, ‘the family . . . under the flagstaff’, planning and scheduling life according to the ‘the calendar’, ‘the life-insurance’ and ‘the tabled fertility

⁵²⁰ ‘Distress at the fracturing of an older, stable social order which is felt to be necessary to civilization stimulates the move towards renunciation, transcending a world that seems now to offer so little.’ Sinfield, 1983, p.88.

⁵²¹ Larkin, ‘Wants’, *The Less Deceived*, Burnett, p.32.

rites' – a 'list of dull phrases' which, according to James Booth, are 'reminiscent of early Eliot'⁵²².

The death wish of the speaker is not romanticised but framed in a matter-of-factness characterising the contemporary age. The dullness implied by the phrases and images seems to enact the very cause of the issue: the desire for solitude or death results from life's lack of charm. The painful fact is that all these social engagements – 'the costly aversion of the eyes from death' – are simply deceptions or illusions that can never eliminate or even change the harsh reality. The main cause of death wish is death itself, the very root of dissatisfaction. Keeping in view the already discussed feeling of emptiness regarding spiritual ('Church Going') as well as sexual ('Deceptions') spheres, one can see that the poem is a continuation, rather than anything added newly, of the already discussed poems.

Though the tendency towards 'solitude' is quite in harmony with Larkin's choice of profession as an artist and librarian as well as the sense of his entire literary work, what makes 'Wants' different is the desire for death – something that has been suggested as horrible and much feared of in poems like 'Next, Please', 'Aubade', 'Buildings'. What accounts for it must be one of those phases of extremely desperate mood that make even the 'grim reaper' less fearsome. The poem seems to suggest not only the insignificance of what we do but also life as a whole – that life itself is a huge myth, death in disguise.

Being one of a generation that saw much of the foul play of war, death's pervasiveness through most of his work is not unusual. Though war has

⁵²² James Booth, 1992, p. 160.

not been dealt with directly in Larkin, the experiences and observations of war-situation seem to have distilled into the highly pessimistic attitude of the poems. The immediate impacts in Larkin's case seem processed into a general but deep-rooted cynical attitude reflected in his work; each individual shocking experience seems precipitated into a homogeneous quintessential form. Like drops disappearing into a huge body of water, every new and fresh current of grief is assimilated into the deep vastness of the entire scheme of the painful drama. Hence, it is the essence of the painful experiences rather than the experiences themselves that Larkin depicts. Hence, it may be apparently rare to find war subjects or situations in his work (except his novels), but it does not mean his motives, feelings and ideas are just timeless and placeless entities having nothing to do with the current and concrete.⁵²³ In fact, they are the very gist of the contemporary mood of uncertainty and despair presented in an intensive and refined manner that has fused the specific and general.

The Evening that Lights no Lamp: The make-believe fixities and conventionalities of life have been questioned in 'Going'⁵²⁴ (1945/46) as well. The poem was included – titled as 'Dying Day' – in *The Grip of Light* (1948) also. Its time of composition, inclusion in *The Grip of Light*, imagery and some questions of existential nature show that the poem is about something vast and deeper than simply helplessness in the face of death: it concerns the confusion regarding the issue of perception and truth, and their mutual relationship. The gradually diminishing images seem enacting the slow, silent sinking down of senses in a manner that makes the poem

⁵²³ 'Along with the anti-metropolitan and anti-cosmopolitan instincts in Larkin's poetry, there is a sedulous avoidance of any direct treatment of recent history. This does not mean, however, that the poems themselves somehow "transcend history".' Regan, 1992, p.24.

⁵²⁴ "'Going", written early in 1946 and placed at the beginning of *Collected Poems*, provides a clear indication of the direction in which the mature poetry was to develop.' Ibid. 1992, p.75.

different from 'Wants' and 'Next, Please' where death is shown as a means of escape and horror respectively through images suggesting a still and static situation:

'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.'⁵²⁵

Death as an extinction of the senses has been described in poem XXVII (*The North Ship*) also: 'Hands that the heart can govern/Shall be at last by darker hands unwoven; /Every exultant sense/Unstrung to silence . . .'⁵²⁶

Before entering upon the complexities of existential issue it is proper to discuss the poem's significance regarding the immediate post-war years and its relevance to the title of the unpublished collection of poems (*In the Grip of Light*) where it first appeared. The image of the spreading 'evening' with 'no lamps' is apt not only in the context of the approaching death but also the uncertain murky atmosphere after the war, conveyed appropriately through the image of '*In the Grip of Light*'⁵²⁷. Its giving 'no comfort' implies the impatience and anxiety at the question whether it

⁵²⁵ Larkin, 'Going Going', *The Less Deceived*, Burnett, pp.82-83

⁵²⁶ Burnett, p. 19

⁵²⁷ See Regan, 1992, p.75.

would turn into a full light or complete darkness. In fact, for many the victory in war – won at the cost of an immense destruction and countless lives, especially youth – was an occasion of deep reflection rather than jubilation: the public excitement and celebrations on VE-day turned out as just short-living bubbles, snapped soon by future worries and feeling of emptiness.⁵²⁸ The landslide victory of the Labour Party in the immediate post-war election was evident of public eagerness for a good change – an embalming not only for the war-inflicted wounds and exhaustion but also for the long-standing sense of deprivation caused by a consistent exploitation in the form of the age-old hierarchical system. What they expected at the end of war was a golden age of equality and justice, of sharing the country they had been fighting for equally with the upper and wealthier. In a way, they had been promised that the coming days would be a broad vista of equal opportunities for everyone regarding legal rights, health, education and employment. Unfortunately, the intensity of desire was countered by the immensity of reconstruction and rehabilitation lying on the shoulders of the newly elected government looked to as the messiah and harbinger of unusual political and social reforms by the war-stricken nation. In addition, the question was how they could be sure of the realization of such dreams in view of the recently shattered Victorian hopes based on an unparalleled and strongly optimistic attitude. Unlike the idealism of the previous century, the twentieth century, having been through the sufferings of the two World Wars, had evolved a mature and realistic outlook that was not easy to appease by the highly heroic political narratives. For many like Larkin who doubted any good change in real sense, this murkiness signifying uncertainty was indicative of an

⁵²⁸ Kynaston

approaching darkness rather than the rising of a bright dawn.⁵²⁹

Substituting the 'black-sailed, unfamiliar' ship of 'Next, Please' with an approaching darkness, the poem merges the diminishing hopes and aspirations with the idea of the approaching death – something typically Larkinesque. Moreover, the spreading darkness may signify the consummation of pre-war joyful innocence – something referred to in 'MCMXIV' also – by the dark experiences of war and post-war era. A rational approach fuelled particularly by the contemporary circumstances shattered belief in fixities, conventions and traditions based on innocent ignorance. The poem, in this respect, seems a rejection of the myth of victory.

What seems silken at a distance 'brings no comfort': the uncertainty has been further strengthened through questioning the very sense perceptions supposed to be the source of truth and knowledge⁵³⁰. Things perceived as true and fulfilling at a distance turns out as unsubstantial in the end as life itself does:

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

What loads my hands down?'⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ "'How to exist", "how to survive" is the fundamental question which [the] poems of the immediate post-war years address.' Regan, 1992, p.76.

⁵³⁰ While '[raising] questions about knowledge and perception . . . "Going" constitutes a negative image or denial of "being"'. Ibid, 1992, p.76.

⁵³¹ Larkin, 'Going', Burnett, p.32.

The fixities – based on sense perceptions and suggested through the image of a ‘tree . . . that [locks]/Earth to the sky’ – supposed to render a meaning to life are themselves susceptible to changes and hence unable to provide any fulfilment to a soul searching for absolute and perfect. The idea has been conveyed in most of the poems in the volume. Where in the religious or moral sense they are ‘A shape [getting] less recognizable each week’ (‘Church Going’), in secular or liberal context, they have been described as ‘desolate attics’ (‘Deceptions’) and ‘sheer inaccuracy’ (‘Reasons for Attendance’). Despite their ‘silken’ appearance or appeal from ‘a distance’, they ‘[bring] no comfort’ on getting closer. Finally, it is always ‘the wretched stalks of disappointment’ succeeded by something even worse, the ‘black-sailed’ ship.

Death as the loss of senses – the source of perception-based knowledge – dismisses any idea of absolute truth. If the end of sense perception means the end of knowledge, then what truth actually means. In a way, the only truth is that there is nothing true or absolute at least in what we see or feel around us. However, there is one thing that seems true and absolute – death. Despite the apparent changes – if there really were any – two things would remain invariably the same: a desire for fulfilment and the fear of death; the latter, being the most powerful, ultimately brings an end to the former. In the context of life – a process of ‘going’ rather than ‘coming’ – talking of fixities and fulfilment, therefore, seems incongruous. The ‘something’ that is being awaited is actually ‘nothing’ but the end of existence, its so-called fixities or perception-based knowledge. However, knowledge in its absolute sense (truth) cannot be the one based on sense perception.

Hence, in the next chapter, the writer seems to search for the truth
'beyond the shapes and shingles', the things that we perceive around us.

Chapter 4

'Beyond the Shapes and Shingles'

[Searching for his Proper Ground]

The three journey poems in the collection tell an eloquent story. First, 'The Whitsun Weddings' (1958) celebrates a composed, open-hearted progress out into the world through a busy social landscape. 'Here' (1961) offers an intimate celebration of the poet's proper ground, culminating in serene stasis and a glimpse of transcendence. Finally, 'Dockery and Son' (1963) traces a journey home in a mood of anti-social self-examination and disillusion. The spinning top had made its first stumble. Larkin's 'prime' had bloomed and faded within the period of *The Whitsun Weddings*' poems.⁵³²

The perspective is often that of the distanced, intellectual observer, carefully reserving judgement, though proving to be fallible and sometimes mistaken in his outlook. Even so, the poems embody a range of attitudes and perspectives, and what proves to be most interesting is the dynamic and complex relationship between textual structure and social structure. In a very overt way the poetry of *The Whitsun Weddings* functions as social discourse; its language is scored through with conflicts and tensions of that historical turning from austerity to affluence.⁵³³

Using poetry as a device to preserve observations and experiences while travelling on train is not unusual in Larkin. 'Here' is one such poem that describes the speaker's journey from a thickly populated and polluted

⁵³² James Booth, *Philip Larkin: life, art and love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 291.

