CHAPTER V

OTHER RECURRENT THEMES

*Loaded with the sum of all they saw*
Larkin has repeatedly been attacked by critics for the narrow thematic range of his poetry. These critics, however, fail to notice that his work deals with universally fundamental issues like choice, time, old age, death, which further divide into sub-issues like love, sex, marriage. In any case, it is a self-imposed thematic limitation which strengthens rather than weakens Larkin’s poetry and makes it surprisingly very profound. Also, that he was a meticulous artist can hardly be overlooked. The analysis of his poems in the foregoing chapters sufficiently illustrates this. These earlier chapters treat his major themes and show how imagery helps in the treatment of these themes. In the present chapter, only such themes and imagery are considered, which though not major, are yet often at the very hub of Larkin’s thought.

Thus, agnosticism, though a blanket theme in the poetry, is also often very compelling in some of his poems. Church Going is an example. Though already analysed earlier in detail in the chapter of alienation, it remains a glaring example of a shorn, almost shattered theological psyche in post-war England. With an apparent cue from the lines “Hatless, I take off/My cycle-clips in awkward reverence.” (CP, p.97) Alfred Alvarez comments:

This, in concentrated form, is the image of the post-war Welfare State Englishman: shabby and not concerned with his appearance; poor- he has a bike, not a car;
gauche but full of agnostic piety; underfed, unpaid, overtaxed, hopeless, bored, wry.¹

Strange as it might appear, the question of personal integrity also got stuck to agnosticism. For personal integrity was the issue, more fundamental than all other issues of life like love, sex, marriage, work, or death. The self had become important and so was its integrity. When this 'self' is challenged, it gives way to negation and nihilism. Alan Sinified foresaw the breakdown of personal integrity as a further deterioration of the post-war condition:

Distress at the fracturing of an older, stable social order which is felt to be necessary to civilization stimulates the move towards renunciation, transcending a world that seems now to offer so little.²

Stephen Regan measures the agnostic mood of Church Going in the social context and observes that attendance at religious congregations was declining fast. He quotes Arthur Marwick claiming that at the beginning of 1950s less than 10 percent of the population were church-goers. The church was marginalised, confined to the rituals of birth, death and marriage. Larkin's faithlessness sometimes recalls contemporary political quietism. Thus, in Church Going the personae or persona as the prototype of Larkin mockingly asks a serious question, which turns out to be on the efficacy of religious congregations in church! Larkin does seem sure that churches would very soon cease to play a divine role in individual life, but, hopes it would endure as part of the tradition. The persona as a visitor in the church, appears to waver between faith and faithlessness. The poem con-
cludes that the state of faithlessness would not also stay very long. But then, even after total loss of faith in God and transcendental life, Larkin appears to prophesy, that these churches would play a role in providing emotional and spiritual edification. But why this? Is it out of nostalgia? or is it just a counter pointing?

Since *Church Going* has already been discussed at length in a previous chapter, it is thought advisable to study Larkin’s other poems to see how steadfast Larkin was in his agnostic attitude. Apart from the easy answer of a post-war condition, the engrained scepticism might be the upshot of his own disillusioned psyche. *Faith Healing*, for instance, with irony and pathos in its title is explicit with its reflection on the prevailing state of disbelief. But, between the lines, the credulous nature of women is mocked at. Such credulity, made mode manifest in females, is always prone to believe! The poem depicts an American Evangelist who pretends hypothetically to cure women of their maladies with his spiritual power. The women line up to seek his blessings which, in a peculiar way, relieve them of their emotional fixations. Stephen Regan, in his historicist approach to Larkin’s work, appears determined to signify the context more than the attitude of the poem. He observes:

> What is particular about the poem, then is its context and not just its outlook; it is not so much a poem about “the human condition” as about the nature of belief and disbelief in a ‘particular’ phase of twentieth century culture.
But a little indepth study of the poem shows that the particular mood of the poem is itself a part of human psychology. Disillusionment and disappointment in life may convert one into faithlessness any time. This difference of opinion with Regan’s point of view is based on the fact that the poem concentrates on the vulnerability of women’s faith rather than the impact of a culture in a particular period. Circumstances do, of course, affect human psychology, and therefore contribution of the post-war situation may not be ruled out altogether. However, the poet’s depiction of only women’s belief, as in this case is significant. Furthermore, identical irreligious outpourings may also be traced in any phase of history. Besides, other poets of Larkin’s period donot necessarily sound as agnostic in their work. Non-inclusion of male members in the congregation is deliberate and in this, there is a clear suggestion that gullibility in women is a human condition. The Evangelist in the poem identified as Billy Grahm, who visited England frequently in the 1950s, is ofcourse important for the context, yet, self-delusion in feminine nature is itself a predicament. some critics think this to be a case of Larkin’s being vindictive against women. In fact, faith and faithlessness go hand in hand, in all ages and at all times with the difference that one often overrides the other at a particular point of time. The exaggerated emphasis on the feminine religiosity is also ironical, for male and female can both be credulous. Men as well as women can cherish the illusion of faith even in the worst of conditions, both of which for Larkin would in any case delusions. In Church Going also, the last believers in the church are the “dubious women.”
However, promtings for the poem is said to have come from a real situation,

Or, after dark, will dubious women come

To make their children touch a particular stone; (CP., p.97)

The illustration becomes symbolic with its powerfully characteristic image of the preacher:

Upright in rimless glasses, silver hair,

Dark suit, white collar. (CP., p.126)

The women are made into submissively passive subjects:

Slowly the women file to where he stands. (CP., p.126)

The stature of the healer becomes lucidly vivid:

Within whose warm spring rain of loving care,

Each dwells some twenty seconds. (CP., p.126)

Larkin's disenchantment of religion is ample in his ridicule of the illusion of faith in God:

And, scarcely pausing, goes into a prayer

Directing God about this eye, that knee. (CP., p.126)

the second stanza is made to reveal the psychological effect of such pseudo-religious healings. Pathos in the description of women goes against them. The delusion of faith is the direct consequence of the failure of will-power. Women are chosen to depict this feeble will power in both man and woman. Sheer sympathetic listening helps the priest arouse the emotions. Kind and affectionate words in return help give the seeker solace. The poem exploits psychological moorings of faith. Pretentious depiction of the Evangelist is
intended to strike at the divine charisma of his personality. With this, Larkin’s iconclasm which makes him debunk all absolutes, is reaffirmed. Larkin offends the Wordsworthian image of childhood by calling the human latent religious impulse as that of “a kind of dumb/ And idiot child.” (CP., p.126) Thus parallelism is psychological as well, because a child is made to cry by showing love and affection towards him at a crucial juncture. The figurative presentation of the women after their meeting with the healer, echoes with the poet’s disillusionment:

...then, exiled

Like losing thoughts, they go in silence...

(CP., p.126)

Larkin concretises such loss of thought by juxtaposing it to the forceful image in ‘exiled’. With extremely compressed image and metaphor Larkin is able to crystalize his hypothesis to make it a live experience. It is not only women’s credulity and through it, human credulity as well, that Larkin despises, he also visualises them, and through them portrays the general human predicament as despicable.

...Moustached in flowered frocks they shake. (CP., p.126)

Faith Healing is different from Church Going in as much as none, that is, in Faith Healing the church has ceased to function as a religious place, though the poem is remarkable for its religious ritual. However, in both poems, women are made stuck to their old, defunct idea of religion. Faith Healing is, of course, rather offensive with its animal imagery for women “sheepishly stray”, “stay stiff”, “twitching and loud/with deep hoarse tears” and, as caressed by emotionally charged idiom “Warm spring rain of lov-
ing care.” The occasion is made casual with its deviation extending only to ‘some twenty seconds.’ Nevertheless this short encounter with the Evangelist proves psychologically powerful so that “thawing, the rigid landscape weeps,” The emotional release from tension becomes tangible through ludicrous depiction.

...and such a joy arrives
Their thick tongues blort, their eyes squeeze grief, a crowd
Of huge unheard answers jam and rejoice-  

(CP., p.126)

In the final stanza Larkin argues that:

...In everyone there sleeps
A sense of life lived according to love.
To some it means the difference they could make
By loving others, but across most it sweeps
As all they might have done had they been loved.
That nothing cures...

(CP., p.126)

So, love could be a substitute of religion, and may be instrumental in drawing the spirit out into a blessed union with something outside of itself! However, for the sceptical Larkin, the experience of love could also come off as futile drama, which further ushers in more disillusionment.

