Chapter - Five
Kingsley Amis : A Poet of Common Morality

The discussion of the poetry of Larkin and Davie in the foregoing pages brings out two important features of the post-Second World War poetry; the desire on the part of the new poets to distance themselves, sometimes backed with polemical pronouncements, from the modernist attitudes in poetry and a renewed desire to rehabilitate the reader. It is these two facts that to a large extent have shaped and moulded the poetic output of the period in question. The new poets looke back with suspicion on the qualities of complexity and obscurity which the modernist writers and under their
impact the writers of the thirties and forties had deliberately cultivated in their writings. It is this fact which accounts for the Movement poet’s critical, almost negative attitude towards their immediate predecessors.

The Movement poets avoid the apocalyptic visions of the Modernists and the social idealism of the poets of the thirties. They also avoid the passionate emotional intensity and psychic phantasmagoria of a poet like Dylan Thomas. The Movement poetry is the poetry of the common sense, a poetry which made a conscious attempt to bridge the chasm between the poet and the reader which had been widening ever since the times of William Blake. They rejected the idea of uniques of the poetic genius and scoffed at the syntactical disorder which was justified in the name of the complex panorama of chaos and futility which they encountered in the contemporary life.

The Movement poets have no common poetic manifesto but their pronouncements on poets and poetry have a surprising similarity of beliefs and attitudes. Further, the poets who are usually identified with the Movement developed differently in their later works, some of them even openly recanting their association with the Movement. Kingsley Amis is the only poet of the group who has remained a Movement poet throughout his poetic career. This, however, does not mean that there is no development in his poetry and that his poetry lacks variety and maturity. Variety and maturity, in his case, have meant that he has refined and perfected the initial Movement moods and techniques and has in the course of time shaken off that note of polemical debunking which characterise his early verse and has grown into a satirical poet.
Refraining from any kind of prophetic and pontifical attitudinising he has expressed a positive, affirmative outlook on life. He has remained an essentially ‘sociable’ poet, an ‘entertainer’ in a very special sense. “He is the chief practitioner of that new provincialism in English poetry” which was attacked as middle brow muse by Charles Tomlinson. Amis claimed:

.... no body wants any more poems on the grandeur themes for a few years, but at the same time no body wants any more poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries or mythology or foreign cities or other poems. At least I hope no body wants them.

These words were written in 1955 by which time the Movement had established itself and had among its contributors nearly all English poets whose poems mattered. Even Ted Hughes and Thom Gunn, poets who were destined to develop into major figures within a few years, sympathised with the group.

Kingsley amis was called “a poet of common morality,” whose satirical vein is similar to that of Alexander Pope, but unlike Pope he can only attack upon the oddities prevailing in society. He was born on 16th April 1922 in South London and brought up to Norbury, to William Robert Amis, a senior export clerk for Colemn’s Murstand, and Rosa Annie Luceas Amis. He was educated at the city of London School and St. John’s College, Oxford. At the age of eleven he wrote his first blank verse and has continued to write ever since. His father wanted to make him a cricketeer but this was not to be. When William found his son’s interest in education, he tried to admit him in local Norbury College where he wrote his first poem about the Miracle of St. Sophia. He
Kingsley Amis found his father as a reactionary which he mentioned in one of his interviews:

My father thought that he, my father, was a rebellion, though of course by the time I was taking any notice of his views, he was a stolidly conservative, not to say reactionary as, anybody I have ever met."\(^4\)

He married Hilary Ann Bradwell in 1948 after publishing his first collection of poems *The Bright November* in 1947. He edited *Oxford Poetry* in 1949 along with James Michie; worked as a Lecturer in English from 1949 to 1961 at University College Swansea; met Dylan Thomas which he has described in his essay ‘An Evening with Dylan Thomas.’ He got Somerset Maughum Award in 1955 for his first novel *Lucky Jim* and has described the encouragement which he received from the elderly novelist:

I admired his works. I got a most courteous letter back. He had evidently read my book, and said that he was fascinated by the portrayal I gave of a new wave of barbarianism who were just then coming of age and entering universities and how appealing it was that they were destroying all civilised standards.\(^5\)

He was also awarded by C.B.E. in 1981. In 1956 *A Case of Samples* was published in which most of his poems earlier published in 1953 under the title of *A Frame of Mind* (1953) were included with eighteen new poems.

