Giving a clear picture of the postwar British literature will be definitely a painstaking task against the backdrop of the divergent lines the writers of this period took up. Considering the different features of the works of different writers, it is impossible to group them in one literary movement or give them a name to represent them in the history of British literature. It is, indeed, impossible to call the period ‘postmodern’ without feeling guilty as the term is still vague to allude to a definite literary trend which is not modern. It may be postmodern or still modern in one aspect or another, but one thing we all tend to agree to is that ‘we change and we are changed’ with the passage of time. After all, the change occurs in literature too. The postwar literature is different from the pre-war modernism though relics of modernism are still quite manifest. However, one thing that is very conspicuous is that the writings of this period are marked by, if not completely, a change from the features of the writings of the modernists like Eliot, Pound, Auden, Yeats, etc. Another change in the literary habits of the people of this period is their turn of attention from poetry to novel. It is not
poetry that attracts them but novels that matter most and draw their attention. The survival of poetry seems to be in stake with this change of literary habits of the people.

However, the characteristics of modernism are quite manifest in the writings of most of the writers of this period with certain marked differences. The sense of spiritual blankness is still a major feature of the postwar British literature. The question of human existence looms large in every human head against the backdrop of the cold war, rise of communism, decolonisation in Asia and Africa, degradation of religious institutions, frequent change of governments, meaninglessness of family values and openness of sex. People frequently challenged the existence of god and life after death. Marriage became a personal event rather than a religious ceremony and pre-marital sex was no more considered illegal and irreligious. The rise of Fascism and Nazism before the war had already left indelible memories of the horror of war business to the people.

One of the most interesting outcomes of the second world war is that it gave birth to the so-called ‘cold war’—a awe-struck characteristic of man’s love for war business in the name of patriotism even after the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This has again, even after the end of the war in 1945, caused a fear psychosis to every human in the wake of the rise of nuclear arms race on the one hand and the decline of church on the other. Larkin experienced all this during his boyhood that he had to deny the sanctity of religion time and again in his poems:

The church was in decline with congregation numbers falling fast: You could no longer imagine a community cemented by faith.
However, twentieth century intellectuals who rejected religion had to confront a newly empty universe. They sense the potential futility of life: reason offered no substitute for religion.¹

The spiritual blankness and religious decline Eliot saw continued with a different shape and size. On the political front, the British empire experienced a rapid decline with India and Pakistan becoming independent in 1947 followed by other colonies in Asia and Africa which consequently made Britain a retired race horse in “At Grass.” In conjunction with all these events came the notion of welfare state when the Labour Party came to power under the leadership of Clement Atlee in 1945 immediately after the war.

However, in the 1960’s Britain achieved some glories on the cultural front—‘fashion design, pop music and culture, and the new permissive society made its capital in London, and the Beatles led British pop music to world dominance.’² These developments were parts of the identifying characteristics of Larkin’s time which also got its expression in his poems. In many of his poems, twentieth century runs into its lines and the century becomes, to his eyes, ‘the reality of everyday’ that he could not think much beyond this ‘reality.’

To ascertain this delineation of twentieth century, Lolette Kuby writes:

In tone, mood, attitude, language an phrasing, Larkin’s poems are unmistakably mid twentieth century. They could not have been at any other time. The objects of the mid twentieth century are his imagistic material—travelling salesman, television sets, plate glass doors, jet planes, industrial froth, perms and nylon gloves; and its informal speech his language—‘stuff your pension,’ ‘I detest my room/ Its specially chosen junk,’ ‘getting my nose in a book,’ ‘Faces in those days sparked/The whole shooting match off.’ The twentieth century is also his theme. Although man’s duality and the painful disjunction of the real and the ideal are Larkin’s universal
themes, true at any time in all places, the atmosphere of the lives of his personae is Now. Within that atmosphere, man’s essential dualism is specifically understood and uniquely acted out.\(^3\)

The twentieth century, Larkin saw, is a period of new developments in politics, science, arts, journalism, poetry, paintings, etc. At every turn one sees new things and in turn he is also seen new by others. Important among those which are considered ‘new’ are the decline of British empire, the theory of relativity, Freud’s psychoanalytical and dream theories, cubism in painting, the two great wars followed by cold war till the collapse of the erstwhile USSR, the fear psychosis of the people caused by the nuclear arms race, etc. Along with such new developments sprang up new and less popular writers in the forties and fifties to respond to the new developments. Among them Larkin was also a pioneer.

In the early forties, Larkin came to Oxford and got associated with people like Kingsley Amis and Bruce Montgomery who were becoming established writers by then. This association was a beginning in shaping his literary career which was later identified as the origin of the Movement:

The origins of the Movement can be traced back to Oxford in the early 1940s, when a number of key friendships were made. The first and most important of these was that between Larkin and Amis. Both were undergraduates at St. John’s College, Larkin beginning his studies in the autumn of 1940, Amis coming up two terms later. Larkin’s description of their first meeting, in the 1963 introduction to his novel, *Jill*, suggests that it was Amis’s ‘genius for imaginative mimicry’ which attracted him. . . . He recalls how Amis’s imitations could make him incapable with laughter”; and he pays further tribute to Amis’s mimicry by way of an oblique allusion in Willow Gables section of the novel, where John Kemp’s imagined sister, Jill, befriends a girl called Patsy
who could make Jill sick with laughing. She could imitate almost anybody. Together they formed an alliance against the rest of the world.4

His literary career also developed from Oxford when he first got his three poems—“A Stone Church Damaged by a Bomb,” “Mythological Introduction,” “I dream of an out-thrust arm of land”—were published in Oxford Poetry (1942-43). His Oxford years were a period of important friendship and learning. During this period, the war was on its full momentum; state economy was drastically hit causing a change of guard; his friendship with Amis was broken when Amis joined Army in 1942 though they regularly visit Oxford during the war years.