⁵³³ Stephen Regan, *Philip Larkin: An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism* (London: MacMillan, 1992) p. 102.

industrial area via a 'busy bustling' town to a calm and cleaner climate of the country. The poem's significance lies in not simply its descriptive power but, more importantly, in the speaker's attitude it implies. To have the poem fully appreciated needs accompanying the speaker to the very end.

It is interesting to see words like 'elsewhere', 'anywhere' and 'nowhere' – reflecting a sense of loss, detachment, remoteness and uncertainty – used often in *The Less Deceived*, finally consolidate into something present, positive and physical. 'Here' is where the speaker's interest seems lying, apparently the destination he is bound for and, most probably, the place where he feels at home; or, perhaps, 'Here' is where the speaker, after trying various possibilities like churches and clubs – 'the shapes and shingles' – is going to seek his 'proper ground'.

Where is 'Here' and what is so significantly appealing about it? Literally, 'Here', as Philip Larkin himself has mentioned on several occasions, stands for Hull;⁵³⁴ while responding to a question he calls the poem 'a celebration of here, Hull . . . a fascinating area, not quite like anywhere else. So busy, yet so lonely.'^{535 536} His conversation with Professor Laurence Perrine is quite informative about not only the poem's background but also helpful in explaining its content:

I was thinking of a journey I took many times, catching the Yorkshire Pullman from King's Cross (London) at 5-20 p.m., changing at Doncaster, as you so rightly at 8 p.m., and getting into a smaller train that arrived in Hull about 9 p.m. All these trains have been changed now, but on a summer evening it was a very pleasant journey. The "traffic all night north" one would catch sight of from the train on the M1 (motorway),

⁵³⁴ Archie Burnett, *Philip Larkin Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012) p. 391.

⁵³⁵ Ibid. p. 392.

⁵³⁶ See Booth, pp. 215-16.

mostly lorries that I imagined would carry on all night until they reached Edinburgh or Carlisle or somewhere like that.⁵³⁷

Compared to the misty atmosphere set in the redundantly metaphoric style of *The North Ship*, one may find in *The Whitsun Weddings* a phase of Larkin's poetic career characterised by geographical as well as social concreteness, something easily inferable from the above references about 'Here', the first as well as one of the most important poems of the volume. Though the poem about a Polish girl in *The North Ship* also describes the speaker's observations while on a train, there, treating the subject – apparently of little social significance itself – in a highly metaphorical manner, renders the things somewhat ethereal, unsubstantial and highly imaginative; the exaggerated manner makes the girl and her beauty as something unearthly or otherworldly.

Though 'Here' is a descriptive account based on a journey from London to Hull town⁵³⁸, and further to the sea-side, it is more than simply that: it conveys not only the writer's views regarding the vanishing natural and simple ways of life versus the rapidly growing industrial and commercial interests in the post-war England⁵³⁹, but also his consistent urge and longing for something beyond and perfect, an ambiguity often interpreted as life's meaning, purpose or ultimate reality.

While shifting the scenes from 'industrial shadows' to 'isolate villages' that lie outside the 'mortgaged half-built edges' of the town, the poem's description of the dull business-oriented activities at the town centre

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Burnett, p. 392.

⁵³⁹ Cf. 'Going, Going', Burnett, p. 83.

compared with that of the beautiful rural views speaks of the persona's aesthetic rather than utilitarian interests. The description – having a vividness and beauty – is significant but, as mentioned before, the poem's value lies more in its brooding over the successively changing sights as train moves on: a demonstration of the speaker's outlook about the changing modes of life from simple and pastoral towards a materially and commercially developed but complex form.⁵⁴⁰ Rather, the poem seems to present a journey of civilization in reverse – moving away from life's modern mazy modes back to simple, pastoral and primitive forms, the speaker finally faces the lonely shores with a vast seascape 'beyond the shapes and shingles' (an image seemingly of transcendental significance) – covered in spatial rather than temporal terms⁵⁴¹; the train, as a transforming agent or time machine, seems to have symbolic significance. The shore that seems to serve as a demarcation line of the journey on land signifies, perhaps, a boundary beyond which the speaker's rational-self has no access. Metaphorically, crossing this barrier would mean an experience beyond the physical, or a moment of epiphany, something Larkin's speaker at times seems to have a glimpse of.

Having thematic possibilities in physical as well as metaphysical sense, the poem asks for quite a close reading, needing to focus not only on words' meanings and their shades, but the skilful use of sound effects as well – something reflective of quite a mature phase in Larkin's artistic career – that correspond aptly with the shifting scenes from Urban to rural, industrial to pastoral, social to solitary, and dynamic to static or 'cyclical'.

⁵⁴⁰ Regan, p. 37.

⁵⁴¹ What a historian describes in temporal context, a poet presents in images.

The phrase 'industrial shadows' sets the tone from the very first line. Where the word 'shadows' having negative implications is something known in literary and cultural spheres, its combination with 'industrial' is quite illustrative in the context, evoking images of narrow, sunless, smelly, smoky streets surrounded by tall buildings. The 'traffic all night north', though linked with the above phrase because of being a feature of modern technological development, carries a 'pleasant' sense – a lovely night-view of moving lights – while the speaker is leaving the 'shadows' behind. The phrase 'swerving east' combined with 'night' in the second line clearly conveys a sense of moving from the darkness of 'night' towards the light of the rising sun in the 'east', or from the narrow shadowy suffocating streets towards the open sunlit meadows.

It is to highlight a sense of thrill, excitement, speed and freedom while moving from the gloom of 'shadows' to open light that 'Swerving' – a word sounding like 'swirling' that suggests the fast twist and turn of dancing movement – is specially emphasised through using repeatedly without its subject (train). The exhilarating experience, like the sweet voice and looks of the Polish girl, seems to dissolve everything except what is natural and essential – a feeling of moving alongside the speaker in the open air rather than confined within the carriage's four walls.

The 'Swerving' continues further in 'fields' which, though too 'thin and thistled to be called meadows', have at least a better view as compared to the narrow dark streets of the 'industrial' and commercial zones left behind. Also, they hold the promise of leading the speaker away from the physical, social and psychological barriers imposed by industrial and

commercial interests or, in other words, from the man-made and material towards natural and free.

But the 'Swerving', rather than having a consistent smoothness, is interrupted time and again by the shocks conveyed skilfully through a combination of apt images and cacophonic sounds: 'And now and then a harsh-named halt, that shields/Workmen at dawn . . .'⁵⁴² Similarly, occurring for the third time in the same stanza, 'swerving', followed by successive alliterative s-sounds and others seeming to enact the speed, leads to a lively description of a lovely rural setting that is being looked forward to:

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

The repeated sound enacts not only the 'swerving' movement but also the elevation the speaker's mood experiences while thinking of the sun-steeped sights and 'solitude' the destination holds. The vividly colourful images, specially the virgin freshness of 'shining gull-marked mud', signify how natural, free and far away the intended place is from the sickening influence of man's material pursuits.^{543 544}

⁵⁴² Here, one can feel the echo of 'One man walking a deserted platform;/Dawn coming, and rain /Driving across a darkening autumn . . .' (Larkin, XXII, *The North Ship*).

⁵⁴³ See Booth, 2014, p. 3.

The next stanza starts with an element of surprise, a shocking one: after leaving the 'industrial shadows' behind, the 'swerving' amongst the 'thin and thistled' fields is expected to lead towards a luminous spaciousness; on the contrary it seems the sight of a thickly built market place of a 'big town' that appears and blocks the open view all of a sudden⁵⁴⁵:

'Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster
Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water,
And residents from raw estates, brought down
The dead straight miles by stealing flat-faced trolleys,
Push through plate-glass swing doors to their desires' ⁵⁴⁶

Unlike the celebration of the dazzling domes and towers in the clean and calm morning air of London in 'Sonnet Composed upon Westminster Bridge'⁵⁴⁷, the buildings as well as machines are mentioned here in a way hostile towards man's material pursuits protruding hideously into life's naturalness and simplicity. For anyone, like the speaker, escaping the noisy, dark, dusty industrial zones or cities for the silence, solitude and clarity of countryside, the unexpected looming out of such symbols of 'civic pride' must be no less shocking. But there is more to see: the unpleasant signs and associations of city life left behind by the speaker can be seen here as well; the residents of the town and those visiting from

⁵⁴⁴ Talking of 'the new consumerism' being 'at odds with the communal ideals of the welfare state', Regan quotes John Goodby: 'Larkin is the uneasy, unwilling celebrator of relative influence . . . a slightly awkward guest at the banquet of new materialism.' (1992, p. 102).

⁵⁴⁵ The dramatic effect is, no doubt, intended to emphasise the thematic significance of the lines.

⁵⁴⁶ Larkin, 'Here', Burnett, p. 49.

⁵⁴⁷ Also mentioned in Burnett (p. 393).

the neighbouring coastal areas – a glimpse of the emerging consumer society of the new welfare state that can be categorised neither as city dwellers nor simple village-folk – are also there to have their ‘desires’ fulfilled. (What are their ‘desires’?) Isn’t the word ‘desire’ used often in the context of something being of high value or magnitude, or something not easily attainable?

Where the ‘residents of raw states’⁵⁴⁸ seems a directly bitter satire on the growing trends of consumerism, ‘desires’ – apparently, items of daily use lying at an arm’s length behind the store’s ‘plate-glass swing doors’ needing simply a slight push or pull of hand to access – also seem to have heavily ironic implications. If ambitions and desires are supposed to be the gauge of a society’s intellectual as well as emotional level, the satirical intention of the context here gets quite clear: the people seem to spend their days moving around petty utilitarian concerns, too busy to think whereto they are being led. It is useful to see the difference between the interest of the speaker and that of the crowd: where the former is urged by a spirit implied in the ‘solitude of skies’, the latter, ‘pushing through plate-glass doors’ for cut-price items, are goaded by monetary concerns:

‘Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies,
Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers –
A cut-price crowd.....’⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁸ The phrase echoes T. S. Eliot in connection with the dullness of modernity.