But Larkin was not altogether an atheist. He recognised the psychological exigency of some sort of faith for the sake of emotional security. Thus, Water is a poem written a little earlier than Church Going, and is one more manifestation of Larkin's hunger for some substitute of religion. In fact, he was sceptical about dogmatic religion and the nature of belief associated with it. He wanted to secularize
the system of faith. In Water, he employs the conceit of “water” with profound connotations. In the Christian context, water is generally a cleansing element washing away sin. It is believed to purge a person of all the faults inherited from the person’s ancestors whereafter the person is supposed reborn. Water is a short poem, of only four stanzas in which the Water-metaphor is introduced in the first stanza, and develops through the poem till it is concentrated in the final stanza. Usually, in Larkin’s poems, the argument is subverted in the closing lines, but this time the image of ‘non-chalance’ is established in the very opening:

If I were called in
To construct a religion
I should make use of water. (CP, p.93)

The visualization of water as compounded of light in an earthly glass, suggests that the persona proposes for his new religion some kind of transparency against the mystifications characteristically inherent in a ‘transcendental’ of church religion. Through ‘Any-angled light’, he eliminates all differences begot by orthodoxy in order that he himself may beget something secular. The difference with Church Going is that Water is exceptionally cleansed of attachment to both people and narrative Swarbrick comments:

It is tempting to see ‘Water’ as an almost ‘voiceless’
poem in which ‘attention is so absorbed in the object
that identity is neutralised into a kind of impersonality.’

Andrew Motion thinks the glass of water has been treated as a symbol “transformed into an imaginative apprehension of endlessness, in which all knowledge of time
and its constraints and of self and its shortcomings, is set aside."

The glass of water raised high is imparted with a religiously pious attribute. The speaker wishes the light to congregate endlessly in the water which, he suggests, may substitute the religion of the religious congregation in the church. The reverence paid to the elemental presence of both water and light appears to momentarily fill the empty space created by the extinction of the institution of the church. This new religion, the persona feels, gives special significance to water and light in an earthly glass which is likely to offer a detached, unemotional view of religion as an idealised state of faith. However, the paradox is that Larkin counters a ritual with another ritual. He rejects the formalized, even ritualized Christianity, which he has long thought dry of the spirit, therefore hard and harsh:

Going to church
would entail a fording
to dry, different clothes:  

and proffers:

My liturgy would employ
Images of sousing
A furious devout drench,

Water if taken as a symbol of re-birth may also imply revival of faith which Larkin somewhat anticipates in Church Going:

And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious
And gravitating with it to this ground..... (CP., p.98)

In his characteristic style, a note of affirmation often undermines the sceptical reasoning of all the preceding stanzas in such poems. Therefore, ambiguity about religious faith is apparent because complete affirmation or negation is absent. In *Church Going* the church has lost its validity as a place of worship. Still, it continues to function for some positive purpose; either it perpetuates a tradition, or, it helps provide some kind of solace to some grieving believer or the other. The evangelical preacher in *Faith Healing* is though a mockery of faith, proves quite a psychoanalyst, for all said and done he is able to reach out to the intrinsic love impulse in man and even provides an outlet to evil emotions. The suggestion that what is needed is a new religion in *Water*, is in fact, an affirmation disguised as negation. Grave and sombre, as well as, ludicrous imagery mark these poems and remarkably concretize seen and felt experience of abstract ideas: “A serious house on serious earth”, “Bored, uninformed”, “accoutred frowsty barn”, in *Church Going*: ‘Upright in rimless glasses, silver hair/ dark suit white collar/ Directing God”, in *Faith Healing* and in *Water* ‘a fording/ To dry, different clothes’, ‘Images of sousing/ A furious devout drench’ all of which mock at faith very seriously.

That was Larkin’s poetry showing him deeply longing for some kind of spiritual solace because dogmatic religion failed to satisfy. This much, then he was religious, and for some reasons agnostic.