His first novel *Lucky Jim* was dedicated to his friend, Philip Larkin, the second *That Uncertain Feeling* to his wife, the third *I Like It Here* to his three children Philip, Martin and Sally and his fifth novel to Jane. He married the novelist Elizabeth
Jane Howard in 1965. But in 1980 the marriage broke down: ‘the happiness went out of
t heir marriage’, as one gossip columnist put it after an interview with Elizabeth Jane. His
other works are *Old Devils* (1986) *The Crime of Country* (1987) and *Difficulties with
Girls* (1988). Very often Amis is known for his novels but his reputation as a poet is no
less relevent than a novelist. Donald Davie has accepted the relevance of Amis’ poetry in
connection with the political issue of the period after Second World War:

> Amis’ poetry, however, is much to our purpose, since for more than
> his novels it concerns itself quite explicitly with political issues. It
does so not under Hardyesque but rather under Gravesian
auspices....“6

He was identified as a leading exponant along with the poets like Philip
Larkin and John Wain of a new literary style that stressed the anti-romantic view-point
and austerity of tone and whose practitioners were some times collectively referred to as
the Movement.

Kingsley Amis wrote an article entitled “Hobbits and Intellectuals” in reply
to Donald Davie. In which the difference between these poets of the same age can be
seen easily as Davie called him ‘no less a good patriot than myself (or) perhaps a better’.Davie does not seem to like lefties any more than Amis does and he finds good things in
international politics, a loss of nerve. Davie uses the metaphor about “Creon, the person
willingly in authority, versus Antigone, the person in perpetual opposition who is too
spiritually grand ever to accept power and its corrupting temptations and when he equates
with my figures of lefty.”7 Another major difference is that Davie called him ‘alleged
monolith of communalism’ to which Amis responded by saying that communalism is not monolith. The basic difference lies between these poets in their right and left political issues which is expressed by Donald Davie in his Thomas Hardy and British Poetry with the help of his several poems like “After Goliath”, “Masters”, “The Voice of Authority”, “New Approach Needed”.

In his essay ‘four fluent fellows’ Kingsley Amis analyses Chesterton’s fictions the Napoleon of Notling Hill (1904), The Ball and the Cross (1910), Manalive (1912), The Man who was Thursday. The chief task of Chesterton, according to him, is to attack upon prophecy and shows us a society’ almost exactly what it is now’. Both Chesterton and Amis are poets as well as novelists-more novelists than poets. Their critical views are also similar. Amis studied Chesterton as a polemicist and a buffoon his polemicism is based upon nationalism and the politics of contemporary age having humour and idealism; his buffoonery is fanatic. His melodramatic novels are ‘grand and histrionic, magnificent and magniloquent as we find in the poems of Houseman or the music of Tehai Kovsky and which we respond ... in the works of Tennyson or Beethoven.”8 Further, he quotes a passage from one of his novels describing the subject of poetry as being the feeling of a child ‘when he takes a gun upon a journey or a bun with him to bed’. Amis also disapproves the grandiosity of the subject of poetry and has described ‘Sexual love, marriage, domesticity stand high and firm in the Chesterton’s thought of values, but they are implied, invoked and unargued motives or goals not explored.”9
Amis has edited the poems of Tennyson and shown a great love towards him. His praise of Tennyson is due to his reducing self-indulgence and sophistication—the qualities Amis shares with him:

His praise of the ability of Tennyson’s work to reduce self indulgent, sophistication to look at this. Good (or bad) isn’t it? might just be accurately apply to the extreme divergence of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in responses to his own.\(^{10}\)

Amis’s first volume of poems, *Bright November* had already come out in 1947 and it contained poems which in no way tried to ‘bicycle pump the human heart’ ‘but were frankly designed to ‘squash it flat’. The manner of these poems is decidedly Audenesque in their ordinariness of diction, their manipulated end rhymes and their wry prosaic quality. Most of the poems are written in rhymed quatrains or couplets and instead of transparting the reader into the realms of the sublime adopt a confident, intimate tone, bordering on easy conversational informality. There is neither grand action nor grand style. Indeed, Amis seems to be convinced that poetry is in ordinariness. This superficial Audenesque manner, however, remains superficial.

In Auden this manner is only a clever facade meant merely to shock the reader than to confide in him. It conceals beneath itself a deep sense of enquisch, pain or guilt. Amis’s choice of ordinariness in both style and theme is deliberate because he wants to cultivate the reader’s friendship and win his confidence. Many years later, in his introduction to *The New oxford Book of Light Verse* Amis described the *Verse de societe* as a continuation of satire:
“This move can be seen as already in progress by the time of Swift, who was certainly not writing satire in the normal sense of term, as his avoidance of the heroic couplet would be enough to suggest.... We are dealing with a kind of realistic verse that is close to some of the interests of the novel; men and women among their fellows, seen as a member of a group or class in a way that emphasizes manners, social forms, amusements, fashion... topicality, even gossip, all these treated in a bright, perspicuous style.”

