CONCLUSION

The three poets whose poems have been discussed in the foregoing pages in the thesis represent the most important phase of English poetry in the 1950’s. These poets set out to rehabilitate English poetry in the English soil. They abandoned the modernist cosmopolitanism of the twenties and they also abandoned the socialist attitudinising of the thirties. The neo-romantic obsession with morbid subjectivity was also not to their taste and their reaction to Dylan Thomas symbolises their profound disgust with a poetry that sought to exclude the near and the immediate and that ignored the prevailing cultural and aesthetic crisis which had resulted from mass culture and consumerist commercialism. These poets who constitute what has now come to be accepted as the Movement were not alone in reacting against the received poetic traditions. There was mushrooming of schools and movements in the post-Second World War years. The Apocalyptics, the Group, the Movement are some of the significant reactionary groups of poets that emerged during these years. These were the years of all round change in social and cultural aspects of British life. Even though the First World War had jolted the British sensibility as never before, there was hardly any change in the cannons of morality or social attitudes which had come down from the Victorian period. The Voyage Without and the Voyage within had taken place without seriously jeopardising the moral and social concepts evolved during the industrial revolution which had made England the workshop of the world during the last few years of the nineteenth century. It was only
after the Second World War that these conons and concepts came under fire. There was a wide-spread resentment against the moral and cultural standards of the elders. This resentment found expression in matters of sex, marriage and family life. It was in the mid-fifties that the changes which had been slowly and gradually emerging in the British social and cultural life received wider public awareness. The ‘combative, irreverant, defiant, edgy and ironic mood’ of the period was symbolised by the movement which sought to launch a vigorous search for new social and moral values. Initially, its attitude was that of ridicule and satiric contempt and this is the reason why the fifties in designated as the angry decade. The writers of the period were faced with a serious spiritual problem. When they looked around themselves, they did not find much which they could affirm and sustain. They had to discover those values and ideals which had given substance to British social and cultural life. They revived realism which helped them in refuting much of the poetic mannerisms of the modernists and their followers. The Movement brought together poets and writers who believed in the ideology of commonsense and an impatient desire to get on with playing their part in the supposedly real literary tradition that predated the modernists.

In this search they began to scrutinize the British culture and literature over the ages. After rejecting their twentieth century predecessors they also rejected the romantics and the Victorians. When they looked back to the eighteenth century they realized that it was during that period that English society and English literature had moved hand in hand. The Augustan poets did not look upon themselves as dreamers or
dealers in fantasy. They brought poetry closer to life and imagination fed upon real experiences. Commonsense was their guiding principle in the choice of themes and regularity of verse forms and a shared poetic diction determined their technique. Further, the eighteenth century poets had also very little to affirm and sustain in contemporary life but this did not lead them to reject their social responsibility. They accepted the contemporary barreness and by satirising and ridiculing the current social and political modes, they created an awareness in the public consciousness of the necessity of collective effort in safeguarding the values and ideals of stable social life which alone could sustain a healthy literary culture.

This desire for striking deeper and wider roots in the public mind is the characteristic feature of the poetry of Philip Larkin, Donald Davie and Kingsley Amis. Sometime they appear to be pessimistic and disheratened but on the whole they are guided by an awareness of a larger social and moral role of the writer in a society which was fast losing its moorings.

It is obvious that Philip Larkin is the most important Movement poet. Beginning his poetic career as a followers of Yeats and Auden, Larkin did not take much time in shaking off romanticism. Thomas Hardy became his most favourite poet because Hardy had also refused to be deceived by any kind of romantic dreaming. Like Hardy, Larkin writes again and again of the loss of that communal social life which had inspired the writers of the past and which had charactrized the British social life. Like Hardy, once again, Larkin writes again and again of the wastage of human life which time brings
about, his poems are designed to preserve experience from this wastage. He has confessed that his primary responsibility as a poet is to save experiences from oblivion. This awareness of the all-conquering time lends a peculiar elegiac tone to his poems and reminds us of the poetry of Thomas Gray. Where he differs from Gray is in his tight and complete control over his matter and manner and the poetry that results from this is one in which there is no surplusage. He may, at times, sound insular and narrow, possessed of what has been called a ‘frightened, welfare state mentality’ but his singular achievement as a poet is his discovery of a new poetic language. Sceptical of the possibility of any grand poetic gesture, Larkin writes his poems in a language which though bare and unornamented is nevertheless expressive of the new socio-cultural ethos.

Donald Davie is a poet-critic. In fact, his critical writings have tended to overshadow his poetic achievement. He was among the first few poets who launched a blistering attack on the modernist distortions of the poetic syntax and pleaded for a new prosaic approach to the diction and technique of poetry. His 1952 book, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* has been rightly regarded as the manifesto of the new poetry of the fifties. Partly, the book was written in reaction against the poetry of Dylan Thomas and his followers in the late 1940s. But the book also articulates Davie’s dissatisfaction with the modernist allusive and mythic technique. Davie pleaded for the regular poetic syntax, the revival of traditional verse form and the rehabilitation of reason in poetry. He refused to accept the current notion that there was any permanent connection between poetic vocation and exhibitionism and egoism. The Movement received its most whole-hearted
defence from the critical writings of Davie who asserted that the Movement was no
dogma but embodied the poets’ desire for discipline and decorum. His dominant theme as
a poet is the search for discipline in poetic language. The gravest sin, that a poet might
commit is the sin against language by cheapening it and by using it in an imprecise
manner. Davie also revived Thomas Hardy for his generation. Davie is Augustan in the
sense that he pleads for a poetry which is rational address to a reading public. Poetry for
him is not a turning loose of emotions, it is a statement of fact which has a precise
meaning for the poet as well as for the reading public. He is primarily a poet of places
and his poems on English districts and countries are his unique contribution to English
poetry.

Kingsley Amis is a confirmed debunker. He debunks every kind of
authority, every kind of idealism and his technique is a mixture of Alexander Pope and
W.H. Auden. He is a writer of social verse but not socialist verse. Most of his poems are
concerned with the concept of authority as his novel *Lucky Jim*. He looks at every kind of
authority as legitimatizing power and he was not alone among the poets of the fifties to
concern himself with such matters. He is also a poet of provincial realism. Though a
close associate of Philip Larkin, Amis avoids his elegiac approach but a deep strain of
pessimism runs through his poems. This pessimism arises out of the awareness that
nothing in contemporary British life has any sanctity. He cannot be didactic because the
British sensibility has degenerated so much that it has no ear for sanity Amis, however,
shares with Larkin a passionless despair. He is acutely aware of a spiritual and moral
vacuity which cannot be filled by any kind of attitudinizing. Amis has been called an entertaining poet but this is a misconception based on a superficial reading of his poems. The hillarity and tone of gay abandon which one notices on the surface of his poems conceal within their patterns a profound sense of disturbance and meaninglessness.

Thus Larkin, Davie, and Amis who form the core of the Movement appealed to the ideals of clarity and ordinariness in literature. They tried to rectify the excesses and extravagances of the modernist tradition. There were other poets also in the fifties who were sympathetic to the ideals of the Movement but in course of time they found these ideals a little too restrictive and narrow and denounced them in no uncertain terms. But these three poets continued to be Movement poets and though they allowed several other influences to work upon them they preserved the basic ideals of rationality, commonsense and clarity in their poems. Their vision of limitation which has been singled out for derision and critical attack was a deeprooted spiritual necessity at a time when English poetry desperately needed a new direction, a new vocabulary if it was not to be redundant and repetitive. These poets, though their individual achievements vary from one another, together addressed themselves to this task and accomplished it eminently.