⁵⁴⁹ ‘Here’, Burnett, p. 49.

Is the speaker criticising the post-war welfare state citizens for their commercial and utilitarian approach towards life? Using the transferred epithet 'A cut-price crowd' at the very start of the next stanza is more than enough to confirm it.⁵⁵⁰ The speaker's attitude, supported by the choice of diction as well as the cacophony caused by an abundance of hard and harsh consonantal sounds in the stanza, sustains its hostility.

Comparing the 'widening river's slow presence' in the first stanza with 'barge-crowded water' in the second one is quite suggestive in the context of freedom versus restrictions or complexities caused by overbearingly man-made or artificial ways interrupting life's natural flow. The two images, once again, remind of William Wordsworth's *River Thames*: 'The River glideth at his own sweet will...'⁵⁵¹ But a more worth-noticing aspect of the image is the use of 'presence' (a word used often in divine, mystic or highly reverential sense) that combined with 'Here' (an adverb rather than name) signifies something unearthly and sacred. Is there anything special or mystical about the place that evokes the speaker's reverential feelings? Perhaps, what accounts for it has been described in the very first stanza: the speaker's imaginative uplift in anticipation of the place's naturalness, solitude, silence and freedom may not be of less significance in this respect. If thinking of Larkin as having mystic or pantheistic views appears implausible in a rationally-driven age like twentieth century – something expected of artists like William Blake and William Wordsworth in their respective ages – his place in view of his reverential and loving attitude towards nature, and consistent inquisitiveness regarding life's

⁵⁵⁰ Regan, p. 101.

⁵⁵¹ W. Wordsworth, *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* (January 20, 2003)

<<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/composed-upon-westminster-bridge-september-3-180/>>
[accessed 31 Aug. 16].

meaning in a comparatively faithless as well as materially fast-developing age seems no less than those great writers living in an era of, perhaps, relatively stronger religious and spiritual devotion; Larkin, at least, is struggling to seek what they seemed sure of having found. It is important to see that this aspect of Larkin's work makes him, in a way, a true representative of his age as well: unlike a confirmed atheist or a staunch believer, he is one of those having developed an agnostic attitude in religious matters and, consequently, a sceptic one towards life generally.

Searching for life's meaning or ultimate reality – irrespective of any conventional influences in religious or secular sense – is the essence of romanticism that often questions the established notions. Though it seems quite applicable in Larkin's case, his role is neither that of a revolutionist nor a reformist: rather than challenging or proposing, his position seems that of a wondering solitary soul confronted by the unresolved riddles of life. But his silently suggestive style seems a strong negation of any effort to cast life's phenomenon in conventional and absolute theories. The current poem, though, seems to reflect the idea of 'The World is too Much with us', it does not present nature or anything else as a heal-all, fulfilling or satisfying as Wordsworth's poetry seems doing so confidently.⁵⁵² From Wordsworth's belief in pantheism – rather than any conventional divinity – in eighteenth century to Larkin's repose in nature, and his sceptic attitude towards life's conventional interpretations in twentieth century, one may see a continuity of rationalization or secularisation⁵⁵³ in the English literary, cultural and social trends.

⁵⁵² Ibid., p. 106.

⁵⁵³ BBC-Home, *Britain Spiritual History* (2008-04-11)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/paganism/history/spiritualhistory_1.shtml> [accessed 28 Aug. 16].

The sceptic attitude, at times, seems keeping Larkin stuck between the two extremes: belief and disbelief; vacillation between the two, at time, causes a blur that can be interpreted neither in religious nor rational context, leaving the reader in a state of confusion that is reflective of Larkin's overall perception of life as well.⁵⁵⁴ 'Here', especially its ending lines, presents an apt example in this respect: the images used in the concluding lines do not convey a clear sense; an attempt to explain, perhaps, a mental or emotional state that words do not seem to support.⁵⁵⁵ Nevertheless, what the speaker seems eagerly interested in surely lies beyond the mediocre business activities of 'A cut-price crowd', 'salesmen', or ordinary human 'relations' enclosed within the 'mortgaged half-built edges' of the town; it is something felt in the remote 'Isolate villages' away from the influence of modernity:

'. . . where removed lives
 Loneliness clarifies. Here silence stands
 Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,
 Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,
 Luminously-peopled air ascends;
 And past the poppies bluish neutral distance
 Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach
 Of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:
 Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.'⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ Cf. 'Going', *The Less Deceived*, Burnett, p. 32.

⁵⁵⁵ Booth, p. 202.

⁵⁵⁶ 'Here'.

It is not difficult to assume what 'Loneliness clarifies' for the speaker in 'Here' seems impossible in the crowded and noisy city-life; a phenomenon for which the 'industrial shadows' and 'the mortgaged half-built hedges' of the town need to be left.⁵⁵⁷ Perhaps, it can be felt only in remote rural settings where an atmosphere of silence, solitude, simplicity and spontaneity prevails: an environment unaffected by the 'sordid boon', carefree like the 'leaves unnoticed thicken', the 'hidden weeds that flower', or the 'neglected waters [that] quicken'; where life follows its natural convenient course according to its own 'sweet will', uninterrupted by the overbearingly fast changing social, political and modern technological forces. 'Here', life seems to exist near its very origin, its essence, rendering the place a stability and strength that arouse the speaker's reverential feelings. But where the essence itself lies.

As far as 'silence' or 'solitude' is concerned, that is easily understandable as an oft-discussed theme in Larkin's poems like 'Verse de Society' and many others.⁵⁵⁸ Similarly, his love for English landscape, rural settings and open meadows is also a well-known feature that establishes the Englishness of his work as well as his character. What really matters is the questioning regarding life's essence, a complex arising from seeking one's own way rather than blindly following the conventional, theological or philosophical versions of an already set formula: consequently, things get evasive for both the reader and the poet equally – something that differentiates Larkin's attitude from that of the Modernists who behaved as being more knowledgeable, highly intellectual, visionary and hence

⁵⁵⁷ Regan, p. 105.

⁵⁵⁸ 'The lonely place is always to me the exciting place.' Larkin in Burnett, p. 393.

superior to the public.⁵⁵⁹ The last lines in 'Here' present the same confusing – or the invisibly bright – image: it is not simply 'silence', 'solitude' and natural beauty in their relative forms, but the unquenched thirst for life's origin or meaning – an essential stimulating element at the basis of Larkin's work – that is being sought through them. Where poets like Wordsworth were quite confident of having found it and tried to persuade others for doing so through following their way, Larkin confronts confusion in this respect; contrary to the intense urge, it seems often a sense of being lost in an immense vastness.⁵⁶⁰

But the longing gets keener rather than exhausted. In 'Here', what Larkin leaves behind is a familiar and boring materially developed aspect of life, but what he comes after seems something beyond, inaccessible, unclear and ungraspable. Though the limitless vastness beyond seems inviting, the question of how, where and what invariably remains unanswered; how to grasp something lying beyond the domain of logic and rationality.⁵⁶¹ What is required, perhaps, is to be well-equipped with faith; something that could not come into Larkin's share. His sceptic attitude does not let him beyond the belt of 'isolate villages' and 'removed lives' that, extending from the 'half-built mortgaged hedges of the town', ends 'suddenly' at 'a beach/ Of shapes and shingle'. At this point one is reminded, once again, of the speaker's 'here endeth' echoing inside the church ('Church Going') which – though used in the sense of the contemporary state of the diminishing faith in the established divine religion – may be taken in the sense of rational limits here. But what is longed for is beyond 'the shapes and shingles': 'Here is unfenced existence:/Facing the sun, untalkative, out

⁵⁵⁹ B. Morrison, *The Movement: English poetry and fiction of the nineteen-fifties* (O.U.P: 1980).

⁵⁶⁰ Regan, 1992, p.105.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

of reach.’^{562, 563} The believing self – the one totally dependent on faith – needed to make it otherwise seems impaired in Larkin’s case.

The image of the sea and the sun implying vastness and ‘unfenced existence’⁵⁶⁴ has been dealt in a way that saves it from becoming merely a Victorian cliché⁵⁶⁵. With its blurring effect, it seems to convey a sense of uncertainty, confusion and eagerness.⁵⁶⁶ By now, it gets clear that the eagerness and excitement suggested by ‘swerving’ is more than simply for the naturalness and beauty of the countryside which, no doubt, retain their value through meeting the speaker’s aesthetic urge. The silence and solitude ‘Here’ is, perhaps, more inspiring than the one the speaker enjoys awhile inside the church as – being in nature’s open ‘bosom’ rather than confined by conventionalities – it bears a sense of freedom, purity and virginity. Compared to ‘Church Going’, ‘Here’ seems concerned with pursuing the truth unaffected by any pre-suppositions in traditional, philosophical or religious sense: leaving the decaying traditional (‘Church Going’) as well as the flourishing sensual (‘Reasons for Attendance’) behind seems an attempt to do it in an original way thereby to ensure its authenticity in individual capacity. This neutrality of pursuit – free from any conventional traces – indicates Larkin as a man of independent soul and maverick nature.

⁵⁶² As George Hartley points out, ‘Here’ contains echoes from Larkin’s prose account of Hull in ‘A Place to Write’: ‘a city that is in the world, yet sufficiently on the edge of it to have a different resonance. Behind Hull is the plain of Holderness, lonelier and lonelier, and after that the birds and the lights of Spurn Head, and then the sea . . . giving Hull the air of having its face half-turned towards distance and silence, and what lies beyond them.’ Quoted in Bennett, p.392.

⁵⁶³ ‘Here’, Burnett, p.49.

⁵⁶⁴ See Booth, p.109.

⁵⁶⁵ ‘[The] images of light and water create an impression of both linear and cyclical patterning.’ Regan, 1992, p.48.