During his Oxford years he befriended Bruce Montgomery and John Wain, two other Movement writers. When Larkin met Montgomery he (Montgomery) was writing detective novels under the pseudonym, ‘Edmund Crispin’ and influenced Larkin towards the Movement sensibility:

Larkin met Bruce Montgomery, who by this time [1943-47] was already writing detective novels for Gollancz under the pseudonym ‘Edmund Crispin’ in 1943. In his introduction to Jill, he has said that from 1943-45, he saw a lot of Montgomery, and that the friendship may have been ‘a curious creative stimulus.’5

This ‘curious creative stimulus’ continued to be the centre of their literary works. Larkin, while being influenced by his contemporaries at Oxford, was also influencing them. If he ‘saw a lot of Montgomery,’ there was also a lot of Larkin in the works of Montgomery. In the preface to the novel Holy Disorders published in 1945, Montgomery admitted that Larkin made valuable suggestions. The third novel of Montgomery, The Moving Toyshop marks the height of their friendship:
This [The Moving Toyshop] is dedicated to Larkin and like Jill, which appeared in the same year, has a narrative sequence centred round the search for a beautiful girl with blue eyes.\textsuperscript{6}

This relationship developed at Oxford suggested that something was going to happen in English literature in the near future i.e. the 1950’s and that something turned out to be the Movement. Larkin topped the list of Movemanteers later in Blake Morrison’s book The Movement (1980) followed by Kingsley Amis, Donald Davie, D.J. Enright, Thom Gunn, John Wain and Elizabeth Jennings. As stated earlier, the friendship that Larkin shared with Amis at Oxford was a turning point in his literary career. This friendship was so intense that it sneaked into their works later. Both influenced each other and the influences were reflected in their works. Their first meeting at Oxford got mentioned in the 1963 edition of his first novel Jill\textsuperscript{7} in its introduction.

The friendship that he had with Amis was the strongest one he had ever had with a writer of his time. This was also ascertained by the number of letters they wrote each other. Even when Amis was called up for military service in 1942 and Larkin failed the medical test, they remained connected by means of correspondence or by regularly visiting Oxford. Later, Larkin left for Wellington, Shropshire in 1943 for his first library job which also decided his future. Though they were in touch during the war, the war later got internal dimensions and they physically experienced the horror of war. The fact was that Larkin began to write about war and its effect along with his contemporaries:

Yet the wound, O see the wound
This petrified heart has taken,
Because, created deathless,
Nothing but death remained to scatter magnificence;
And now what scaffolded mind
Can rebuild experience
As coral is set budding under seas,
Though none, O none sees what patterns it is making? (CP 269)

However, to a great extent, apart from its devastating effect, the war provided a
stimulus for national reconstruction not only in politics but also in culture.
Before the war, British culture was divided into two conceivably distinct types:
‘the culture of the masses based largely on the dance hall and the cinema, and
that of the elite, rooted in the traditional high culture of painting, music, drama
and literature.’ However, with the political change in the British national life
after the war and the notion of Labour’s welfare state, Britain was heading
towards a ‘common culture.’ This cultural change came into being in association
with the change in the socio-political structure.

The social and political milieu in which Larkin conceived his poems is
an interesting blend of ‘new’ developments in all spheres of life that:

. . . around it [twentieth century] are clustered political, intellectual, scientific, and artistic events which spawned the modern world:
the beginning of the end of British colonial power, the growing
strength of Bolshevism, the theory of relativity, the beginning of widespread practical effects of Freud’s psycho-analytical and
dream theories, the ‘new’ poetry, cubism and abstractionism in art,
cacophony in classical music, the ‘birth of the blues’ in popular
music, and ‘the war to end wars.’ It brings to an end an age of
innocence.

With all this, the period is marked by spiritual barrenness, rise of individual
freedom, advancement of science and technology, cultural hybridization,
etc.— all of which hit the human psyche drastically and gave birth to the difficult
poetry of the age. There has been a long and persistent invasion of material
development which has inflicted the spiritual health of man causing a severe metaphysical ‘hangover’ throughout the century. This mechanisation of human existence has already caused Eliot’s *The Waste Land* earlier in the century where people like Prufrock fails to find spiritual perfection. The twentieth century man is always haunted by the fear of death while still alive. The imbalance of spiritual and physical existence in man has driven himself to desolate psychological spaces and institutions like family, marriage, church etc. have got destroyed. The fact is that one is his own master. The erosion of social and spiritual institutions has burdened man so much that he has become a victim of his own material achievements. This phenomenon persists for so long that man’s spiritual failure has been the prime concern of many writers from Victorian Age to the later half of twentieth century. The fact that poetry has been described as ‘the criticism of life’ by a Victorian poet is still a strong basis to search the roots of man’s unbearable anxiety and spiritual confusion in twentieth century. The twentieth century man is the heir of what his predecessors in the Victorian Age left to him. This age is an age of ‘hard times’ because moral degradation, unemployment, industrialization and prostitution sprout in this age reaching its peak during the 1950’s. For example the mechanisation of life gets manifest in one of Larkin’s less popular poems:

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Living toys are something novel,
But it soon wears off somehow.
Fetch the shoebox, fetch the shovel —
*Mam, we’re playing funerals now.* (CP 130)
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If one reads the above lines in conjunction with the mechanical life described earlier, he or she will be definitely reminded of what Virginia Woolf once said: ‘On or about December 1910 human nature changed.”
To make the age more complicated, as mentioned earlier, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein come with the psychoanalytical theory and the theory of relativity respectively redefining man’s physical presence in space and time. This scientific redefinitions of man’s existence are interwoven by the two world wars and the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. The widespread acceptance of Marx’s ‘theory of class struggle’ and ‘the economic interpretation of history’ has redefined man as the outcome of the interaction of social and economic forces. The rise of the then USSR and USA as two superpowers after the war has also caused the so-called cold war dividing the world into two blocs each led by the two states. This is also a defining feature of the postwar literature. Larkin’s fear of death is quite evident against the backdrop of such circumstances: ‘In mill towns on dark mornings/Life is slow dying’ (CP 138).

A thorough examination of some of the poems of Larkin shows the recurrent theme of the impact of war which has brought in the emptiness of human existence. It is not, of course, a postwar phenomenon only because people already started questioning the authenticity in religion in the very beginning of the twentieth century. Change of attitude from Victorian submissions to authority to a more rational probing and questioning attitude in the first half of the twentieth century is a major shift in human nature that will find its place in the writings of Philip Larkin and his contemporaries. Poems such as “Church Going,” “The Whitsun Weddings,” “Aubade,” “Water,” etc. are filled with the delineation of the religious failure of his age.