Not only ordinariness but also the fair wind attracts the attention of the poet to write light verse as he said in his review of ‘The Comic and Curious Verse’ selected by J.M. Cohen:

“It always seems to me that in the matter of light verse or the writing of the light verse give those matches a fair wind, would you, Roger? We should really hand the palm to that much maligned gang, the Victorians”.

Oxford English Dictionary defines light verse as ‘requiring little mental effort; amusing, entertaining’. It is light in the sense of being cheerful, airy. Light verse, for him, does not only mean a poem dealing with a light subject having no relationship with the current and serious problems of society but it should deal with our ‘gentler emotions the more telling for its unexpectedness. Amis presented serious matters in a light tone so that it can be easily apprehended by the readers, as we find in Chesterton’s Rolling English Road and Leigh Hunt’s fish sonnets. Light music, unlike light verse, is meant for the refreshment of mood. T.S. Eliot’s dissociation of sensibility is the primary requirement of light verse which was ignored by earlier poets; resultantly their poems became unimpressive and irrelevant. The difference lies between comic and light verse as
the former is only meant for pleasure whereas the latter is mixed with high seriousness.

W. Hutchings comments upon the works of Kingsley Amis:

“To like it now means to be superbly comic about the world’s absurdity and to be serious about what makes the world worth living in; conversely death has to be put in perspective as the end of a life worth living and has to be seen in all its meaningless horror.”

As mentioned earlier, the earlier poems of Amis were being written when the Second World War was about to begin and naturally these poems are overshadowed by the awareness of the impending war. But these poems adopt a tone much different from similar poems written by the poets of the thirties. Amis does not ‘socialize’ the causes or effects of the war. He is more concerned about the stark brutality that a war symbolizes. The war machinery and the technology that has gone into sophisticating it and making it deadlier elicits Amis’s ironic praise. Thus a poem like “Radar” which is ostensibly intended as a praise of the inventors of the radar ends on an ironic note when it alludes to the suffering brought about it on the enemy side. The directions of the radar are not cent percent correct and when the target is missed and innocent lives are destroyed, this is dismissed as a stray effect by the soldiers. This kind of casualness to genuine human suffering is a common-place occurrence during wars and it is this casualness which is another name of callousness and it is attacked by the poet. Similarly, “O Captain, My Captain”, though written in a conventional style suited to a conventional theme, does not play up any kind of heroism which is the common theme in jingoistic war poetry, comes down heavily on these soldiers who are drained off of every kind of sensitivity and go on
killing and destroying indiscriminately. The poet asks the soldiers that if they ever chanced upon to listen to music, or experience diverting splutter of the rain-drops, or see a beautiful face, they must stop their guns and allow these to work upon their minds. The “Aviator’s Hymn” and “Belgian Winter” have the same ironic tone. The latter specially which ends with lines: ‘Behind is the city, a garnished London, a Paris/That has no idea of how to live, of chirico squarea/A feast of enemies, the stranger entertained/with opera and lesbian exhibitions”, is probably one of the finest poems of this period when Thomas Hardy and Wilfred Owen were serious intellectual preoccupations of the poet. Though such stark irony grew less and less in his later verse, its traces have not been completely wiped out even then.

The vein of satire, or better still, mockery, is present in most of the poems of Bright November. This volume was published in 1947 and the war experiences colour quite a few poems of this volume. The war as an event had already passed into history but it was too fresh in memory and too near in time to be put aside. The volume contains a poem entitled “Release” which is the longest in the volume and which also gives the title to the volume. The poem recalls the year 1945 when large-scale demobilization was going on. The scaffoldings of the war was being dismantled and the scene of dismantling reminds the poet of another beginning which is no less horrifying and pathetic than the beginning of the war. But the ending of the war brings no comfort to the poet. The ‘sage brutality’ and ‘shrewd blind eye’ are deeply impressed on his psyche. The easy colloquial diction of the poem and the slightly jocular tone of the speaker cannot conceal the deep
emotional disturbance that the poet has experienced. Such Auderesque method is evident in many poems of the volume, though intellectually and otherwise too Amis finds himself unable to share Auden’s enthusiasm about the war which he looked upon as a source of enlargement of poetic experience. Amis cannot conceal his disgust at the decay of human culture and one of the methods through which a new awareness can be injected into humanity is by openly debunking the masquerade of romantic idealism. Thus there enters into Amis’s poem a vein of satire or mockery. As an example we can take ‘Beowulf’. If one were to expect that the poet would use the nationalistic legend of Beowulf as an occasion to lament the loss or degeneration of heroic ideals, one would be rudely shocked. Instead, the poet is disgusted with all such myths of superhuman heroes. Beowuld is presented as a person who has lived too much in ideals, loosing contact with ordinary joys and pleasures of life. The poet uses the myth as a spring-board to ridicule all those who are trying to perpetuate such myths:

Some one has told us-this man was a hero
Must we then reproduce his paradigms,
Trace out his rambling regress to his forebears
(An instance of old English harking-back)?