⁵⁶⁶ ‘The changed circumstances of the post-war England and the absence of any clearly defined social or political direction help to explain the final movement of ‘Here’ towards the geographical periphery and “the bluish neutral distance” of sea and sky.’ Ibid. p.105.

Larkin may not be a mystic in the sense of being a visionary like William Blake, or a pantheist like Wordsworth, but he is definitely one in the sense of being consistently in search of ultimate reality or, at least, in the sense of yearning for it. In poems like 'Here' one finds him more than merely a rational aesthete, someone who wishes for something of permanent value that, perhaps, lies beyond 'the shapes and shingles'.⁵⁶⁷ This yearning to see the unseen, perfect and permanent renders him a distinctive place amongst the Movement writers. In 'Here', the quest – more than simply the serious and aesthetic concerns of 'Reasons for Attendance' or 'Church Going' – does not stop at the beauty and calmness of 'isolate villages', but tries to reach 'beyond', something that can be interpreted in the sense of a desire to break through rational barriers.⁵⁶⁸ Doesn't one feel here a romantic spirit forcing its way out? Unlike a staunch believer or a confirmed atheist,⁵⁶⁹ Larkin does not shut the door for innumerable possibilities in a world made even more uncertain by the wars' devastating effects.

Mystic or no mystic, what is certain about 'Here' and many other poems in the collection is Larkin's preference for aesthetic concerns as well as his hostile attitude towards material pursuits in any form. 'For Sidney Bechet' – for instance – follows almost the same way of shifting the speaker to another place as in 'Here'. But unlike 'Here', it is not the train but the power of music that – like 'the viewless wings of Poesy' taking Keats to the world of the 'Nightingale' that sings of 'summer with full-throated ease' – serves as a conveyance for the speaker to New Orleans, the origin of

⁵⁶⁷ See Booth, pp.264-65

⁵⁶⁸ See Regan, pp.47-48.

⁵⁶⁹ An agnostic is a mystic as, unlike a believer or non-believer, he lets the spirit of searching the truth flourish and prosper rather than coming to a dead end. At the same time, he can be said as having secular inclinations in the sense of following his own rather than traditionally established ways.

Larkin's favourites: the classical jazz and the famous jazz saxophonist, clarinettist and composer Sidney Bechet⁵⁷⁰.

It is important to see that the 'untalkative, out of reach' 'unfenced existence' in 'Here' is substituted by 'the natural noise of good' or the essence of music that the speaker equates to 'love' ('On me your voice falls as they say love should, /Like an enormous yes.'⁵⁷¹). As usual, after having the experience of 'nothing', 'something' and 'nowhere', 'somewhere', Larkin turns for repose to some alternative often seen in the form of art, nature and love that provide one, at least, with a provisional but ennobling sense of existence that may contribute to the cause of humanity. In fact, the ennobling influence of attributes like these may elevate one to an approximate, if not exact, transcendental experience. For instance, it is the beauty, spontaneity, simplicity, solitude and naturalness in 'Here' that takes the speaker to the proximity of 'unfenced existence' through dissolving – or, to be more exact, making him unconscious of – anything physical for some time. Perhaps, it is this mental or epiphanic state that, transforming the solidity of the train into 'swerving', leaves the reader with nothing but a vision of speed or energy. Similarly, it is the influence of music that, emancipating the speaker of 'For Sidney Bechet' of any barriers through shrinking the spatial as well as temporal remoteness, transports him to the 'Crescent City' of music.

But unlike Keats' realisation of the deceiving nature of imagination or fancy ('Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well/As she is fam'd to do,

⁵⁷⁰ Larkin, a lover of classical Jazz, was a great fan of Sidney Bechet. In fact, this aspect of his personality was one of the factors playing a significant role in bringing him and Kingsley Amis together. Perhaps, sharing the listening and experience of jazz were the only serious and meditative moments that broke the monotony of their non-serious and funny ways of college life.

⁵⁷¹ Larkin, 'For Sidney Bechet', *The Whitsun Weddings*, p.54.

deceiving elf.’) in the end, Larkin’s speaker is aware of its ‘falsehood’ in the very beginning:

‘That note you hold, narrowing and rising, shakes
Like New Orleans reflected on the water,
And in all ears appropriate falsehood wakes...’⁵⁷²

Despite his awareness, he lets himself deluded by the ‘appropriate falsehood’ on purpose – a ‘suspension of disbelief’. After all, illusions like these are essential not only to keep one safe from getting exploited by material concerns that kill humanistic values, but also serve as shock-absorber in general sense. Other instances in this respect can be seen in ‘Love Songs in Age’ and ‘Reference Back’ where music from past relives the spirit of youthful love for an old widowed mother and creates a harmony through bridging an emotional gap between the ‘unsatisfactory’ souls of an old mother and her young one respectively. Similarly, the necessity of love has been emphasised in ‘Faith Healing’ through satirising the so-called spiritual practices of a faith-healer curing a woman:

‘In everyone there sleeps
A sense of life lived according to love.
To some it means the difference they could make
By loving others, but across most it sweeps

⁵⁷² ‘For Sidney Bechet’.

As all they might have done had they been loved.
That nothing cures.'⁵⁷³

Though 'Here' is where the speaker searches the horizons for finding answers to some fundamental questions about life, a relief – what if momentary or provisional – can be found in beauty, nature, art, music and love to avoid the consequent frustration; attributes like these clarify the view of life – often blurred by 'shapes and shingles' – to some extent if not fully. Probably, this is what Larkin's speaker experiences in 'Here' through the power of rustic purity and beauty, away from the unpleasant and ugly looking artificial and commercial.

⁵⁷³ Larkin, 'Faith Healing', Burnett, pp.53-54.

Chapter 5

From 'Here' to *High Windows*

Like his previously discussed works, *High Windows* (1974) can be appreciated properly if read in full perspective of Larkin's personal life as well as the contemporary cultural, social and political continuum that served as a source of inspiration for the poet. Composed during the 'swinging sixties', the poems – rather than going for trends of 'rootless freedom' or 'snobbishness' of conservative attitude – seem to suggest the need for a harmonious whole marked by a fusion of communal and individual traits.

The journey from 'Here' to *High Windows* seems as one characterised by a traveller's growing consciousness of the lack of time for seeking, searching or longing any further; that despite all running around for different alternatives one has finally to yield to the inevitable⁵⁷⁴ – old age ('The Old Fools') and death ('The Building').

Death – the immense reality that makes the total sum of life – dispenses with the illusory aspect of life once and for all. The sense of its nearing puts an end to Larkin's skill – rejection of myths in any religious or secular form⁵⁷⁵ – of getting 'less deceived' he had been fencing with all along against falling into the pit of total disillusionment. In the end, death for him rejects the huge myth not only of here but the here-after as well:

⁵⁷⁴ 'I would not lift the latch;/For I could run/Through fields, pit-valleys, catch/All beauty under the sun – /Still end in loss:/I should find no bent arm, no bed/To rest my head. Larkin, XXIII, *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Archie Burnett (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), p. 11.

⁵⁷⁵ See 'Church Going' (p.35-36) as well as 'Reasons for Attendance' (p. 30), Burnett.

'The sure extinction that we travel to
 And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
 Not to be anywhere,
 And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.'⁵⁷⁶

Considering death merely as an extinction of existence sounds harsh but, perhaps, it is comparatively less cruel than living one's life in pursuing another false hope. After all, what can be expected of one who had been seeing life throughout as nothing but an endless series of illusions?

This, unfortunately, happens at a time when the world of the sixties and seventies around him seems getting younger and younger. How ironical! When young, the world was moaning under loads of miseries caused by the two great wars of the century, and now, when he was getting older, the life around seemed surging with the spirit of the rising youth culture. The fast and furious Rock n Roll, the carefree ways of the mods and rockers, the increasing use of drugs, and the introduction of contraceptives⁵⁷⁷ as well as the legalisation of abortion and homosexuality (1967 Acts), serving as catalyst to the 'sexual burst', provided a smooth, steep, slide to the 60s youngsters to taste the thrill of their crazy youthfulness to the dregs – something that Larkin's generation could only

⁵⁷⁶ Larkin, 'Aubade', Burnett, pp. 115-16.

⁵⁷⁷ Use of Penicillin as a cure for syphilis is also considered by some as a motivation for recklessness in sexual behaviour: 'It's a common assumption that the sexual revolution began with the permissive attitudes of the 1960s and the development of contraceptives like the birth control pill. The evidence, however, strongly indicates that the widespread use of penicillin, leading to a rapid decline in syphilis during the 1950s, is what launched the modern sexual era.' Hayley Dixon, 'Freedom from Sexual Diseases Sparked the Sexual Revolution of the 60s', *The Daily Telegraph*, 11:24AM GMT 04 Feb 2013, Lifestyle.

long for^{578, 579} The facts have been described quite vividly in some of the volume's very remarkable poems such as 'Annus Mirabilis', 'High Windows' and 'This be the Verse'.

In 'Annus Mirabilis', setting the beginning of 'sexual intercourse' somewhere between the occurrence of two very important events of the decade is not only funny⁵⁸⁰ but informative:

'Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(which was rather late for me) -
Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles' first LP.'⁵⁸¹

The poem's commentary on the spirit of the age is quite revealing of the speaker's response towards the outbreak of liberal attitudes in the contemporary cultural, social and political spheres. The very first phrase of the verse, 'sexual intercourse', reflects the bluntness with which words and phrases once considered as taboos, obscene, indecent or impolite could be used without much hesitation at the time. (This aspect of the remaining two of the above-mentioned poems will be discussed later.)⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁸ Burnett, 2012, p. 80.

⁵⁷⁹ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945* (Penguin, 1996).

⁵⁸⁰ James Booth, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 309.

⁵⁸¹ Burnett, p. 90.

⁵⁸² See Stephen Cooper, *Philip Larkin: Subversive Writer* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), p.171.