Now, Time and Old Age, also, are together such fixations for Larkin that he is unable to relieve himself of the obsession even in his last poems.
Of course, the ideas were there earlier too. Thus, in *The Less Deceived* this theme has been dealt with some urgency and, is a muted preoccupation in *The Whitsun Weddings* also, but it becomes blatantly explicit in *High Windows*. Lonely, and often almost desperate, Larkin was forever awfully sensitive to passing time which became starkly terrible when he was abandoned by Winifred with whom he had developed intimacy during his stay at Belfast. Andrew Motion maintains that he wrote eight poems in three months time after her departure. In most of them he emphasised the sharp division between past, present and future. Since the fear of death had ever been phenomenal to Larkin, he almost felt its approach through the passage of time. He has dealt with the enigma of time in a number of poems. Nearly all of them stress that death helps appreciate ‘Time. And, for Larkin, Time is not simply a movement of the clock advancing meaninglessly. Rather, existence is to be understood in the context of its temporality, that is, in relation to a past, present and future. As a matter of fact all our idiosyncrasies, our concerns and anxieties, are bound up with Time. What Larkin wants to say in his poems is that human finitude is ascertained by the negativity of time, because past is a ‘no-longer’ and future is ‘a not-yet’, and, the present is itself perpetual transition. Therefore, in his Time poems the main thrust is the inaccessibility and impenetrability of Time!

Thus, *Triple Time* as the title suggests, dramatizes what Larkin thinks are the clear manifest phases of time. Each phase of Time is treated separately in a whole stanza, getting visual images to portray it. Thus, the first stanza imagines the present with:
This empty street, this sky to blandness scoured,

This air, a little indistinct with autumn. (CP, p.73)

The present is dull, empty, bland, and uninspiring. The present is ‘Like a reflection of the past with ‘an air lambent with adult enterprise.’ Thus, this very present was once ‘the future furthest childgood saw.’ The present is forever lapsing itself into the past. It has past in it too and so is ‘traditionally soured,’ often appearing ‘unrecommended by event.’ And soon this present becomes the past, “A valley of cropped by fat neglected chances’ to be remembered with regret because the past too is lamented for present misfortunes:

On this we blame our last

Threadbare perspectives, seasonal decrease. (CP,p.73)

This sense of remorse becomes much more intense in old age which is one of seasonal decrease.’

Finally, the poem argues that we are perpetual victims of Time’s illusion, for, the present only exists in relation to its past and future. The present is a transition between the promises of future and disillusionment of the past. The present is illusory because it is not supported by the expectations of future. However, it is regretted, when past, for its wrong perceptions.

In Lines on a Young Lady’s Photograph Album Larkin is original enough to use a photograph’s album to concretize a dark and bleak vision of Time. The album helped the poet contextualise Time, which is otherwise an ungraspable phenomenon. What seems to be in monologue, turns itself into an emotional dialogue between the persona and an erstwhile lady-love, Winifred; the intimacy
is now preserved in photographs taken at different stages of Winifred’s life. The past did somewhat haunt Larkin, for, looking at photographs appears with him a persistent habit.

Now, the album does recover and recall earlier life-stations only as ‘sighted-articulations’, and help initiate a dialogue which turn out to be quite self-revealing for the speaker-persona. The album also helps achieve a contemporaneity with Winifred’s past, as well as with her future. Furthermore, captured poses make the age-factor at various life-milestones prominent:

   In pigtails, clutching a reluctant cat;
   Or furred yourself, a sweet girl-graduate;
   Or lifting a heavy-headed rose
   Beneath a trellis, or in a trilby hat.  \(\text{(CP., p.71)}\)

Against either of these disjunctions, or telescoped reconstructions, stands a solitary speaker-persona, Larkin himself:

   (Faintly disturbing, that, in several ways) -
   From every side you strike at my control... \(\text{(CP., p.71)}\)

Past, present and future are thus counterpointed to help the speaker-persona recall and recover a past and lost time and play with notions of memory, age and nostalgia. Through conjunctions, disjunctions and telescoping, the poet gets distance, contemporaneity and even simultaneity. Yet this exercise was indeed futile because the past can hardly ever be reclaimed, photograph-albums notwithstanding. Regret and disappointment are the only result:

   In short, a past that no one now can share... \(\text{(CP., p.72)}\)
The lady in the photograph seen ‘a real girl in real place’ is no longer real. Her past is dead for ever. The woman in the poem is symbolic for an irrecoverable past. Apart from all other dimensions of the poem, it embodies all those things which ‘lacerate/simply by being over’ and lead the speaker to say ‘You/ contract my heart by looking out of date.’ It is a kind of a resigned and quietest acceptance of the present. We have no way to recover the past and we are left only with the freedom to cry:

It leaves us free to cry.  