The protest is not only academic, it goes deeper and brings out the hollowness and naivete of those who are constantly digging out the past in order to underrate the present. Similarly another poem in the volume ‘Retrospect’ suggests the emptiness of heroic ideals which forces upon the post the truth that ‘life... always insists on smiling when we want to be serious’. Constancy in love is an old ideal of the middle
ages when chivalry was the most commonplace pose. With time having changed and permissiveness becoming the order of the day ideas of love have also undergone a change.

There is hardly any scope for fantasy in life, which hardly has any sense of the cinema. Man is forced by the black knight of living and we should be ready to lose our eyes or our invisible empire. It has certainly meant a griveous loss because.

When hands
Link that don’t mean to hold on forever
Their touch is cold, is cold that silence ends
And love is always moving somewhere else.”

The poem’s title is misleading because there is hardly any touch of sentimentality. However, there is no debunking here either. Like his friend Larkin, Amis also seems to be crushed by time and finds no escape from it.

In his poem ‘Bed and Breakfast’ he exposes the reality of love which is suppose to be ideal and permanent, but now it has been reduced only to quench the thirst of sexual desire:

But love, once broken off, builds a response
In the final turning pause that sees nothing
Is left, and grieves though nothing happened here.”

The majority of the poems in Bright November are imitative in manner but the non-confirmist beliefs and attitudes of the poet are all too apparent. Amis finds the early works of his own as “full of energy and also full of vulgarity, crudity and incompleteness. And later works are more carefully finished, and in that sense better
literary products. But ... there is often a freshness that is missing in the later works. For every gain there is a loss. I think it events out in that way.\textsuperscript{17}

The next volume which came out in 1956 under the title \textit{A Case of Samples} has a subdued satirical note. Many poems are concerned with debunking the old traditional values but there is finesse and sophistication in the manner which was lacking in the earlier volume. Even so, one notices the fact that with his maturity the poet’s scepticism about the old order of things has deepened. Maturity has bred a better insight and more confidence in the poet. The method of ironic juxtaposition which was crude and unrefined in the earlier volume has no become sharper. It is also obvious that the youthful non-conformism of his earlier poems has now chrystallized into a liberal point of view. While editing with James Michie, \textit{Oxford Poetry 1949}, Amis had emphasized certain qualities which in his view were essential for good poetry.

The poet must have a sharp observing eye for the contemporary reality. And anyone having this quality would automatically adopt a satirical tone. Moreover, he must give evidence of his technical skill by being innovative in choosing images and manipulating rhymes. These qualities are found in Amis’s 1953 volume of poems \textit{A Frame of Mind}. Amis was now turning his attention to novel-writing which was better suited to diagnose the contemporary malaise and which also provided him with better scope for lashing at the increasing aberrations in the cultural and academic life of England. The poems of the volume also give evidence of what later came to be derisively known as Amis’s misogyny. This volume contains one of Amis’s most popular poems,
“Against Romanticism” in which he makes a forceful plea for a temperate zone, that liberal point of view which would have pleased E.M. Forster. Life is not a series of catastrophe, most of it is built of ordinary events, lack lustre happenings which are common to all and by no means peculiar to the poet alone. Amis lashes out at the brain.

... raging with prophecy
Raging to discard real time and place ...
Raging to build a better time and place
Than the ones that give prophecy its field
To work, the calm material for its rage,
And the context which makes it prophecy.\textsuperscript{18}

The real meaning of life lies in being more prosaic and down-to-earth:
Let the sky be clean of officious birds
Punctiliously flying on the left;
Let there be a path leading out of sight,
And at its other end a temperate zone:
Woods devoid of beasts, roads that please the foot.\textsuperscript{19}

Patrick Swinden in his article ‘English Poetry’ makes a comparison between Amis’s “Against Romanticism” and Bateson’s, “Anti-Romantics”. In ‘Woods devoid of beasts’ and ‘I have heard them halloowing in the guilty wood’- the wood seems to mean the same thing and the imagery used to refer to it is very similar to skylark, officious birds, pegasus, the unicorn. To quote Swinden:

It is this combination of pretension and absurdity,
the claim of mysterious knowledge and the enability
(so it is claimed) to produce the evidence for it,
that both Bateson and Amis are making in their poems.\textsuperscript{20}
‘Romanticism’ Amis has said, “in a political context I would like to define as an irrational capacity to become inflamed by interest and causes that are one’s own.” When he finds himself in a romantic era which is incurable, he turns to the Audenesque method that is simple, straightforward and real. John Press has accused Amis of not making a clearcut difference between ‘valid principles of Romanticism and the quagmire:

A traveller who walks a temperate zone
- Woods devoid of beasts, roads that please the foot- 
Finds that its decent surface grows too thin:
Some thing unperceived fumble as his nerves.
To please in ingrown taste for anarchy 
Torrid images circle in the wood....”

All the images of the poem are totally against Romanticism which delighted in terror-striking images. Tigers, wolves and lions: were found in their forest; and they were habituated to move among thorny bushes. The romantics were impressed by the French Revolution and anarchism. Geographically, the temperate zone is opposite to the torrid zone from which their images were borrowed.

The other poem based upon the same subject is “Aiming At A Million” in which the poet attacks upon the high flying of person and concludes:
None outgrows dying,
But height is the end of growing.
A lot is better than nothing.

Here also the poet is deflating ‘Bush giant, forest king’, Assorted drydas’ ‘that god-almighty bole’, ‘one leaf in the forest/can dwarf or dry the rest’, ‘the biggest
beauty is almost ugly’. The images and subjects, prominent in the romantic poetry have become irrelevant for the poets of the Movement phase. To quote O’Conner:

It is true that the range of his subject matter is small, but he is not arid or bold. He works hard as being anti-romantic, hard enough so that one could suspect the romantic exerts a strong pull on him. If there is a characteristic situation in his poems it is the building up of, or pointing to romantic expectations, them undermining them.24

‘Ode to the East-North-East by East Wind’ is an attack as well as counterpart of Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”. Amis also mocks at the simplistic world view of the archromantic Shelley and his poem. The poem begins with an ironic praise of the wind:

“We know, of course, you blow the wind mills round,
And that is a splendid thing to do;
Some times you pump up water from the ground;
Why, darling, that’s just fine of you.”25

In the early part of the poem Amis seems to present the wind as the preserver of things and a source of pleasure as opposed to Shelley who described the west wind as a ‘destroyer and preserver’ and the source of frightened atmosphere in the whole cosmos. The answer of ‘why’ is given in the concluding lines of the poem:

Poetic egotists make you their theme,
Finding in you their hatred for
A world that will not mirror their desire.
Silly yourself, you flatter and inspire
Some of the silliest of us
And is that worth the fuss?26
The last lines asks the reader whether it is worthy to be worried about such an irrelevent thing. The poem starts with an attack upon P.B. Shelley and his poem and gradually it turns to the romantic age in general.

In another literary poem ‘A Dream of Fair Women’ recalling as the title does Tennyson’s famous poem of nearly the same name the poet refuses either to idealize the ‘fair women’ or to suggest any didactic lesson for the fair sex. This deliberate distancing on the part of Amis from both Tennyson’s idealism and didacticism is a telling example of the peculiar Movement sensibility. Tennyson as behoved the Poet-Laureate set out to delineate the theme of beauty corrupt by vanity in a grand poetic style by surveying the various portraits & female frailty from Chaucer onwards. The poem is a strange mixture of patriotism and moral idealism. The theme of the poem is set out in the following lines:

    .... In every land
    I saw, wherever light illumineth,
    Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand
    The downward slope of death.27

The archaic ‘illumineth’ in the second line nets the tone of prophecy and authority. The dream is only a feigned one and in finely measured quatrains the poet delineates through examples drawn from legend as well as literature the basic theme set out in the principium. Amis, on the other hand, neither pontificates on the lofty themes of beauty, nor does he maintain any facade of artificial dreamings. He is delighted when “into the bright oxygen of his nod” colive angels as well as a squadron of draped nudes:

    Speech fails them, amorous, but each one’s look
Endorsed in other ways, begs me to sign
Her body’s autograph book ....

As if the shock to the reader were not enough, the poet almost bursts on him with a frank declaimer, a declaimer that disarms any condemnation of Amix as a sexist: the poet has been dreaming. What he says in the poem is the commonplace experience which produces feeding on romantic idealism would not admit:

But wait; not just a dream’, because through good
And beautiful, it is also true, and hence
Is rarely understood;
Who would choose any workable ideal
In here and now’s giant circumference,
Is that small room were real?