This ‘freedom of the written word’⁵⁸³ is, no doubt, indebted to ‘the end of the Chatterley ban’ where ‘The word “fuck” or “fucking” appears no less than 30 times . . . “Cunt” 14 times; “balls” 13 times; “shit” and “arse” six times apiece; “cock” four times; “piss” three times, and so on.’ The prosecuting counsel’s attempt to use this data in the trial of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* as a ‘trump card’ in ‘his opening speech to the jury’ seems ridiculous; he, perhaps, closed his eyes to sections two and four of the then newly passed 1959 Act stating: it should be seen if the work was intended to deprave or corrupt and ‘even if the jury found that the book tended to deprave and corrupt it could nonetheless acquit if persuaded that publication “is justified in the interests of science, literature, art and learning or any other object of general concern”.’⁵⁸⁴

Therefore, Larkin’s referring to ‘the end of *Chatterley* ban’ as one of the main motivating factors behind the free spirit as well as ‘sexual explosion’ during the 60s decade, even if in a non-serious way, is more than true; the overturning of the ban proved quite consequential: for many it marks the beginning of a ‘permissive society’⁵⁸⁵:

No other jury verdict in British history has had such a deep social impact. Over the next three months Penguin sold 3m copies of the book – an example of what many years later was described as “the *Spy catcher* effect”, by which the attempt to suppress a book through unsuccessful litigation serves only to promote huge sales. The jury – that iconic representative of democratic society – had given its imprimatur to ending the taboo on sexual discussion in art and entertainment. Within a few years the stifling censorship of the theatre by the lord Chamberlain had been abolished, and a gritty realism emerged in British cinema and drama. (*Saturday Night* and *Sunday Morning* came out at the same time as the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley*, and very soon Peter Finch was commenting on Glenda Jackson’s “tired old tits”

⁵⁸³ See *The Guardian*, Friday 22 October 2010 12.00 BST, Books.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006) p. 205.

in *Sunday Bloody Sunday* and Ken Tynan said the first “fuck” on the BBC.) Homosexuality was decriminalised, abortions were available on reasonable demand, and in order to obtain a divorce it was unnecessary to prove that a spouse had committed the “matrimonial crime” of adultery.⁵⁸⁶

Beatles, another significant cultural phenomenon of the decade mentioned in the poem, played a remarkable role in promoting the contemporary youth culture. The musical band comprising four Liverpudlian lads is said to be ‘at the heart of the transformation’ that rendered the decade such a distinctive place in history. ‘Beatlemania’ – a word shaped out of the popular craze to see, listen to, dance to and copy the style of the musical group performing on the stage – bore the very essence of the freedom that lied at the basis of various contemporary cultural, social and political movements. Their lively performance, love-centred songs and frankness reflected the very message of love, peace, individual freedom and political pacifism that the proponents of the counterculture campaigned for. The great appeal that their love-themed lyrics as well as music composition – a unique fusion emerging from experimenting with various Western and Oriental musical genres – had for the youth rendered them a pioneering role in the anti-establishment, anti-war and anti-nuclear movements.⁵⁸⁷

No wonder in Larkin’s focussing particularly on the sexual attitude of the time as liberty in this respect meant shaking the very foundation that upheld a society netted strongly through the norms and values rooted mainly in Christian traditions. The prevailing trend of extra-marital and casual sex was challenging for a society based on the traditional concept of family life: the growing disinterest in married life, the fast increasing

⁵⁸⁶ Robertson, ‘The trial of Lady Chatterley’s Lover’, *The Guardian*.

⁵⁸⁷ ‘Swinging Britain: 1965-1966’, *The 60s: The Beatles Decade*, Drama, 12 Jan 2015, 01:55.

divorce rate and, consequently, issues like single parenthood⁵⁸⁸ were going to cause deep cracks in the already weakening stronghold of conservative outlook. Things like these gave way to a generational conflict: the Baby Boomers versus their parents where the former were, apparently, at the winning end; unlike their parents who had been through the hardships of war and economic austerity, the youth of 60s wanted to fully avail what the contemporary affluence offered through having fun and pleasure.⁵⁸⁹

Larkin's unfavourable opinion of married life – the basic unit of the traditional English society – can be seen here as well while comparing the past and present of sex-based relations:

‘Up to then there'd only been
A sort of bargaining,
A wrangle for the ring,
A shame that started at sixteen
And spread to everything.’⁵⁹⁰

The critical attitude towards married life can be seen in the very diction: where ‘bargaining’, a word of trade and commerce, is used in the sense of agreement between two persons or two parties, ‘wrangle’ is used in the context of ‘arguing’, ‘contending’, ‘manoeuvring’ and ‘managing or

⁵⁸⁸The Guardian, *Divorce Rates Data, 1858 to Now: How Has It Changed* (2016) <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2010/jan/28/divorce-rates-marriage-ons>> [accessed 28 Aug. 16].

⁵⁸⁹ The National Archive, *Sixties Britain: A Social and Cultural Revolution* <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/sixties-britain/>> [28 Aug. 16].

⁵⁹⁰ Burnett, p. 90.

controlling a herd'. A married life is more about commitment, compromise and control over each other rather than a relationship characterised by sincerity and spontaneity in love and sex. Talking of marriage in a way as if it is no more a part of the 60s' life, the speaker calls it a shameful experience that (because of its hypocrisy and dishonesty), starting usually at the age of sixteen, would spread its bad influence not only over the entire life-span of the couple, but make a mess of everything related. But things changed with the arrival of the decisive decade of 60s:

'Then all at once the quarrel sank:
 Everyone felt the same,⁵⁹¹
 And every life became
 A brilliant breaking of the bank,
 A quite unlosable game.'⁵⁹²

The lines seem to suggest as if the only obstacle in the way of having freedom and fun was marital life, and with sexual liberty all the issues were resolved once and for all.⁵⁹³ The alliterative b-sound in the fourth line of the stanza not only suggests a sense of excitement and spontaneity of everyone doing and feeling the same way but its enactment of a bursting sound seems to have sexual undertone as well. Unlike the business-like dealings of married life, the 60s' decade introduced a game

⁵⁹¹ 'An early draft of stanza three began: "Then all at once the quarrel sank/ Both sexes felt the same" (u/p draft, workbook 7). The reference to 'both sexes' emphasises the point . . . that the alternative lifestyle will not be exclusively male in its conception but will be indorsed . . . by men and women alike (u/p draft, workbook 7).' Cooper, p. 180.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ The poem's tone echoes Alexander Pope's satirising the contemporary cultural, social and political trends.

with no loss: one did not have to lose or sacrifice one's identity or independence anymore for having sexual relations⁵⁹⁴.⁵⁹⁵

But after going through the poem one can't help asking if the poet is serious; if he really means what the poem says. Is this the freedom he had been longing for all his life? Larkin's attitude towards sex as well as marriage – already dealt with in several of his poems like 'Reasons for Attendance' and 'Dockery and Son' respectively in the previous collections – had hardly changed: where sex for him was nothing but 'burst[ing] into fulfilment's desolate attic'⁵⁹⁶, marriage was 'dilution' or losing one's identity rather than addition.⁵⁹⁷ But Larkin's opinion of marriage was personal, he never presented it as a universal truth; his 'Dockery and Son' declares it as a matter of one's own choice and satisfaction. In fact, what he disliked was mythologizing of things that leads to nothing but an illusory and disappointing situation.⁵⁹⁸ Despite his being an agnostic or a confirmed bachelor, he did not deny the significance of church or marriage as a tradition giving a proper structure and strength to the English society in past; Larkin never wanted that structure gone⁵⁹⁹. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that like the rest of the poem, the way marriage has been described unfavourably here is too exaggerated to be true; it must have been intended to create a humorously ironic effect for targeting the boom of sexual liberation.⁶⁰⁰ Similarly, the poem's title as well as the speaker's self-mocking in the first and last stanzas also

⁵⁹⁴ See Larkin's 'Maiden Name' and 'Self's the Man'.

⁵⁹⁵ See Cooper, p. 179.

⁵⁹⁶ Larkin, 'Deceptions', Burnett, p. 41.

⁵⁹⁷ See Larkin's 'Dockery and Son', 'Maiden Name' and 'Self's the Man'.

⁵⁹⁸ '[In] Larkin systems are resented ... for their inhibitive ... bullying nature ... One thinks immediately of the "hectoring" Bible in "Church Going", or the "bonds and gestures" in "High Windows", the oppressive presence of the priest.' Cooper, p. 170.

⁵⁹⁹ See 'MCMXIV', Burnett, p. 60-61.

⁶⁰⁰ S. Regan, *Philip Larkin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 129.

contribute to the ironical implications of the boosting way the changes and their consequences – the pleasures of sexual freedom – have been claimed.⁶⁰¹

The poem seems to suggest, ironically, as if the world had finally succeeded in finding a solution to man's miseries; the direly needed poultice for the war-inflicted wounds and the consequent social as well as political damages finally came in the form of sexual liberty leading to 'Everyone [feeling] the same' way (myth-making has been targeted once again⁶⁰²). Certainly, this was not the freedom Larkin longed for all along; what he wanted was more than the individual, social and political freedom: it was something deeper and philosophical, related to man's role in his destiny, freedom of choice, birth and death – the questions recurring in Larkin's work from the very beginning.⁶⁰³

This is confirmed further in the highly serious tone of 'High Windows', the title poem of the collection. The reader's first impression of the speaker as being envious of the kids enjoying sex freely, without any fear of pregnancy, soon gets checked:

' . . . I wonder if
 Anyone looked at me, forty years back,
 And thought, That'll be the life;
 No God any more, or sweating in the dark

⁶⁰¹ 'The Latin title of the poem (mimicking John Dryden's poetic tribute to 1666) sets up expectations which are undercut by the burlesque opening stanza.' Ibid., p. 130.

⁶⁰² Booth, 2014, p. 309.

⁶⁰³ The question is an integral part of both Larkin's prose fictions and poetry.