Socio-political aspect of Britain is another issue that should be kept in mind while reading Larkin’s poems. The Labour government that came to power under the leadership of Clement Atlee in 1945 is a major political shift which
reflects the deep economic crisis in postwar Britain. With the notion of ‘welfare state’ Atlee’s government adopted many new policies in the name of social protection for people. Against endless criticism that heavy public spending would cause inflation thereby endangering economic recovery from the wartime weakness, the Labour government continued to take many welfare measures for people:

The railways, coal, gas, electricity, road transport and steel industries were taken into public ownership. Rationing, started during the war years (1939-45), continued on some food items and wages were frozen between 1948 and 1950. Industry was brought under strict governmental control. The powers of the house of Lords were reduced, and the last tokens of pre-1932 franchise privileges, conferring many votes upon a few, were repeated. These measures were intended to encourage the reconstruction of industry which had been starved of investment from 1939 to 1945 and which had suffered damage during the nightly raids by the German air force in the war years. However, for obvious economic reasons—an unprecedented amount of public expenditure causing devaluation—the welfare state declined, and the government had to fall back on the mode of reconstructing the socio-economic structure. As the people were disillusioned, the government was caught in a political dilemma between horrifying the welfare state and enhancing the process of reconstructing the national economy.12

Now, the interesting thing about the reality highlighted above is that Larkin’s novel Jill reflects the socio-economic circumstances of his time very clearly:

Life in college was austere. Its pre-war pattern had been dispersed in some instances permanently. Everyone paid the same fees (in our case 12s. a day) and ate the same meals. Because of Ministry
of Food regulations, the town could offer little in the way of luxurious eating and drinking and college festivities such as commemoration balls, had been suspended for the duration. Because of petrol rationing nobody ran a car. Because of clothes rationing it was difficult to dress stylishly. . . .

The Movement poets, among which Larkin is one, sensed the then prevailing social circumstances and economic condition of Britain. The condition of the horses in “At Grass” and the life style of Mr. Bleaney in “Mr Bleaney” hint at these circumstances narrated above. Not only Larkin but also other Movement writers made a serious response to the postwar reconstruction experiences:

The earliest modern poets had been form breakers . . . . But thirty years had rolled by; the world had been drugged by two decades of meaningless peace and then suddenly battered nearly to death by a global war . . . .

At such a [postwar] time, when exhaustion and boredom in the foreground are balanced by guilt and fear [emphasis mine] in the background, it is natural that a poet should feel the impulse to build [emphasis Wain’s]. Writing regular and disciplined verse forms is building in a simple and obvious sense, like bricklaying. Too simple, too obvious? Perhaps. But we were all very young and were doing the best we could to make something amid the ruins.

Here, Wain’s statement is phenomenal and it can be related in terms of the social and literary perspective of the postwar Britain. The war left enough ‘ruins’ when it ended in 1945, not only in its physical sense of the word but also in terms of its psychological effects on man. Most cities in Britain including Coventry, the birthplace of Larkin, severely devastated by the bombings saw a deserted look immediately after the war causing a scary scene to the visitors. Narrating the effect of war has become a discipline for some writers. This broken state of
Britain found its manifestation in the ‘Paintings and photograph and… cinematic exploitation of bomb-sites in films such as the two early comedies made at the famous Ealing Studios, Charles Crichton’s rowdy *Hue and Cry*, (1947) and Hary Cornelius’s farce *Passport to Pimlico* (1949).’

But this heap of rubbles left by war is, on the contrary, a resourceful heap of valuables for many writers that they lucidly used it as an apt metaphor for the broken lives and the broken empire immediately after the war. Thus Andrew Sanders writes:

> This landscape of ruins [left by the war] must also be recognised as forming an integral part of the literature of the late 1940s and the early 1950s. It was a landscape which provided a metaphor for broken lives and spirits, and, in some remoter and less defined sense, for the ruin of Great Britain itself. It was also a ruinscape that could sometimes surprise its observers with joy.

What joy? The fragmented civilization that the modernists saw earlier has to be relooked at and reshaped. This work of rearrangement of the fragments of the broken lives and civilization makes the postwar writers an aberrant literary group distinctly dissociated from the world of the modernists. These postwar writers are fond of making ‘the waste land’ fertile once again by putting in order the fragments of meaning of life which got lost in the wilderness of ‘the waste land,’ and by reaping the fruit of the ruins their lives are again reassured. For the modernists, life seems ‘a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury (of the war) signifying nothing’ but for the postwar writers, it signifies an assured belongingness after all those ‘sound and fury’ of the war. They saw life in the ruins and felt the need to water it. An apt example of this change of feeling is what Rose Macaulay said in 1950 in her *The World My Wilderness*: 
Here you belong, you cannot get away, you do not wish to get away . . . you can say, you can guess, that it is you yourself, your own roots that clutch the stony rubbish, the branches of your own being that grow from it and nowhere else. 17

This is an answer to Eliot’s baffling question in *The Waste Land*:

Where are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man  
You cannot say, or guess . . . .18

When Eliot’s baffling question was answered in 1950 by Rose Macaulay it seems that the literary stage is all set to receive the new feeling and meaning the new Britain has brought in after the long struggle of war. This is, of course, as John Wain said, an age of ‘guilt’ and ‘fear’ where the poets should feel the impulse to ‘build’ amidst ruins. This sense of reconstruction and rearrangement appears in all fields including art, science, politics, economy and even religion. The fact is that the just concluded war destroyed all these fields in which life should get expressed. However, one interesting lesson we have learned is that destruction gives birth to a new construction— the national reconstruction which also shaped the individual lives. The immediate postwar period saw the rapid decline of British empire and the subsequent political instabilities marked by unemployment, frequent strikes, wave of Bolshevism, and above all the shrinking economy as portrayed in Larkin’s *Jill*.