The message of the poem is made further clear. Life is beautiful in its ordinariness, nay, it is much more beautiful as it is despite what the romanticists might say. To the climatic question in the last three lines quoted above the poet’s answer is as follows:

Only the best; the others find, have found
Love’s ordinary distances too great,
And eager, stand their ground;
Map drunk explorers, dry land sailors, they
See no arrival that can compensate
For boredom on the way;
And seeming doctrinaire, but weak,
Lime lighted dolls guttering in their brain,
They come with me, to seek
The women of that ever fresh terrain
The night after tonight.
It is this determination to see poetry in the ordinariness of life, this refusal to sentimentalise or idealise the realities of life, that makes Amis unique even among those of his contemporary poets with whom he launched the new poetry of the fifties. He is free from Larkin’s melancholy or painful sense of absences and Davie’s high polished academic attitudinizing, while he is also free from Ted Hughe’s obsession with violence and power in the natural world and Thom Gunn’s brooding self-consciousness. It is this supreme confidence in the ordinariness of life that makes the poet declare:

Going well so far, eh?
But soon, I am sorry to say,
The Here where recipe
Will have to intrude its I,
It’s main verb want,
It’s this at some tangent.31

He affirms this new creed in quite a few poems such as ‘A Bookshop Idyll (‘Should poets bicycle pump the human heart/ or suqash it flat?) ‘A song of Experience’ (What counter images, what cold abstractions/could start to quanch that living element/the flash of prophecy, the glare of action), “New Approach Needed” (People have suffered worse/And more durable wrongs/than you did on that cross/without sure prospect of/Ascending good as new/On the third day/without/’Idie, but men shall live’/As a nice cheering thought’). Amis is quite blunt in reproaching those poets who are incapable of writing intelligible poetry and take refuge in remote and complex symbols and motifs (It takes a poet to be more dishonest./... To pretend that finding or withholding meaning means any thing.’
“The Bookshop Idyll” is an open attack on such poets who inflate their ideas with the help of symbols and images especially metaphysical poets and early twentieth century poets. The poet scans the content page of a thin collection of poems and finds relief to see the names of new poets. Ironically he defends his age for the lack of pomposity and superficiality and says:

‘I travel, you see’, ‘I think’ and ‘I can read’ These titles seem to say:

But I remember you, Love is my Creed.

Poem for J:

Their poems are divided by sex—man and woman, and
Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart;
Girls are not like that.32

According to John Press:
A Bookshop Idyll reviews with malicious accuracy The contents of the typical thin anthology of modern verse:
Like all strangers, they devide by sex:
Landscape near Parma

___________Interests a man, so does The Double Vortex.

___________So does Rilke and Buddhs;

___________X       X       X

Girls are not like that.

It is characteristic of Amis that he should make a serious critical point about the nature of poetry by employing a facetious image, and that the poem which begins as an ironical survey of the differences between the verse written by men and women, should develop into a deadly attack on masculine arrogance and self satisfaction.33

The poet further says:
Women are really much nicer than men:
No wonder we like them.\textsuperscript{34}

The poet likes women rather than men as they are ‘nicer’- in the sense of beauty, charm and sex. Here is also an attack upon sex because-

Deciding this, we can forget those times
   We sat up half the night
Chockful of love, crammed with bright thoughts,
   names, rhymes,
And could not write.\textsuperscript{35}

“A Song of Experience” is another witty account of the sex life of a womanizing commercial dark-eyed traveller. The title of this collection \textit{A Case of Samples} is derived from this poem. When he was asked ‘to tell of women he had known:
   He tried all colours, white and black and coffee;
   Though quite a few were chary, more were bold;
   Some took it like the host, some like a toffee;
   The two or three who wept were soon consoled.\textsuperscript{36}

The poet ridicules the passion as expounded by three major poets:
   What Blake presaged, what Lawrence took a stand on,
   What Yeats locked up in fable, he performed.

As being a typical personality of (after Second World War) the twentieth century the traveller knew very well that fumbled ideas, wild day dreams and vulgarity in art have no importance as well as meaning for the present generation; and all such things have become outdated. Love is nothing but ‘valvet on a hand of iron’ which distracts the ‘lover from his aim’; and has no difference between Lamb and the Lion, Nausican and
Circe. ‘Counter images’ and ‘Cold abstraction’ can do nothing to quench the thirst of man’s desire but the experience is important which on the one hand, safeguards the time and, on the other hand, satisfies one’s self. As its title suggests, here the poet defends experience rather than passions and emotions which had been dominant among earlier poets.