About hell and that, or having to hide
 What you think of the priest. He
 And his lot will all go down the long slide
 Like free bloody birds . . .'⁶⁰⁴

Besides thematic significance, here is something autobiographical as well. Thinking of old days, the speaker wonders if the old generation of his youthful days, seeing him as a fearlessly godless youth, felt the same way about him as he as an old man is feeling now while seeing the 'couple of kid' having sex fun. The question, rendering the situation dubious, engages the poet once more in his oft-discussed issue of perception, illusion and truth. If his religion-free as well as God-free state – probably arousing the envy of many at the time – was nothing like freedom as far as his personal experience was concerned, his 'guess' about the kids being in 'paradise' may likewise be no more than a perception, and consequently another illusion.⁶⁰⁵ So, what the truth is: how and where freedom can be found in its true sense.⁶⁰⁶ ⁶⁰⁷ The question finds its place in the last lines:

'And immediately
 Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
 The sun-comprehending glass,

⁶⁰⁴ Larkin, 'High Windows', Burnett, p. 80.

⁶⁰⁵ 'In "High Windows" the "oppressions" are those of sexual desire and religious belief, both of which tyrannise human existence.' Cooper, p. 170.

⁶⁰⁶ See Regan, 1992, p. 132.

⁶⁰⁷ Cooper, p.170-71.

And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
 Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.'⁶⁰⁸⁶⁰⁹

As usual, the response he finds in return is silence of the 'endless' 'deep blue air' leading to 'nothing' and 'nowhere'.⁶¹⁰ ⁶¹¹It is obviously a repetition of the concluding lines in 'Here'⁶¹² but with a difference of the setting shifted from the open shore to the indoor confinement where things can be seen from behind the glass panes of the high windows⁶¹³. What is it that takes the speaker from the openness of 'Here' behind the 'The High Windows'? It is essential to discuss a few more things before coming back to this question.

The two poems focus apparently on the loveless, mechanical and non-serious nature of relationship as clearly suggested through using the phrases and words like 'sexual intercourse', 'bargain', 'fuck' and the twice use of 'going down the long slide'. The last phrase seems to suggest how commercial interests in the age of affluence have brought the concept of love down to the level of kids' sport played simply for fun and refreshment.⁶¹⁴ For Larkin, as can be seen not only here but from other

⁶⁰⁸ The last stanza of 'High Windows' is a good example of Larkin's '[contriving] a sublime emotional elevation out of negatives'. Regan, 1922, p. 16.

⁶⁰⁹ In some of the earlier drafts of the poem '[Larkin] wrote as an alternative to the final words: "and fucking piss".' Booth, 2014, p. 307.

⁶¹⁰ 'Larkin's poem, like Mallarmé's 'Les Fenêtres' ('The Windows'), sees the sky as imprinted with human longings for fulfilment.' Regan, 1992, p. 54.

⁶¹¹ 'From a poststructuralist perspective, the writer's quest for transcendence or 'ultimate meaning' is always impeded by the arbitrariness of language, by the unstable relationship between *signifier* (the word) and what is *signified* (the meaning).' Ibid. pp. 131-32.

⁶¹² Ibid. p. 131.

⁶¹³ Cooper, p. 173.

⁶¹⁴ Where equating 'love' with commerce in poem XVI (*The North Ship*) is mostly under the gloomy and frustrating effect of the war, in the current situation it seems more because of the sickening material concerns. However, it is mostly the sexual aspect of love which for Larkin was one of the big illusions of life.

relevant poems in the previous volumes, what matters is not marital bond or sex but their essence, the element of love.⁶¹⁵ As can be seen in the above-quoted lines, the issue leads the speaker into something even deeper: the purpose of life, the ultimate reality.

The recurring question about ultimate reality originating basically from a sense of unfulfillment covers what Larkin experienced and felt as a somewhat isolated child trapped in a tense situation with his grumpy parents, as a teenager as well as youth surrounded by the horrors of war years, as a mature adult in the age of austerity, and finally as one feeling frustrated with his growing age and nearing death in scenario of the developing commercialism, diminishing values and the rising youth-culture.⁶¹⁶ But this sense of dissatisfaction, caused apparently by personal, social and political issues, was deeply rooted in something permanently underlying all of them: man's helplessness regarding his birth, freedom of choice, impermanence, old age and death⁶¹⁷; freedom has no sense in a situation like this.⁶¹⁸

It is actually feelings like these that work behind the angry tone of 'This Be the Verse'⁶¹⁹. The bitterness of initially accusing parents for transferring their faults to their kids gets a bit defused but broad and thought-provoking when they themselves are shown as victimised the same way by 'soppy-stern'⁶²⁰ 'fools in old-style hats and coats' once: the origin of the

⁶¹⁵ See Larkin's 'Arundel Tomb' and 'Faith Healing'.

⁶¹⁶ A. Motion, *Philip Larkin: a writer's life* (London: Faber, 1993).

⁶¹⁷ See Larkin's 'Old Fools' and 'The Buildings'.

⁶¹⁸ See John Kemp's situation in 'Jill', also 'Old Fools', 'Aubade' and 'Buildings' by Larkin.

⁶¹⁹ 'The title refers to Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Requiem' ('This be the Verse you grave for me'), published in *A Child's Garden of Verses*, 1885. The reference is, however, highly ironic, and this is one of Larkin's most original works . . . his most pungently comic poem.' Booth, 2014, p. 365.

⁶²⁰ The poem also 'highlights the deceitful nature of parenting. Behind the child-deceiving "soppy-stern" persona are the adult realities of married life – passion and conflict – which the phrase "at one another's

fault is traced back to grand-parents, great grand-parents and so on where none has been shown as directly responsible.⁶²¹ Where the problem actually starts then, and where does its cause lie? The poet, as usual, does not enter the religious or philosophical depths of the issue as he neither believes in such stuff nor considers it of any use. However, he comes to an apparently very simple but curious conclusion and, perhaps, solution of how to stop this 'fucking' process:

'Man hands on misery to man.

It deepens like a coastal shelf.⁶²²

Get out as early as you can,

And don't have any kids yourself.'⁶²³

The lines, obviously, imply that the fault lies with our very birth.⁶²⁴ Here, at least, is something where parents can be held as directly responsible in biological sense: it is actually the event of birth that gives birth to all the issues one has to face till the end. Interestingly enough, one cannot exclude the possibility of the genetically inherited problems⁶²⁵ from the list of the numerous existential, cultural, social and political issues

throats" so effectively conveys. The implication is that family life is founded on duplicitous principles.' Cooper, p. 175.

⁶²¹ See Booth, 2014, p. 365.

⁶²² 'The image of misery deepening 'like a coastal shelf' is in keeping with the poem's flagrant renunciation of the biological process...' Regan, 1992, p. 130.

⁶²³ Larkin, 'This be the Verse', Burnett, p. 88.

⁶²⁴ 'The fine pun of the opening phrase suggests . . . how being conceived is equated with ruination. In colloquial terms we are all "fucked up" when we inherit the previous generation's faults.' Cooper, p. 175.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

affecting one physically as well as psychologically.⁶²⁶ Hence, it has been clearly suggested that the biological process of reproduction is nothing but a continuation of man's miseries leading to death; though there is no way of escape, it can be stopped by not having any kids (A discontinuation of life itself, meaning 'no life, no death'!).

It is interesting to see, as far as Larkin himself is concerned, he stopped it in his personal capacity through remaining unmarried and having no kids (Though he was not sure if he was on the right)⁶²⁷; he did what he said. He might, at least, have been satisfied for not being a partaker or accomplice in the crime of extending and aggravating this miserable process any further, but he himself was helpless as far as his own miseries – something faced generally by human beings – were concerned: like everyone else, he could not undo the faults that happened in past and their influence on his personality and life. He could not, for instance, help the situation he was born in, the parents he lived with, the way he was brought up, and finally the inevitable old age and the fast approaching death. Where was the choice? Questions like these psychologically made him a restless, inquisitive, solitary soul wandering around, visiting empty churches⁶²⁸, peeping through the windows of youth-clubs⁶²⁹, observing life from the windows of moving trains⁶³⁰, searching the horizons from the sea shores⁶³¹ and, in the end, wondering at the blue emptiness from behind the high window.

⁶²⁶ Cf. John Kemp, *Jill's* protagonist.

⁶²⁷ See Larkin's 'Dockery and Son' (*The Whitsun Weddings*).

⁶²⁸ Larkin, 'Church Going', Burnett, pp. 35-36

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 'Reasons for Attendance', p. 30

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 'The Whitsun Weddings', pp. 56-58

⁶³¹ Ibid. 'Here', p.

Where windows in the previous poems signified, besides other things, viewing life from an objective position, in the present case it is more about old Larkin's growing sense of further alienation from a world led by youngsters with new tastes and new ideas devoid of the typical Englishness so dear to him.⁶³²

With a wide range of past perspective and experience, and – in the wake of growing age as well as declining health condition ('... the strength and pain/Of being young; that it can't come again, /But is for others undiminished somewhere)⁶³³ ⁶³⁴– with little hope of having what he had been longing and looking for, he seems being haunted by memories of his past on the one hand, and fear of getting old and nearing death on the other. Consequently, the increasing sense of alienation, isolation and past memories imprint his work with an image of Larkin waiting and looking from behind the window of a high close attic ('High Windows') or a hospital ('The Buildings') rather than that of a moving train amongst the humdrum of life as seen in 'The Whitsun Weddings'. Unlike the crazy race outside, life for Larkin seems to have come to a stand-still before total 'extinction'.

But recollecting past is done not simply because of growing old, it seems more a stimulation by contemporary cultural, social and political changes: the prevailing commercial trends developing into a race for material pursuits, the growing selfish attitudes, and the consequent isolation and chaos in the contemporary society must have sparked Larkin's nostalgia for a life bound by a sense of community, neighbourhood, mutual care,

⁶³² See Regan, 1992, p. 129.

⁶³³ Larkin, 'Sad Steps', Burnett, p. 89.