(CP., p.72)

Our grief lies in ‘The gap from eye to page’, a gap which cannot be filled but only mourned, and, that too, without a chance of consequence. The past too appears ‘like a heaven’ where

...You lie Unvariably lovely there,

Smaller and clearer as the year’s go by.  

(CP., p.71)

Regretfully that past cannot be recovered and can only help make the present more miserable. Overtly these poems may have biographical overtones but they do poemize the phenomenon of Time with profound pathos.

Having done with a photograph album, Larkin in Reference Back uses the device of a jazz record to recall and recover the past. It is one of those poems his mother may have inspired. About his mother Andrew Motion writes:

Difficult and limiting as she was, his mother produced the mental weather in which his poems prospered, and many of his best were either triggered by her or actually, about her.6

The poem deals with the all too familiar sense of helplessness, with which
the poet seemed quite fixated also. He felt lonely and helpless. The speaker-persona plays a jazz-record repeatedly. It relates his past to the present. The poem presents the wry and disgruntled persona who appears reminded of his mother's unwarranted behaviour through those particular record-replays. It actually preserved the charged moment of disappointment between the speaker persona and his mother:

That was a pretty one, I heard you call
From the unsatisfactory hall
To the unsatisfactory room where I
Played record after record, idly,
Wasting my time at home, that you
Looked so much forward to. (CP, p.106)

The rift between the speaker-persona and his mother was thirty years old. But, the record replays his past, present and future loom large superimposing into each other when his 'unsatisfactory prime' and his mother's 'unsatisfactory age' inordinately clash. Personal limitation aside, the poet, by replacing 'I' and 'You' with 'We' in the final stanza gives the lines universal appeal:

Truly, Though our element is time,
We are not suited to the long perspectives
Open at each instant of our lives
They link us to our losses; worse,
They show us what we have as it once was,
Blindingly undiminished, just as though
By acting differently we could have kept it so. (CP, p.106)
Send No Money actually caricatures Time- "The fobbed/Impendent belly of Time'. In a conversational tone and with almost a performance potential the poem dramatizes the fatalistic and deterministic dimensions of life. The persona-speaker stands pigmied before the giant of Time and looks comic asking Time some Truths about how the things which ultimately shape life happened to happen. The answer sounds likes from an affectionate elderly figure:

Sit here, and watch the hail
Of occurrence clobber life out
To a shape no one sees-

(CP., p.146)

To the pigmy-persona that proved hardly anything:

What does it prove? Sod all
In this way I spent youth.

(CP., p.146)

This is a poetic version of what Larkin expressed in a letter he wrote on his fortieth birthday:

Looking back on my first 40 years, I think what strikes me most is that hardly any of the things that are supposed to happen or be so do in fact happen or are so. What little happens or is so isn't at all expected or agreeable. And I don't feel that everything could have been different if only I'd acted differently- to have acted differently I should have needed to have felt differently, to have been different, which means going back years and years, out of my life time.?

Now, fear of death was a common feature of the Post War psyche. Its up-
shot was growing disbelief in ideas of an Eternity and Immortality. All was thought to end with death. Indifference of the new generation towards the old made old age itself a big horror. Larkin’s The Old Fools expresses his anger ‘at the humiliation of age’ as well as at the old for reminding us of age.

As is always characteristic of this poet, he is forever forthcoming with a counter point. However, the earlier stance of ‘argumentative ventriloquism’ changes and this poem opens with blatantly declarative directness asking questions:

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

(CP., p.196)

In this telling detail on senility Larkin makes the reader almost see, hear and smell old age. What is worse is, and the poet mourns at it, is old age loosing all sense of time to ‘alternate things back’ ‘if they only chose’. Worse still the terror of death becomes outrageous in old age:

Why aren’t they scream?

(CP., p.196)

The poem imagines what it feels like to be old and ‘it describes something so purely ‘over’ that there is an overpowering sense of being asphyxiated. The Old Fools depicts Larkin’s fear of death and disgust at old age, with some frankness. This time he does not attitudenise his proposition. There is no compassion or pathos in the language. The opening questions are venomously directed at senile decay. Swarbrick thinks:

This loud aggression is self-defensive: it loathes old
people because they remind the speaker of his own old age and death.  