When the Allied Force won the war in 1945, the sense of victory was overshadowed by the immensity of devastation in Britain, because ‘much of Britain was in ruins’ with most industrial cities bombed during the war. The effects of war on Larkin is another aspect that calls for a minute investigation. Larkin visited his birthplace Coventry in the summer of 1940 to search his
parents after the bomb raids of the town. Everywhere was affected—Coventry, Oxford, Canterbury, Bristol, Exeter and Portsmouth were all in ruins—and the heap of rubbles scared the visitors. Yet Larkin wrote to his friend J.B. Sutton: ‘There is a lot in the paper today about what Russia, America, Russia, England, Russia, America and Russia are going to do with Germany . . . I haven’t bothered to read.’ However the influence of the war on Larkin cannot be underestimated in the light of this letter. When Larkin wrote the letter, J.B. Sutton was in the British Army as an ambulance driver deployed in the Middle East. Larkin would have, therefore, written the letter so that it does not deter his (Sutton’s) sentiment. It is also highly incredulous to say that one who was born and lived in England during the war was not influenced by the war which got international proportion. It is also evident in some of his poems such as “At Grass,” “Church Going,” “Homage to a Government.” In another letter written during the war to the same addressee, Larkin said: ‘ . . . in the midst of life we are in Death.’ His letter to J.B. Sutton on 9 February 1945 also begins with a pessimistic tone in the very first paragraph:

... I am an artist in hostile surroundings. It is a Sunday evening and in the normal course of things devoted to literature but there is not much fire in the grate, I am goddamned cold and (most of all) there is a radio in the next room blaring out all the childish insanity that the BBC see fit to afflict our ears with.

It is now clear that the war has afflicted Larkin’s ear and one may also be reminded here that most of his Oxford friends (i.e. Amis, Wain, Sutton) were recruited in the army during the war. Under such circumstances Larkin’s readers will definitely feel it reliable to check his poetry with reference to the war though he did not actively participate in it. Again most of his poems were written
after the war or during the war except those collected in *The North Ship* and very few poems uncollected in it. What happened in the past is always in his memory and it gets manifested in his works as Wordsworth puts it as ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling recollected in tranquility.’ Larkin is no exception to it.

When the war ended in 1945 by leaving Britain in a heap of rubbles, meaning of life, religion, philosophy, family etc. underwent a drastic change. Though the war had ended, the effect of war continued to haunt everyone with the memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the concentration camps and the ‘Night of the Long Knives.’ On the political front, the general election of 1945 brought a Labour government under Clement Atlee who brought far-reaching reforms in domestic politics by encouraging public funding in all sectors—education, health industries such as coal, iron, steel, railways, etc.—with the notion of the ‘welfare state.’ It is interesting to learn that this notion of welfare state with public ownership of core industries continued for a long time until the Conservative government of Mrs. Thatcher came to power in 1979. Most of Larkin’s poems were written during this period. Examining this period Blake Morrison writes:

> What was especially significant though was that the Movement writers were assigned an identity which presented them as the ‘coming class’. They were identified with a spirit of change in post-war British society, and were felt to be representative of shifts in power and social structure... to draw attention to the relation between the emergence of a ‘lower-middle class’ literary group and the redistribution of income and status, ‘gentle though real, in the newly created Welfare State’.22

This is to say that postwar literature has a close link with the power and social structure of that period.
Postwar Britain was completely belittled in the world political map. The pre-war glory and status it enjoyed were also cut down to size. The Movement writers including Larkin, as a matter of fact, reflect these changing circumstances in their writings. They dislike going abroad where they will not be respected as it was in the pre-war period: ‘With Britain’s decline as a world power particularly apparent in the years just after the war . . . a period of comparative insularity ensued.’ On one occasion, when Ian Hamilton asked Larkin whether he read foreign poetry, Larkin replied: ‘Foreign poetry? No!’ With this we learn the sense of alienation that is inherent in his poetry one after another against the backdrop of the circumstances that took place in the postwar Britain. This period belonged to United States because of its dominance and dynamism, geographical size, economic growth and its military might. At one point of time United States constituted half of the world’s economy: ‘. . .for a period it [United States] represented half of the economic power of all the other countries put together.’ The expansion of American culture is so widespread during this period. The coming of computer technology was also overwhelmingly concentrated in America. Such American dominance could never be checked by Britain in any form.

On the other hand, we saw the steady decline of British empire from 1945 onwards. India and Pakistan became independent in 1947. Ghana, Malaya, Cyprus, Nigeria, Somalia, Jamaica, Uganda, Kenya, etc. became independent one after another. Since the end of the war in 1945, Larkin did notice only one event in which he saw British prestige restored by the Conservative government of Mrs. Thatcher in Falklands war. Larkin wrote to Gunner: ‘Well, so we have the Argies on the run. Thank God we didn’t cock it up.’
What Larkin saw in postwar Britain was a new departure in the cultural front with the coming of the Labour government in 1945: ‘the Brave and Revolting New World came into its own.’ The government was no more a mere bundle of politicians but a blend of trade unionists, economists, scientists, businessmen, doctors, etc. The government then consisted of a number of consultative and advisory bodies by bringing in the non-political professionals into the centre-stage of governance and literally governance of state means ‘management of things.’ Within these crucial years, the need to mobilize moral resources began to be felt. Consequently, ‘a programme of cultural mobilization the like of which had never before been seen in this country’ was widely carried out. This is in the line of ‘education for citizenship’ conceived during the war years by the coalition government led by Churchill and it continued to be relevant during the postwar years when a multicultural society took shape gradually. Then Britain began to be over-crowded by people who belonged to foreign culture—large numbers of West Indians, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, and smaller numbers of East Asians, Maltese, Cypriots, Negroes, etc. One conservative M.P. Enoch Powell was expelled from the party for making ‘a speech warning that “rivers of blood” would flow as Black and White fought against each other for space and economic survival.’ Here, one may also be reminded of Larkin’s attitude towards Black immigrants as recorded in a letter he wrote to his friend Kingsley Amis showing his angst over the liberal policy of Harold Wilson’s Labour government: ‘Fuck the whole lot of them I say . . . the decimal loving nigger-mad . . . the worst government I can remember.’

The change in the cultural and political scenario of the period became more and more complex. With the ‘rising tide of niggers’ and the nigger-mad
policy of the then Labour government of Wilson, Larkin’s anger reached a higher degree when he wrote to his mother in 1970:

> England is going down generally! It was shown recently that one child in Eight born now is of immigrant parents. Cheerful outlook, isn’t it? Another fifty years and it will be like living in bloody India—tigers prowling about, elephants too, shouldn’t wonder. We’ll both be dead? 31

This right wing attitude—‘kick out the niggers’—continued to be a characterizing feature of Larkin’s personality.