⁶³⁴ Booth, 2014, pp. 307-8.

respect and love. Besides the simple innocent joys of the old days – contrary to his oft-mentioned childhood boredom – it is the spirit of mutuality such as sympathy, support, sharing and togetherness that has been vividly depicted in poems like ‘To the Sea’⁶³⁵:

‘To lie, eat, sleep in hearing of the surf
 (Ears to transistors, that sound tame enough
 Under the sky), or gently up and down
 Lead the uncertain children, frilled in white
 And grasping at enormous air, or wheel
 The rigid old along for them to feel
 A final summer, plainly still occurs
 As half an annual pleasure, half a rite . . .’⁶³⁶

Larkin knows how significant traditions and rituals are for maintaining the spirit of a community based life in English society (or any society). The sight of people ranging from children to aged ones sharing and feeling the same way while playing on the shore presents a pretty picture of a close-knit society. It is things like these – of which Larkin and his parents also had been a part once; in fact, it was one such occasion on which his parents were tied into matrimonial bond⁶³⁷ – which Larkin adores, and

⁶³⁵ James Booth, in his book (*Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p.140), considers the poem as one of Larkin’s great extended elegies with a tone which is ‘weary and a touch pious’.

⁶³⁶ ‘To The Sea’, Burnett, p. 75.

⁶³⁷ Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life* (London: Faber, 1993).

fears lest they get wiped out with the fast flowing freshets of change witnessed by the 60s' decade.⁶³⁸

The same spirit runs through 'Show Saturday' where the word 'show' – being of focal significance – has been put at the head through syntactically reversing the sequence of the title phrase⁶³⁹. The poet minutely describes numerous activities at a summer festival in an unprecedentedly loving manner. The poem is an asset, documenting and preserving the life of village folks in their moments of emotional as well as physical plenitude: their ways of life have been traced from the arena of contests, race courses and stalls at dawn to the privacy of their 'local lives' in the stone-streets at dusk, regenerating with seasonal changes every passing year. The poet's wish for such gatherings of social as well as cultural significance to remain for ever affirms his attachment to rituals and traditions once more:

'Let it stay hidden there like strength, below
Sale-bills and swindling; something people do,
Not noticing how time's rolling smithy-smoke
Shadows much greater gestures; something they share
That breaks ancestrally each year into

⁶³⁸ While working at Oxford on his anthology, Larkin presented 'Poem about Oxford' 'to Monica at Christmas in 1970. Movingly, he inserted the draft in the manuscript of his Brunette Coleman novella of three decades earlier, *Michaelmas Term at St Bride's*, which he must have reread at this time. As in 'To the Sea' Larkin was returning nostalgically to his earlier life'. Booth, p. 364.

⁶³⁹ Regan, 1992.

Regenerate union. Let it always be there.’⁶⁴⁰

Larkin’s love for traditions, rituals – of which bringing words like ‘strength’, ‘greater gestures’, ‘share’, ancestrally, ‘regenerate’ and ‘union’ together in the above lines is more than a sufficient proof – or anything contributing to the cause of a community-based life as well as his growing consciousness of being old and nearing death kept him out of tune with the fast blowing wind of changes that characterised the decade; freedom for him did not mean breaking the communal harmony of life into a chaotic situation. Perhaps, he longed for a social and political harmony where individual freedom and communal values are not a threat to each other; and that is possible only through living within the limits of rationality and common-sense. Besides, for Larkin – thinking existentially – freedom, in the sense of having no control over one’s birth, death or fulfilment of desires, was just meaningless and illusory. The sense of unfulfillment caused by such a situation gets more intensified when he cannot see any purpose of life. Therefore, a soul already feeling alienated from the humdrum of life was distanced further from it in the final years of his life. In the end, when the journey ‘down cemetery road’ was nearing its end, the ‘ships’, ‘trains’ and church⁶⁴¹ were replaced by ‘Ambulances’ and ‘Buildings’, and the outdoor setting transformed into a confined existence behind the ‘High Windows’ of an attic, the inside of a lighthouse tower, or the interior of a hospital where ‘past [the] doors are rooms, and rooms past those, /And more rooms yet, each one further off/And harder

⁶⁴⁰ Larkin, ‘To the Sea’, Burnett, p. 75.

⁶⁴¹ The decaying church of ‘Church Going’ (*The Less Deceived*) turns into the ‘locked church’ of ‘The Buildings’ (*High Windows*).

to return from'⁶⁴² ⁶⁴³. In the end, alienation took its extreme form – extinction, leaving for nothing, nowhere:

'The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.'⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴² 'The Buildings', Burnett, pp. 84-86.

⁶⁴³ The endless view of rooms leading to rooms imply a resemblance with the sight of graves in a graveyard, something recalling the graves in 'Church Going'.

⁶⁴⁴ 'Aubade', Burnett, pp. 115-116.

Chapter 6

The Quest for Meaning: From Proximate to Ultimate

[Conclusion]

Design

'I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,
 On a white heal-all, holding up a moth
 Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth--
 Assorted characters of death and blight
 Mixed ready to begin the morning right,
 Like the ingredients of a witches' broth--
 A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,
 And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,
 The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?
 What brought the kindred spider to that height,
 Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
 What but design of darkness to appall? –
 If design govern in a thing so small.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴⁵ 'Design' by Robert Frost

Beginning with a sense of unfulfillment, Larkin's story initiates a series of unfulfillment leading to unfulfillment that ends with dismissing the idea of having fulfilment in real sense. The search for meaning starting with an imaginative voyage towards the romantically mysterious and less trodden north enters into a realistic phase of wandering through churches, clubs, pubs and sea-shores – places popularly considered as significant regarding fulfilment and meaning – and concludes in 'The Building' that is 'harder to return from'⁶⁴⁶. The last place (particularly its naming word used deliberately to convey an impersonal and indifferent sense), lacking the apparently warm and welcoming attitude of the previous places, suggests a cold, still and lifeless quality that befits the image of death. The stimulus behind all this seems the accumulative effect of 'childhood boredom', the misery of war-years, the immediate post-war austerity, the fast diminishing English values and the fear of growing old and dying⁶⁴⁷:

'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.'⁶⁴⁸

The lack of fulfilment, consequently, leads Larkin to a questioning mode of existential significance, setting his direction through 'proximate' issues

⁶⁴⁶ See Burnett, pp. 84-86

⁶⁴⁷ The issues have already been discussed in detail in the previous chapters.

⁶⁴⁸ The lines taken from 'Dockery and Son' (Burnett, pp. 65-67) briefly as well as beautifully summarise life from Larkin's perspective: the boredom of childhood followed by a feeling of fear with the growing knowledge soon turns into the unpleasant facts of old age and death.

towards 'ultimate'. It is, actually, the difference between the 'proximate' interests of the post-war generation, specially youth, and the 'ultimate' concerns of the writer that determine the attitude of his work towards the rapidly developing secular trends.

The urge for fulfilment and meaning, the main concern of almost all the protagonists and speakers in Larkin, is actually the urge for freedom; though associated with human destiny generally, its intensity particularly reflects the disquiet about the contemporary age of turbulence. The life-loss and destruction, the collapsed Victorian vision, the declining British Empire⁶⁴⁹,⁶⁵⁰, the immediate post-war austerity, the war-time broken promises of a welfare state and the overall disintegration in cultural, social and political spheres,⁶⁵¹ stirring Larkin's consciousness of life's transience and deficiency in general, take the issue to a level where one starts looking around for the meaning of life itself.

The distance from 'proximate' to 'ultimate' is covered through a deep, objective and analytical observation of various cultural, social and political trends and institutions popularly supposed as fulfilling⁶⁵². Where Larkin finds them no more than simply 'a style/ Our lives bring with them: habit for a while/ Suddenly they harden into all we've got'⁶⁵³ his quest for the ultimate, because of his rationally developed mentality, remains unresolved till the end. Consequently, life for Larkin becomes a huge illusion, and the urge for fulfilment or freedom, like a bait, makes one run after its constituent illusions till death overcomes.

⁶⁴⁹ Stephen Cooper, *Philip Larkin: subversive writer* (Brighton England; Portland, Or: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), PP. 133-134.

⁶⁵⁰ See 'Homage to the Government' Archie Burnett, *The complete poems of Philip Larkin* (London: Faber, 2012), p. 87].

⁶⁵¹ See 'MCMXIV' (Burnett, pp. 82-83)

⁶⁵² See 'An Arundel Tomb' (Burnett, pp. 71-72)

⁶⁵³ P. Larkin, 'Dockery and Son', Burnett, pp. 65-67.

Pricking all its component bubbles – or, in other words, the series of illusions or myths filling the gap between life's beginning and end – before the huge myth of life itself collapses is, indeed, a hard and painful way of living. However, unlike most of us preferring to close eyes to the horrible conclusion, Larkin refuses to live in fools' paradise.⁶⁵⁴ To avoid shocking conclusions, it is reasonable to be ready for every new day as another desert to cross (. . . What lips said/Starset and cockcrow call the dispossessed/On to the next desert . . .?)⁶⁵⁵. For Larkin – knowing the deceiving nature of existence as inescapable – it is a way of getting, at least, 'less deceived'.

But before adopting the strategy of getting 'less deceived', Larkin seems trapped in the cold, stormy and misty world – reflective, no doubt, of the war situation, the confusion often associated with 'coming-of-age' and the uncertainty of yet to find one's true artistic voice – of *The North Ship*. The voyage to the north – besides ensuring peace in the world through finding an alternative to the already existing system in the limited perspective of cultural, social and political context⁶⁵⁶ – signifies an inner urge for the 'ultimate' meaning to resolve the issues of humanity once and for all.

These issues are delineated through the characters of John Kemp and Katherine, the protagonists of *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947) respectively. Though the questions about human destiny (sufferings, old age and death) and free will are of universal significance, their timeless nature should not eclipse our view of the complainant (the writer)

⁶⁵⁴ The idea has been elucidated through Katherine's views on life (*A Girl in Winter*) who can often be seen as the writer's mouth piece.

⁶⁵⁵ P. Larkin, 'XXII', Burnett, p. 17.