“A Song of Experience” is typical; as if the sexual experience of the commercial traveler were to end as it begins with a smutty laugh... the sadness of Don Juanism- or sexual experience as an end in itself-slips in as if another comic anecdote... Yet after the salesman has ‘drained his Liquor’ and ‘paid his score’, even he, rootless, lonely is viewed with compassion ... the car’s trunk may hold up the samples of whatever it is he sells; nothing can buy back the possibilities of a life with meaning he has squandered. To him ‘Nausicaa and Circe were the same’, even juliet another one-night stand.”

‘Dirty Story’ is another poem about sex which presents the story of a lady whose chief aim is to cheat any one who comes in contact with her. Here the speaker is talking to the lady about her present, past and future activities in three stanzas and concludes the same in the next one:

Hero of the single action, epic expert,
Beggar prince and pandit chief of the sexy,
Spry Juan, lifter of the lifted skirt.
Here the poet is deflating the idealists who have been doing the most nasty things; then he asks the question about her ‘howling success’. In the last stanza the poet attacks ‘uneasy reverence’ as having no importance for a twentieth century man:

Reverence at such will to live in stories;
Uneasy, because we see behind your glories
Out own nasty defeat, nastier victories.\(^{39}\)

Ironically, here, ‘glories’ means the popularity gained by the lady not for her good activities but for her lustrous one. We, masculine human beings, are often defeated in our victory; but both victory and defeat are nasty things.

According to Amis, ‘Death is a nasty thing, sex a nice one. In his poem ‘Alternatives’ both are presented at the same time. It begins with the description of a white girl in a dark house’, playing on her piano in a lonely place to divert her attention from her mental anguish:

It starts: a white girl in a dark house
Alone with the piano, playing a short song;\(^{40}\)

Further he describes about the murderer who “shuffles towards the music. It end.” In the next stanza the speaker mourns over the death of the girl who

.... smiled as she played,
Hearing a step she knows, and sitting still,
Waited for the hands to move, not round
Her throat, but to her eager breasts?.\(^{41}\)

The poet exposes the reality of death which can shatter the aspiration of human being whereas sex provides pleasure. To quote Dale Francis Salwak: “Beginning in a comic world filled with verbal jokes, comic masquerades and incidents his view of
life grows increasingly pessimistic until he arrives at a fearfully grim vision of night are
world filled with hostility violence, sexual abuse and self destruction.”

As a university lecturer Amis wrote certain poems about scholarship like
“Beowulf”, “Lessons” and “Masters” out of which “Lessons” needs an extensive
explanation. The poem ‘Masters’ moves round Auden’s curt authority and laconic case;
those who are bred to command their fellows:

Those whom heredity or guns have made
Master, must show it by a common speech;
Expected words in the same stone from each
Will always be obeyed.

Then he suddenly turns from the contemplation of human strength to his
compassionate weakness in which some one is personally responsible for life and love:

By yielding mastery the will is freed,
For it is by surrender that we live,
And we are taken if we wish to give,
Are needed if we need.

According to John Press “Amis appears to be a dual personality: the cool
sardonic mocker of academic stuffness, who cocks a snook at his high brow colleagues
by reviewing science fiction and jazs records, cohabits uneasily with the serious teacher
of literature struggling against all that debases learning and flatters ignorance”.

“Lesson” is an attack upon the ulgarity of university and school life in
which the students feel so much boredom that they do not want to continue their work
beyond their class room. The poem says:

Therefore let all who teach discard their pride,
That anything is learnt except to please;
When fingers touch, or how love’s names are said,
Like any lessons, change with time and place.\(^{45}\)

The poem seems to be written under the impression of Chesterton’s “An Apology for Idlers” in which he defended the truants and accepted their habit as of his own as it gives pleasure as well as freedom. When the students come out of the school, they find their attachment with the society and forget their private life:

But out of school, always the hand will move,
Forget the private hour, and touch the world;
The voice will bowl, slur the accent of love,
The tongue slop sweets, the mind lounge home expelled.\(^{46}\)

The satirical tone is continued in his next poem “Wrong Words” in which the poet exposes the seriousness of subject matters of certain poets who select their topics related with life, death and love which for the poets of the Movement have no relevance:

Half shut our eyes dwadle down the page
Seeing the word love, the word death, the word life,
Rhyme-words of poets in a silver age:
Silver of the bauble, not of the knife.\(^{47}\)

The poems written in ‘silver age’ looks as if nice, pretty and beautiful but really speaking of little value. Amis considers art superior to other techniques as it purges our feelings. In his poem “Mightier than Pen” the poet describes the task of a poet to search out all the defects prevailing in society and put them before the readers:

I have heard that art is a kind of pill
To purge your feelings, so I will try
And catch him in my cameras eye
Transcribe him down to the last hair
Ambered, though neither rich nor rare.48

In the next stanza the speaker raises certain questions whether these camera roles are sufficient for the improvement of social ills or only the presentation of oddities are the sources of success. The poem ends on a negative answer to these questions.