The new multicultural dimension in Britain is strengthened again by a new wave of globalization through print and electronic media. Art is no more for a minority urban elite group but more for the common people including those living in the remotest parts of the state and those immigrants who are not yet fluent in English language. During and before the war, the world has learned English and, now, in the postwar years English language has received a number of loaned words to such an extent that English language no more seems to belong to the English people only. This is seen as a dilution of English culture in the line ‘Summer is fading’ (CP 121) for ‘recreation’ of a new cultural dimension that is coming in with fear and apprehension. Cultural mobility seems completely irresistible with the popularity of radio, television, cinema, tape-cassette, playable easily anywhere with portable battery powered recorder or player, etc. Radio also penetrates into the rural homes changing the rural life drastically. Life becomes freer from social and religious bondage with these technological advancements. The fact is: No rule rules you. This cultural shift has brought in an increasingly open society that is always open to receive anything that is ‘new’ and ‘foreign.’
These circumstances narrated above led to the capitalist consumerism which was immediately followed by the privatization process of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in the 1970’s which was a turning point from state economy to market economy. These circumstances changed the lifestyle suddenly and the change is reflected in the poems such as “Annus Mirabilis” and “High Windows.” The language of these poems shows the degree of openness in the postwar Britain. The radio in “Mr Bleaney” and the LP (long playing record) in “Annus Mirabilis” are all symbols of the agents of cultural change.

By the fifties it was clear that the direction of English literature had changed—whether it changed or was changed—and this change was later called the Movement or the ‘New University Wits’ because most prominent writers of this period were either University lecturers or librarian. When William Van O’Connor wrote his book *The New University Wits and the End of Modernism* in 1963, it was all clear for these writers that they belong to a group essentially different from their modernist predecessors. However, O’Connor was not the first to use the term as it has already been used by people like Bonamy Dobree, Walter Allen etc. O’Connor also acknowledged it in his book. Some writers also tried to group them as ‘Angry Young Men’ along with John Osborne whose play *Look Back in Anger* (1957) spoke for a generation of disillusioned and discontented young men who were strongly opposed to the establishment and to its social and political attitudes.

Be it the Movementeers or the Angry Young Men or the New University Wits, their identifying characteristics are that:

Almost all of them have or have had University connections. The majority have been scholarship students. Most of them come from
working class or lower middle-class families. They matured during and after the world war II, and they have lived in the welfare state. They are a part of different, a broadened, more democratized, culture than England has had in the past.\textsuperscript{32}

As a matter of fact, three terms— Movement, New University Wits and Angry Young Men— were widely used to refer to these group of writers of the 1950s and early 1960s. Later, it seemed that the term ‘Movement’ is more apt because New University Wits reminds one of the playwrights of the Pre-Shakespearean period, who lived in the peaceful and glorious reign of Elizabeth unlike the complex and fast life in the postwar Britain. Elizabethan age was comparatively peaceful and prosperous if it is compared to the postwar decline. Again the prominent writers of the postwar period who are grouped as the Movementeers can be segregated from the so-called Angry Young Men because their political mindset is distinctly different from the latter. Unlike Jimmy Porter of \textit{Look Back in Anger}, Larkin has a politically right wing tendency as suggested by his letters written to his friends. It is in such circumstances that the term Movement continued to be used by the literary executors of the 1950’s to refer to Larkin and his contemporaries.

One interesting aspect of the literary scene in Britain immediately after the war was the revolt against the cosmopolitan spirit of the poets of 1930s and 1940s that O’Connor writes:

England he [Stephen Spender] said was experiencing “a rebellion of the lower Middle Brows.” It was, he said, a revolt against London literary life, against traditional intellectual trends at Oxford and Cambridge, against the poets of the 1930’s and the 1940’s and against the cosmopolitan spirit in modern literature. Essentially, he said, it was a revolt against the “classy.”\textsuperscript{33}
However, most of the Movement writers are all university educated and they are either university lecturer or University librarian at one point of time or other. Larkin was also a librarian by profession since leaving Oxford and died as a librarian at Hull. The landscape as portrayed in his poems also shows how it differs from that of the complex ones as drawn by the modernists like Eliot, Auden, Yeats etc.

Apart from his contemporaries, the main influences on Larkin are first W.B. Yeats and then Thomas Hardy. Yeatsian influences are quite manifest in the volume *The North Ship* and some other earlier poems which are not collected in his four major volumes. Larkin himself also admitted that he wrote ‘a great many sedulous and worthless Yeatsy poems . . . and this went on for years and years.’34 But he began writing differently after 1948 or 49 as he said in an interview granted to Ian Hamilton.35 This influence of Yeats is also ascertained by what his biographer Andrew Motion wrote:

> Larkin’s most formative early influence was W.B. Yeats whose own poetry owed a great deal to the symbolists and Yeats’s description of their methods helps to explain their appeal to Larkin . . . . The most revealing aspect of this definition is, paradoxically, its vagueness.36

However in terms of style and diction, Larkin is not an equal to Yeats who considers ‘that to dislocate the precise relationship between a concept and a thing was to transcend the ordinary world and so escape the flow of time.’37 For a symbolist like Mallarmé ‘To name an object is to do away with three quarters of the enjoyment of the poem which is derived from the satisfaction of guessing little by little: to suggest it, to evoke it— that is what charms the imagination.’38 If Larkin’s poems are read in view of such notions of poetry it will be extremely
inconsistent to put the poems within the symbolist framework except for some early poems. Larkin’s poems are direct and colloquial and they immediately hit the matter for which they are written. As stated earlier the intellectual complexities of the modernists are not found in his mature poems though at times, however, he is interested in the portrayal of emotions through symbols. By doing so he maintains his symbolist tendency. For example the title poem of the volume *The Whitsun Weddings* concludes with a final stanza dense with symbols:

There we were aimed. And we race across
Bright knots of rail
Past standing pullmans, walls of blackened moss
Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail
Travelling coincidence; and what it held
Stood ready to be loosed with all the power
That being changed can give. We slowed again
And as the tightened brakes took hold there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain. (CP 116)

These complexities of symbols—‘an arrow shower,’ ‘rain,’ etc. preceded by more vivid ones such as ‘bright knots of rail, ‘standing pullmans,’ ‘walls of blackened moss’—bring in our mind the kind of images which are conspicuously prevalent in Yeats’s poems such as “Byzantium,” “The Second Coming,” etc.