That death is an event outside the Self was a conviction that made the trauma of old age more terrible. This attitude is evident in the plain description of the human anatomy:

At death, you break up: the bits that were you  
Start speeding away from each other forever  
With no one to see.  

(Solitariness becomes too tragic to bear in the old age. The poem seems to suggest that old age is death in stages and the forms of dying are graduated:

...And these are the first signs:  
Not knowing how, not hearing who, the power  
Of choosing gone.  

The loss of the illusory power of decision makes the nearness to death most urgent, for, the power of choosing illusory though it later proves, is quite a possibility. Old age as second childhood submerges into oblivion and is not acceptable because what follows childhood is in any case, a power of choosing, however illusory, whereas old age has no such illusion left:

...It’s only oblivion, true:  
We had it before, but then it was going to end...  

Also, childhood -  

...was all the time merging with a unique end  
To bring to bloom the million-petalled flower  
Of being here.  

(Also, childhood -  

...was all the time merging with a unique end.  
To bring to bloom the million-petalled flower  
Of being here.  

(CP., p.196)
To the contrary, in old age:

...Their looks show that they’re for it

Ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried into lines-How can
they ignore it? (CP., p.196)

Living with the faint images of the past they forget the present, their past is not recovered, They lose their present and they cannot alter their future:

...That is where they live

Not here and now, but where all happened once. This is why they give

An air of baffled absence, trying to be there

Yet being here. (CP., p.196)

But the excruciating phenomenon of passing time that is of a past, present and future cannot ever be transcended. “For the rooms grow farther’ leaving/incompetent cold.” The final image of an ‘Extinction’s alp’ is insight yet ‘what keeps them quiet’ is its uncertainty of the time of its approach. Childhood gives way to youth, but ‘inverted childhood’ is the final end. The poet feels like screaming at the cruelty of senility along with the unresolved mystery of extinction but is able somehow to reach restraint. ‘Well, We shall find out.’

The poet has carefully graded old age with images that gradually move forward. In the first stanza the initial stage is communicated through ‘mouth hangs open and drools’ feeling ‘crippled or tight’ indulging in ‘thin continuous dreaming/watching light move’ and also keeping “on pissing yourself” and loosing memory for they ‘can’t remember/who called this
Then comes on oblivion, a second childhood, when all power of choice is completely lost, not that it was quite there earlier in life, and, senses become too weak to respond. The vision of this time station is that of ‘Ash hair, toad hands prune face dried into lines.’ The extreme is at a ‘baffled absence,’ and, ‘the constant wear and tear/of taken breath, and them crouching below.’

Uncertain reigns supreme for now the ground slips beneath the feet. To this portrayal, Larkin’s earlier attempts on the subject of old age appear comparatively lighter. They are poorer in imagery and superficial in thought. Age written in 1954 is an example:

O’ you tall game I tired myself with joining!

Now I wade through you like knee-level weeds

And it ends saying:

...By now so much has flown

From the nest here of my head that I needs must turn

To know what prints I leave, whether of feet,

Or spoor of pads, or a bird’s adept splay.

Also, Long Sight in Age too is immature and inconvincing:

They say eyes clear with age;

and-

The many-levelled trees,
The long soft tides of grass
Wrinkling away the gold
Wind-ridden waves- all these,
They say, come back to focus
As we grow old. (CP, p.105)

However, these two poems, lesser in intensity and experience, nevertheless show Larkin's bemoaning advancing years quite early in life.

Inconclusiveness, seemingly a poetic technique of deviousness, also turns out to be an important theme in Larkin's hand. In the discussion of The Dance, Andrew Motion gives a cue:

It's five printed pages in the Collected Poems are a fascinating ruin, their fragmentariness powerfully reinforcing the poem's theme of incompletions.\(^9\)

The Dance is not the only poem which articulates Larkin's inarticulacy. Very often his poems stand as sheer incomplete statements. However, they are usually rich with the wealth of detail and, also develop well through argumentative rhetoric. Still, something is importantly left unsaid, for which, the reader feels impatiently inquisitive. Shyness and scorn, the two mutually destructive elements in his personality patterned this fragmentariness in his verse. His experience of life, lacking in many many ways, as he confesses also in The Dance:

....It's pathetic how
So much most people half my age have learned
Consumes me... (CP, p.156)

This is conveyed through his art as a yearning for something 'out of each'. In his poetry, as a result, death remains the unsolved mystery, and its experience only half-done; choice is futile phenomenon; alienation partial;
happiness transitory; love and sex unsatisfiable; marriage an imperfect bond; religiosity an inadequate edification; and culture incompatible. Historically also, post-war English poetry was chiefly characterised by extra-ordinary scepticism. The Movement group, of which Larkin was, for sometime, the leading poet, felt an urgent need of some kind of inhibition to curb all romantic excess. This exercise of check and restraint, in Larkin’s case, is often seen as ‘sad-eyed reaction.’ However, the characteristic wariness of his poetry may also be understood in terms of a vigilant readjustment process, necessary for an unsettled post-war England. The general atmosphere of uncertainty in the generation of this period made the writers opt for a ‘desired neutrality’. Therefore, they tried to achieve the poetical ideal of ‘a moderate writer’. Robert Conquest assumed that poetry could maintain a ‘free and neutral stance’. In the Introduction to New Lines, Conquest encouraged restraint against the excesses of romanticism, as part of the general intellectual ambience of the time. Thus, the technique of non-commitment, or, the theme of incompleteness, in Larkin’s poetry is part-personal and part-cultural or part-contemporary.

Most of his poems are marked by an ambivalence in attitude and approach, and therefore, do not concretize any definite stance, on an otherwise thoroughly discussed issue. Love, for instance, never achieves complete fruition in his poems: even those in which one may claim that it is near to success. Therefore, they are weakened in their power somehow. Thus Wedding Wind, a poem of excitement and fulfilment, loses its very spirit of happiness with a number of queries that are nevertheless incorporated in the poem:
Can it be borne, this bodying-forth by wind
Of joy my actions turn on, like a thread
Carrying beads? Shall I be left to sleep
Now this perpetual morning shares my bed? (CP., p.11)

The speaker-persona appears sad because other people and animals are deprived
of that kind of contentment.

…and I was sad
That any man or beast that night should lack
The happiness I had. (CP., p.11)

Yet another example is An Arundel Tomb. This poem too registers identical anxi-
eties in its approach to the subject of love. The poet carefully weighs losses and
gains in the domain of love. And finally, the poem comes to quite a contradictory
conclusion. It is that love is merely a theoretical possibility! The crucial hinge is
only a possibility that it might succeed:

Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stone fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love. (CP., p. 111)

Talking in Bed depicts two loving souls lying together in bed. This must be a very
happy moment, but the excitement suffers when honesty in love itself is questioned
with ‘The wind’s incomplete unrest’ which the couple hear as ‘more and more time
passes silently.’ The ceaselessly changing wind the lovers hear conveys the
unsettled incompleteness of the couple’s feelings for each other. They are lying together, but the silence achingly brewing between them is quite tormenting so that there is hesitation to commit! And, for Larkin, commitment itself poses a threat to personal identity. It also once again confirms that he relishes a love inaccessible and unrequited rather than a love fulfilled. In fact, the theme of incompleteness also reinforces taciturnity as another significant aspect of Larkin’s poetry:

\[
\text{It becomes more difficult to find} \\
\text{Words at once true and kind,} \\
\text{Or not untrue and not unkind. (CP., p.129)}
\]

This phenomenon of the failure of language is clearly noticeable in many a poem of Larkin. We see that unfinished state of The Dance is caused due:

\[
\text{To something snapped off short, and localized} \\
\text{Half-way between the gullet and the tongue. (CP., p.156)}
\]

The turbulent stasis of speechlessness is created in Larkin’s poems when they show how they aspire to things ‘out of reach’. Andrew Swarbrick significantly says:

\[
\text{In Larkin’s case, this meant a yearning for} \\
\text{metaphysical absolutes, for states of being imagines,} \\
\text{as it were, beyond the reach of language.}^{10}
\]

Swarbrick further writes:

\[
\text{His poems are attempts to occupy the imaginative space} \\
\text{of ‘Somewhere you’re not’}^{11}
\]

In an interview Larkin himself once said:

\[
\text{One longs for infinity and absence, the beauty of}
\]
Again, Reasons for Attendance promises the tension between art and sex. The speaker weighs communal activities of couples in the dance hall against the artistic endeavour of the isolated speaker. Apparently, the poem prefers solitariness to achieve his artistic purpose, but the syntactical structure of the poem makes it embarrassingly ambiguous with its use of so many conditionals, 'or so I fancy,' 'as far as I'm concerned' - 'if you like' renders the ending provisional: 'and both are satisfied/
If no one has misjudged himself or lied.