Amis is a poet with deep critical sense. That he is a practising novelist also is relevant in any consideration of his poetry. And as a novelist he is close to Fielding’s classic definition of the novel as a comic epic in prose. Amis brings his observation of men and manners to bear on the themes of his poems. One such poem or a sequence of poem is “The Evans Country”. William H. Pritchard has remarked that this poem marks a break from Amis’s earlier method in the sense that it starts the phase of societal verse or light verse reflecting social manners, fashion and tipicality. But this is only partly true. The small poems compiled under the title “The Evans Country” constitute a series like different episodes of a novel. These episodes aim at the characterisation of the protagonist who is caught up in a situation which he knows is hopeless. The emphasis in the sequence is not on the unromantic architecture against which Evan’s courting take place. On the contrary, the sequence suggests how in spite of one’s occasional lapses into dreaming and reverie, one must realize the value of ordinariness which alone abides. Evans passes from one romantic experience to another but he knows that he does not belong there. Commonsense ultimately brings him home. The sequence is neither satiric nor humourous, because Amis is neither a cynic nor an entertainer. Evans accepts life. He has no regrets. But this should not he taken as a passive acquiescence in life, a sort of
stoic resignation. This acceptance follows a deep spiritual realization of the nature of life. This realization consists in the thought that living may appear to be a chain of disappointments but finally, life has its compensations:

Nice bit of haddock with poached egg, Dandee cake, Buckets of tea, then a light ale or two, and gun smoke, “Danger man; the late night Mocre Who is doing better then? What about you?"

The rhetorical questions at the end suggest the mood of reconciliation and acceptance.

The Movement poets have a group pride in the new provincialism which they had introduced in English poetry. Subsequently this provincialism became one of the major sources of criticism. Their poetry was labelled as the middle brow muse. These poets were accused of lacking the ‘vital awareness of the continuum outside themselves, of the mysteries bodied over against them in the created universe, which they fail to experience with any degree of sharpness or to embody with mistress and sensuous depth.” Michael Kir Kham has remarked that the Movement poets were guilty of “partisan self advertising polemics and prescriptive manifestes for one kind of poetry”, which limits “the possibilities of poetry and discourage(s) growth outside and within the group”. The qualities which these critics single out for criticising are found in Kingsley Amis much more than any other poets of the group. In fact, most of the poets of the group have in retrospect regretted their movement phase. Only Amis has remained unrepentant. His later poems are as rooted in reason and common sense as his earlier poems. They
have the same degree of control over image and rhythm. They lack, however, the non-
challant debunking mood of the earlier poems. The later poems reveal him as an enemy of the growing crappiness of the times but Amis has the capacity of congratulating him that he has come through this crappiness and remains as undefiant and unrepentant as ever:

So bloody good luck to you, mate,
That you weren’t born too late
For at least a chance of happiness,
Before unchangeable crappiness
Spreads over all the land.
Be glad you’re fifty-and
That you got there, while things were nice,
In a world worth looking at twice.”

Of late poetry has ceased to be a central creative preoccupation with Amis. He has turned almost entirely to prose fiction. This is probably the reason why his poetry has remained largely ignored. Even those who recognise the historical role of Kingsley Amis’ poems, conceding that he has written some really good poems, are quite skeptical about the value of his poetry as a whole. Thus Michael Schidmt defended his exclusion of Kingsley Amis from his anthology of contemporary poetry on the ground that Amis was not central to the tradition of English poetry:

Kingsley Amis has written good poems. Yet they don’t add up (to the English poetic tradition_ in the way (Philip) Larkin’s or (W.S.) Graham do. They are in a sense peripheral to Amis’s other work and to English poetry while Larkin’s are central and taken together, add
up to an important body of work. The less successful poems cannot be written off: they are a part of a continuing exploration.\textsuperscript{53}

Amis has summed up his achievement in the following words:
What I was doing was knocking British-anti-American and I thought, put all the old arguments into the mouth of a very unsympathetic character. I thought this was quite a good way of showing up all those British attitudes. But I must have muffled it somewhere along the line.”\textsuperscript{54}

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\section*{References}

9. Ibid., p. 96.
15. Ibid., p. 19.
16. Ibid.,
19. Ibid., p. 36.
23. Ibid., p. 50.
26. Ibid., p. 55.