Time and its implication on life is another aspect that Yeats is obsessed with and that is what we find in Larkin too: ‘Our element is time’ (CP 106). The confrontation between human will and Time is what makes life so futile in its endless attempt to realize what is wished. Life has its beginning and an end though time is omnipresent. One cannot alter what had taken place in the past while future does not assure anything except that:
Only one ship is seeking us black—
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back
A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
No waters breed or break. (CP 52)

This ‘consciousness of his subjection to time’ is also revealed in Yeats’s “The Second Coming” where time brings the ‘Sphinx’ which is seen as the ‘black-sailed’ ship of death in Larkin’s “Next, Please.” The past is empty for ‘Nothing, like something, happens anywhere’ (CP 82) and this emptiness combines with the image of the ‘black-sailed’ ship together to prove that ‘Life is first boredom, then fear’ (CP 153). The boredom of the past and the fear of future haunt the present ceaselessly. When his second volume of poetry, The Less Deceived was published it was revealed that one of Larkin’s masks . . . was the sad face of a clown and this sadness is the sadness of the 1950s as Alun Jones said: ‘It is in the poetry of Philip Larkin that the spirit of the 1950s finds its most complete expression in English poetry.’

However the greatest influence on Larkin, other than his contemporaries, is Thomas Hardy, a poet and novelist, to whom Larkin has also confessed his indebtedness. He avoids the language of the modernists— ‘that which is privately invented, and that which is taken from less known classics, mythology, religion’ to remain himself aloof from modernism. This is how he is more seen as a ‘poet for the common man.’ This is again to say that his poetry is a deviation from the classy modernist poetry of the cosmopolitan intellectuals of London who write more to confuse than to express. There is always, for Larkin and his contemporary Movement poets, an audience for whom poetry is written. This audience shares a common language with the poet to communicate the full range of the experiences of life. It is here that he stands nearest to Hardy: ‘The growth of
Larkin’s sensibility, his development as a poet, is also seen as having to do with a movement away from the influences of Yeats and towards discipleship under Hardy.”

The second volume of poems *The Less Deceived* contains poems which are relatively bleak if judged in terms of their themes. The old racehorses are depicted in “At Grass” as:

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The eyes can hardly pick them out
From the cold shade they shelter in,
Till wind distresses tail and mane;
Then one crops grass, and moves about
— The other seeming to look on —
And stands anonymous again. (CP 29)
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Similarly, the rapist’s mental pang is portrayed in “Deception” as:

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That you were less deceived, out on that bed.
Then he was, stumbling up the breathless stair.
To burst into fulfilments desolate attic. (CP 32)
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The growing tendency of bleakness brought in by the ‘black-sailed’ ship of “Next, Please” reaches its climax in “Aubade”:

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Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
Making all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die.
Arid interrogation: yet the dread
Of dying and being dead,
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify. (CP 208)
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This horrifying experience is how the poet knows the inevitable attack of Time and the cruel embrace of death. But still the poet asks: ‘Where can we live but days?’ (CP 67) The answer lies in one’s endless engagement with the ‘priest’ and
the ‘doctor’ (CP 67) in which the latter overpowers the former. Religion cannot assure life after death: ‘That vast moth eaten musical brocade/Created to pretend we never die’ (CP 208). This outburst against metaphysical assumptions of life after death is a reflection of the social and intellectual developments in the postwar years. The saddest thing in life, for Larkin, is ‘the anaesthetic from which none come round’ (CP 208).

These revelations show Larkin’s nearness to Thomas Hardy immediately and to ascertain this fact one may be reminded of what Larkin said about Hardy:

I was struck by their [Hardy’s poems] tunefulness and their feeling, and the sense that here was somebody [Hardy] writing about things I was beginning to feel myself. I don’t think Hardy, as a poet is a poet for young people. I know it sounds ridiculous to say I was not young at twenty five or twenty six, but at least was beginning to find out what life was about and that’s precisely what I found in Hardy. In other words I am saying that what I like about him primarily is his temperament and the way he sees life. He is not a transcendental writer, he’s not a Yeats, he’s not an Eliot; his subjects are men, the life of men, time and the passing of time, love and the fading of love.

This praise of Larkin on Hardy is to ascertain that Larkin’s themes are birth, death, life, time and the sufferings of life. Putting himself closer to Hardy, Larkin further writes:

What is the intensely maturing experience of which Hardy’s modern man is most sensible? In my view it is suffering or sadness, and extended consideration of the centrality of suffering in Hardy’s work should be the first duty of the true critic for which the work is still waiting . . . it surely cannot be denied that the dominant emotion in Hardy is sadness. Hardy was peculiarly well equipped to perceive the melancholy, the unfortunate, the frustrating, the failing elements of life. It could be said of him as of Little Father
Time that he would like the flowers very much if he did not keep thinking they would all be withered in a few days.  

Men’s predicament in the hand of Time, like what his admired Hardy did, is recurrent in many of his poems that each passing day brings him nearer to his death. The consciousness of the passage of time keeps him at a point between what he hoped for in the past and the futility of the failure to realize those hopes. In “Dockery and Son” Larkin writes:

Life is first boredom, then fear.
Whether or not we use it, it goes,
And leaves what something hidden from us chose,
And age, and then the only end of age. (CP 153)

Between the ‘boredom’ of the past and the ‘fear’ of future he realises that:

Half a life is over now,
And I meet full face on dark mornings.
The bestial visor bent in
By the blows of what happened to happen. (CP 146)

In most of his poems his struggle against the futility of Time is so conspicuous that he said: ‘You know that you are going to die, and the people you love are going to die.’ Men’s subjection to Time is where Larkin sees his own tragedy that at the end of his time, he will meet ‘The anaesthetic from which none come round’ (CP 208). This, is what Larkin is afraid of throughout his life because man’s will falls prey to the superiority of Time’s will when the ‘black-sailed’ ship of death approaches him. Thus the habit of expecting something in future is essentially ‘bad’ as it does not assure anything towards realizing our ‘sparkling armada of promises’ (CP 52). The consciousness that ‘whether or not we use it [life], it goes’ (CP 152) haunts Larkin’s mind from poem to poem:
‘Hours giving evidence/ Or birth, advance/ On death equally slowly’ (CP 138).