⁶⁵⁶ Stephen Cooper, *Philip Larkin: Subversive Writer* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), pp. 102-106

belonging to a highly chaotic time in British – or, probably, human – history.⁶⁵⁷ ⁶⁵⁸ These questions of humanistic concern lie at the very core of Larkin's secular and democratic inclinations. With this approach towards life, Larkin enters the world of *The Less Deceived*.

Whether it is the return of 'The North Ship' or its being trapped or lost in the distant, foggy 'somewhere', the next volume of poetry – where Thomas Hardy's poetic collection encouraged Larkin to use his own genuine voice for the known and familiar⁶⁵⁹ – presents life clearly, maturely and realistically. The poems are a complete negation of life having any utopian possibilities; to have a sense of fulfilment or freedom is contradictory to the very nature of life that is based on perceptions, relativity and impermanence. It is particularly here that Larkin starts sifting the things supposed as essential as well as fulfilling from their mythical, sentimental and hypocritical features, bringing them under the limelight of an objective and realistic view. The poems in *The Less Deceived* demonstrate what leads us into the world of myths and deceptions is in fact the issue of perspective⁶⁶⁰, perception-based knowledge⁶⁶¹ and our obsession with wishful thoughts⁶⁶².⁶⁶³

Larkin's rejection of myths or anything utopian, therefore, is actually to see life in real sense along with its limitations. More importantly, the phenomenon of rejecting the mythical and sentimental is based on a rational approach towards life; in fact, this is what accounts for Larkin's

⁶⁵⁷ Stephen Regan, *Philip Larkin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992).

⁶⁵⁸ See P. R. King, *Nine contemporary poets: a critical introduction* (London: Methuen, 1979).

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ The issue of perspective has been particularly dealt with in 'Next Please' (Larkin in Burnett, p. 31) that presents an original and effective version of the old saying 'all that glitters is not gold'.

⁶⁶¹ See Larkin's 'Going' (Burnett, p. 32) regarding the issue of perceptions.

⁶⁶² See Larkin's ideas about religion in Burnett, p. 371.

⁶⁶³ Poems like 'Poetry of Departures' (Larkin, Burnett, p. 39) and 'Wires' (Larkin, Burnett, p.35) vividly illustrate the maxim 'grass is always greener on the other side of the fence'.

refusing the incomprehensible divine aspect of religion. But, at the same time, he questions the authenticity of life's secular and liberal aspects as well. Sex – having, perhaps, as significant a role in life as faith – for Larkin is nothing but a way to 'fulfilment's desolate attic'⁶⁶⁴. Rather, faith and sex – commonly supposed as fulfilling or meaningful – have been presented in his work as oppressors, the main sources of humanity's sufferings⁶⁶⁵.

Consequently, what Larkin has to go for is realistic and rational – divested of its mythical, romantic and sentimental associations – but aesthetic. His going for the communal and artistic rather than the divine and sexual respectively demonstrates his attitude towards life as definitely that of a person who looks at life with a 'hunger for seriousness'. However, preferring 'the rough-tongued bell' rather than chasing the chiming and glittering one is not a choice but a way he has to adopt to avoid the shock of being 'more deceived'. Hence, the soberly aesthetic pursuits like those of poetry, music (jazz)⁶⁶⁶, nature,⁶⁶⁷ love⁶⁶⁸ and communal values serve, perhaps, to compensate to some extent for life's deficiencies acutely felt by a sensitive soul suffering from 'the agony of disbelief'.

As can be seen, Larkin avoids extremities in any form: if the divine aspect of religion is incomprehensible, the material and commercial is distasteful

⁶⁶⁴ In 'Deceptions' (Burnett, p. 41), the urge for sexual indulgence has been described as an urge for freedom and fulfilment that results in disappointment.

⁶⁶⁵ The idea has been taken from Stephen Regan (1992) while discussing P. Larkin's 'High Windows'.

⁶⁶⁶ Larkin's appreciation for music, specially jazz in its classic form, can be seen in his poems such as 'For Sidney Bechet', 'Reference Back' and 'Love Songs in Age'. It is important to see that like love in 'An Arundel Tomb', he does not ignore checking its illusory aspect while referring to its waking 'in all ears appropriate falsehood' (Burnett, p. 54) in 'For Sidney Bechet'.

⁶⁶⁷ P. Larkin's love for landscapes and sea scapes is a quite known feature of his work. In poems like 'Ugly Sister' (a poem of autobiographical significance) and 'Going Going' (a poem dealing with environmental issue) his appreciation of the healthy and healing effects of nature have been particularly focused.

⁶⁶⁸ In 'An Arundel Tomb' and 'Faith Healing' love has been presented as an essential element. The former, despite its sceptic as well as ironical tone, cannot help holding it as a supreme form of emotion more lasting than life itself. The latter suggests love as a solution to the problems of humanity.

to him no less; if religion to him seems a sum of wishful thoughts, material pursuits are just a 'sordid boon' robbing a society of its humanistic and aesthetic values.⁶⁶⁹ Art, nature, love and communal aspects of life – occupying a medial position – even if subject to transience like the rest of the things, contribute towards making life beautiful and bearable. Despite having an acute consciousness about the temporal, spatial and rational limits, Larkin prefers a life marked by love, mutual respect and freedom.

But there is a huge difference between 'bearable' and 'fulfilling'. In the world of *High Windows*, where the somewhat cynical tone is determined mainly by an old soul with ill health and growing frustration of nearing death, Larkin dismisses once and for all the idea of having fulfilment and freedom – something he craved for all his life – in real sense. He satirises the young generation of the 'swinging sixties' who, in their craze for fulfilment and freedom, think of having finally found it in sexual liberty and material plenitude of the decade⁶⁷⁰ – things that Larkin has already rejected as illusory and mythical.

Freedom for Larkin is not simply in the sense of being free to have sex, having more to spend on material and leisurely lifestyle, or disowning and challenging the established ways of life⁶⁷¹; it is more a matter of fulfilment that he does not seem to have till the end. With old age and death that

⁶⁶⁹ Hostility towards growing industrialisation as well as consumerism is one of the recurring topics in Philip Larkin. 'Here' and 'Going Going' particularly deal with the issues. Where the former demonstrates it in the speaker's escape from 'rich industrial shadows' to 'isolate villages' where 'luminously-peopled air ascends', the latter does it through lamenting over the drastic effects of the expanding industrial growth on the natural beauty of English countryside.

⁶⁷⁰ The humorously satirical treatment of the subject in 'Annus Mirabilis' is noteworthy (Larkin, Burnett, p. 90)

⁶⁷¹ Larkin's sceptic attitude in this respect can also be seen in 'High Windows' while wondering if he was envied as a religion-free youth as he himself felt nothing like worth-envy (Burnett, p. 80)

keep changing from a state of merely being obsessive to possessive⁶⁷² – or from a feeling of fear to fact – Larkin's inclination towards existential issues goes on intensifying.⁶⁷³ But the inability to get any clue – implied often by the silent emptiness of the infinite blue in Larkin – in this respect increases his sense of helplessness; the strategy of getting 'less deceived' meant to save him from getting shocked cannot save him from becoming extinct⁶⁷⁴.

The intense sense of having no choice in one's coming to, living in or going from this world manifests itself in the bitterly harsh and cynical tone in many of the poems in *High Windows*. While looking at the issue in the 'proximate' sense, his primary impulsive response of anger against his parents in 'This be the Verse' soon gets diffused after realising that the transferring of 'faults' into children is not simply their doing as 'they [themselves] were fucked up in their turn' by their parents and so on⁶⁷⁵. However, the fact remains that biologically they have been the reason of his existence; perhaps, they could stop it through having no kids. With no life, there would have been no sufferings, no old age and no death; the curious idea has been generalised and presented as a solution to stop man's miseries:

⁶⁷² The vividly depicted fear in the poems of previous volumes looms large in the form of old age and death – the very sources of fear – in poems like 'The Old Fools' (Burnett, pp. 81-82), 'Ambulances' (pp. 63-64) 'The Buildings' (pp. 84-86) and 'Aubade' (pp. 115-116)

⁶⁷³ In poems like 'Here' (Burnett, p. 49) and 'High Windows' (p. 80), the speakers, feeling helpless to satisfy their questioning mood, start looking up where there is nothing visible but the infinite blue blankness.

⁶⁷⁴ See how the following lines from Larkin's 'Aubade' describe the inevitable 'just on the edge of vision' (Burnett, pp. 115-116)

The lines are relevant to reference no. 681 as well.

⁶⁷⁵ Larkin's 'This be the verse' illustrate also John Kemp's anger at his parents in *Jill* (Burnett, p. 88)

‘Man hands on misery to man.
 It deepens like a coastal shelf.
 Get out as early as you can,
 And don't have any kids yourself.’⁶⁷⁶

Of course, Larkin stopped it in his own capacity through having no kids himself; in a way, he saved his kids from the misery of existence through having no kids. Could we say that his share to the deepening ‘coastal shelf’ of man’s misery is zero in this respect? In fact, he did what he said or believed.

What can be expected of one with such an attitude towards life? However, his work seems to suggest if the misery of life cannot be stopped, it may at least be dealt with appropriately. A possible way to do so is to remain within the spheres of rationality, democracy, tolerance, mutual respect and love. It is this humanistic approach that keeps him away from cultural, social and political dogmas and myths: he can be labelled as anything except as a believer, a non-believer, an atheist, a conservative and a liberal. Being anyone of them definitely tempers the way to see the reality or find the truth. Being none of them keeps the door open for all possibilities; this is what anyone with truly humanistic concerns would do.

Perhaps, it would not be wrong to call him a lover and a mystic. Where, as a lover he upholds the principle of love above everything,⁶⁷⁷ as a mystic he is always in search of truth. In fact, the longing for truth that causes the shifting of his questioning mode from ‘proximate’ to ‘ultimate’ is also due

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ See ‘An Arundel Tomb’, ‘Faith Healing’, ‘Submission is the only good’ etc. where Larkin suggests love as the basis of humanity.

to his love as well as concern for a solution to the issues faced by humanity.

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