The ideal of life is, thus, always dissociated from the reality of the temporal life and as such one has to attend his daily work, not because he loves it or the ideal is in work but because such works help him forget his dark future. Examining Larkin’s engagement with time vis-a-vis Hardy, Lolette Kuby writes:

Larkin’s pre-occupation with time is no more unique than was Hardy’s and, like Hardy’s, even when it is not the explicit subject, his concern with time lies so close to the surface that it verges on eruption into what the poem is about. More unique is the metaphysics underlying Larkin’s concern. Time occurs in his poems not only as the traditional enemy that alters the good and the desirable into something less, or as the medium in which the positive moment is transformed into a negative one, or in which pleasure dies. These and their associated emotions, nostalgia, regret, anxiety, cynicism are emphatically there. But in addition, the meaning of time in his poems extends to complex metaphysical concepts involving the role that time plays in human dualism and in the deconstruction of reality and ideality. 47

Larkin’s nearness to Hardy is not only in the style and theme of the poems but also in their personal lives. Both are not happy with their families. Larkin remained single throughout his life and Hardy was never happy with any of his wives. Talking of Hardy, Mrs. Hardy’s cook once said:

He [Hardy] didn’t want a wife. He wanted an unpaid secretary. Of all the married couples I have known I am certain that Mrs. Hardy was the most unhappy of any wife. 48

This description of Hardy’s married life is also a defining characteristic of Larkin’s life who never got married with the fear of being imprisoned within the confines of marriage at the cost of personal freedom. Marriage seems to Larkin a continuous adjustment rather than a game of love. He also said that he felt an
outsider by his being single and at the same time maintained that ‘love collides very sharply with selfishness, and they are both pretty powerful things.’ This is what Larkin saw in Hardy too: ‘We find [in Hardy’s character] hypochondria, self absorption, stinginess, luxuriating in misery, selfishness, inhospitality, susceptibility to young women, mother fixation.’ These characteristics are quite manifest in Larkin too—a loner by nature, fond of thinking about miseries in life and a mother fixation particularly after the death of his father in 1963.

However, Hardy’s influence on Larkin is not that much as we think if we read his poems in conjunction with what some of his critics say. For example, Michael Kirkham says:

Life is ‘unsatisfactory.’ Larkin does not however, offer it the resistance, as his admired Hardy does, of contrary expectations. Perhaps the only unqualified positive emotion he expresses is one that he has remarked in Betjaman, a poet he also admires: a yearning for a world as it were unburdened by himself; out of this he has created pastoral worlds blessedly emptied of himself, ‘attics cleared of me.’

In view of the above remarks what Andrew Motion, his biographer, said is also noteworthy:

. . . Larkin’s poems are not as narrowly circumscribed as has often been claimed. By looking at a few of his recurrent themes, it is possible to see that his pessimism is not axiomatic, his attitude to death is in marked contrast to Hardy’s, and his hope of deriving comfort from social and natural rituals is resilient. And by examining his use of symbolist devices, it is clear that his poems describe a number of moments which—qualifiedly but undubitably—manage to transcend the flow of contingent time altogether.
However contrary to what Motion said many critics have still found the dominant current of pessimism. He has been dubbed as a hopeless and inflexible pessimist and this pessimism is seen as a weakness of his own philosophy on life. He has been called ‘the saddest heart in the postwar supermarket’ by Eric Homberger, is criticised for the ‘central dread of satisfaction’ by Geoffrey Thurley and for his ‘tenderly nursed sense of defeat’ by Charles Tomlinson. In the same manner Michael Kirkham also writes:

Larkin the passive realist, the disappointed romantic, the deisher of strategies for depriving emotion of the power to hurt is a minor poet; his poetic world of death-in-life, defeat, disenchantment, pathos, rendered exactly and poignantly, is a confined world in which self is a sufferer not a maker.

Larkin’s psychological pendulum moves between the real to the ideal frequently to and fro in search of an ultimate answer to the future of man’s will and Nature’s opposition to it. Man is part of the Nature which brings in the cycle of birth, life and death and man’s will is always to overcome death which is impossible as it is against Nature. Man is tightly conditioned in Nature, yet, he keeps ‘bad habits of expectancy.’ But what he finds at last is not what he has expected but ‘something hidden from us chose’ (CP 153). This conditioning of life is unavoidable at any cost except to forget for a while by attending to our work: ‘Work has to be done’ (CP 209).

His nearness to Hardy is clearly seen in both literary traits and personal life. Indeed, Hardy is a mammoth figure from whom most twentieth century British poets got benefitted: ‘that in British poetry of the last fifty years (as not in America) the most far reaching influence, for good or ill, has been not Yeats still less Eliot or Pound, not Laurence, but Hardy’ [emphasis Davie’s]. On
Hardy’s influence on Larkin, Donald Davie, a prominent contemporary of Larkin writes:

I shall take it for granted that Philip Larkin is a very Hardyesque poet that Hardy has been indeed the determining influence in Larkin’s career, once he had overcome a youthful infatuation with Yeats. Larkin has testified to the effect repeatedly, and any open minded reader of poems of the two men must recognise many resemblances, though Larkin, it is true, has shown himself a poet of altogether narrower range— it is only a part of Hardy that is perpetuated by Larkin into the 1960s, but it is a central and important part.58

In view of Hardy’s influence on Larkin and against the backdrop of the social circumstances of the postwar period, it is interesting to read Larkin’s poems by keeping in mind the pessimistic tone of most of his poems as Philip Gardner said:‘The “wintry drum” itself is Larkin’s own property: the awareness of sadness at the back of things, of the passing of time and the inevitability of death.’59 In the same way, most of his long poems are the result of his confrontation with time as his master, Hardy did. Life, for Larkin, seems a continuous journey ‘down Cemetery Road’ (CP 148) with the help of the toads.

Auden is another poet who influenced Larkin in the manner how the social condition of their time got expressed in their poems:

Larkin, the schoolboy often acts his age: his first shots at imitating Auden remind you that he is fifteen years younger and has a lot to learn. In other poems, though, he achieves a tough, modern, Audenesque tone that seems only, say, five year behind the master. We enter the landscapes of the 1930s— clocks, factories, soldiers, strangers, frontiers, permits, “evening like a derelict lorry,” “allotments fresh spaded,” “the red club house flag,” “Boring birds/
flying past rocks, “the brilliant freshman with his subtle thought”, “the muffled by with his compelling badge. On his serious errand riding to gorge.” The tone and metre seem extraordinarily authoritative even if the authority is Auden.60

This finding of Blake Morrison is ascertained by what Larkin admitted that he was ‘the ex-schoolboy, for whom Auden was the only alternative to old fashioned poetry”61 before he subsequently admired W.B. Yeats and Thomas Hardy.

Among others Larkin loved to read and had respect too, Betjaman was one. In an interview he granted to the Observer he said: ‘I read Betjaman . . .’62 Larkin also praised him by writing an essay on his biography Summoned by Bells in a sincere and grand manner:

Betjaman does more than genuflect before Victorian lamp brackets and shudder at words like ‘serviette’: despite the flailing introduction to First and Last Loves, he is an accepter, not a rejecter, of our time, registering ‘dear old, bloody old England’ with robustness, precision and a vivacious affection that shimmers continually between laughter and rage, his sense of the past casting long perspectives behind every observation. And the age has accepted him in the most unambiguous way possible: it has made him a television personality.63

Thus, it is clear that Larkin loves Betjaman and this love is ascertained by what he has said about Betjaman’s biography.

D.H. Lawrence’s influence on Larkin is another aspect that calls for our attention while reading his poems and novels. As Larkin’s father, Sydney, was very fond of Lawrence, Larkin had the opportunity to read him at an early age. Larkin’s obsession of sex is one characteristic feature of Lawrence’s novels. This characteristic interest in sex is an influence of Lawrence on Larkin as he
read Lawrence from childhood because of his father’s collections of Lawrence. Andrew Motion says that ‘Lawrence is mentioned most frequently in Larkin’s letters.’ Larkin also said in 1942 with more confidence: ‘To me, Lawrence was what Shakespeare was to Keats.’ Larkin’s love of metre is also seen as another characteristic feature of Larkin’s poems which immediately reminds a reader of Lawrence.

Another less prominent but very interesting influence on Larkin was the poet Vernon Watkins. It was Watkins who introduced the volumes of Yeats’s poems to Larkin, the first and larger influence Larkin got, and was found quite manifest in his first collection of poems *The North Ship*. Larkin met him in 1943 at the English Club: ‘It was in February [1943] the poet Vernon Watkins visited the English Club to talk about the poetry of W.B. Yeats . . . gave a sonorous reading which lasted past coffee time, past discussion time.’ From this meeting of Watkins, Larkin came to know about the life of the former and got impressed suddenly: ‘This uneventfulness [of the life of Watkins who was then 40 years old and not married] impressed Larkin. It suggested a life from which all distractions had been removed, so that it could be devoted to literature.’ The fact that Larkin remained single throughout his life to preserve his freedom could have been caused by such influence from Watkins.

One of the less important but interesting influence on Larkin was John Keats, about a hundred year apart, and ironically a romantic poet. However, this influence is not a far reaching one like that of those narrated earlier. Larkin’s romantic idealism— ‘What will survive of us is love’ (CP 111)— can be read in conjunction with John Keats’s famous line ‘Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter.’ Though the ‘bold lovers’ in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”
can attain the romantic ideal, the Count and Countess of Larkin are not free from the bondage of time. This can be discussed in a larger dimension by bringing in the social circumstances through which they lived. Keats lived in an age when the British colonisation of the world was flowering while Larkin lived in an age when the flower was withering. Larkin is always preoccupied with the futility of time against all our efforts to surpass it. But Keats’s imagination moves beyond the ‘element of time’ to attain the romantic ideals. Even after all his anti-romantic stance, Larkin is said to be appreciative of the romantic values in life. Thus, John Reibetanz writes:

Yet Larkin’s achievement as a poet demonstrates a more profound reappraisal of romantic values than is evident in any of his wryly dogmatic critical pronouncements. In particular “The Whitsun Weddings” may be viewed as a searching revaluation of Keats’s art in the “Ode on a Grecian Urn.”68

Such contradictory comments are frequently made by many critics and therefore a thorough reading of his poetry is called for.

Thus, the influences on Larkin cannot be fixed here or there casually since he lived in a complex postwar period marked by new developments in all fields of study as narrated in the beginning of this chapter. Parental influences are not given place in this chapter since it is not a great consequence in shaping his literary career though the married life of his parents gave a negative impression of marriage throughout his life which was quite manifest in the poems like “Dockery and Son”. The historical circumstances, the friendship he developed, his personal experiences in life and the readings he made are the major influences that has got its expression in the poems and as such these areas are examined in this chapter with a view to forming an integral part of the interpretation of the
poems. Issues and events which shaped Larkin’s career and which help in the proper understanding of the individual poems will also be discussed as and when necessary while examining those individual poems. This is how a Larkin study can be set out against the social and literary milieu of the postwar period. The next chapter will examine selected poems from the volume *The Less Deceived* against the backdrop of the postwar social and literary milieu.
NOTES


2 Ibid., p. 3.


5 Ibid., p. 13.

6 Ibid., pp. 13-14.

7 Ibid., p. 10.


10 Henry Auster, “Larkin's Shakesherian Rage: A Reading of ‘Aubade,’” The Literary Criterion, Vol. XL, 3-4 (Mysore, 2005):131. Auster in this essay quoted Amis as saying 'when that ineffable compound of depression, sadness (these two are not the same), anxiety, self hatred, sense of failure and fear of the future begins to steal over you, start telling yourself that what you have is a hangover."


12 Sisir Kumar Chatterjee, Philip Larkin: Poetry that Builds Bridges (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2007) p. 86.


16 Ibid.


23 Ibid., p. 60.


38 Quoted in Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin*, op.cit., p. 13.


52 Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin, op. cit.*, p. 59.


63 Ibid., p.129.

64 Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life*, op. cit., p. 43.

65 As quoted in Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life*, op. cit. p 43.


67 Ibid.