Next, in Self’s the Man compared the lifestyles of a married man and a bachelor. A thorough discussion reveals contradistinction between the two, but in the last lines the speaker-persona sounds sceptical about his own assumption and therefore avoids a final judgement:

```
Only I'm a better hand
At knowing what I can stand
Without them sending them a van-
Or I suppose I can. (CR, p.118)
```

In almost similar fashion, Dockery and Son reflects on the critical issue of paternity: to become a father or remaining unmarried and childless:

```
...To have no son, no wife;
No house or land still seemed quite natural. (CP, p.152)
```

After all the arguments and counter arguments the words in the last stanza like 'Nothing' and 'something' help the poem remain uncommitted to either side of the argument:

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For Dockery a son, for me nothing.
```
Nothing with all a son’s harsh patronage. (CP., p.153)

but then ‘Something hidden from us chose’ quiten down the clinching tone.

Even *Unfinished Poem* which prepares a much elaborate ground for death to approach with its last moment experience, is left with experience unaccomplished because:

Nothing like death stepped, nothing like death paused,

Nothing like death has such hair, arms so raised.(CP., p.61)

Identical conclusions about death echo in *Many Famous Feet have trod*:

Nothing’s to reach, but something’s to become. (CP., p.18)

Further, in *Traumerei* the trauma of mortality is dramatised peculiarly, with its alphabets emerging gradually, but before the word is finally pronounced:

I have woken again before the word was spelt. (CP., p.12)

Earlier *Toads* had discarded work as something despicable against the pleasure of no-work, or, in favour of something ‘something sufficiently toad-like/Squates in me too.’ However the final verdict is:

But I do say it’s hard to loose either... (CP., p.90)

In *Church Going*, Edwin Morgan diagnoses a characteristic ‘distancing and dissolving of conflict...a fear of statement and commitment.’ The poet stresses that ‘belief must die’ and yet the church should continue as tradition! In *Mr Bleaney*, identification of the speaker-persoan with the poet himself is so ambiguous that the poem ultimately ends with:

He warranted no better, I don’t know. (CP., p.103)

However, this pose of neutrality could not last later than *The Whitsun Wedding*. *High Windows* is a complete shift where his personal tensions force him to become
lyrical and the strategy of detachment begins to look increasingly defensive and withdrawn. Stephen Regan comments:

The fastidious restraint of *The Less Deceived* gradually gave way to a much more confrontational and openly polemical writing, especially in *High Windows*.\(^{13}\)

Andrew Swarbrick also sums up Larkin's Collection as showing 'bare feeling of fury and rancour' expressed vehemently reinforcing his social and ideological commitment so far rarely struck in his work. Stephan Regan diagnosis this development in Larkin's poetry as a loss of consensus. Poems in *High Windows* seem more daring, and, therefore lyrical in moralising more explicitly. *The Old Fools* also exemplifies a far more militant and assertive stance ever adopted by Larkin:

...If they don't (and they can't), it's strange Why aren't they screaming? \((\text{CP.}, \text{p.196})\)

It was an acute sense of desperation in old age that made Larkin speak with authoritative and unequivocal dissent.

...Their looks show that they're for it:

Ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried into lines

How can they ignore it? \((\text{CP.}, \text{p. 196})\)

Thus, 'inconclusiveness' seems to be 'concluded' as Swarbrick notes:

*High Windows* can be read as the sometimes despairing conclusion to Larkin's life long quarrel with himself about his own identity and the value of Art. \((14)\)

Larkin sacrificed his earlier masks and adopted bluntly declarative directness.
Homage to a Government is offensively satirical. It bitterly reacts against the general idleness and greed that caused an economic crisis in England in the decades of sixties and seventies. A desperate finality can also be noticed in the very tone of the poem:

Next year we shall be living in a country
That brought its soldiers home for lack of money.

(CP., p. 171)

Or,

Our children will not know it's a different country
All we can hope to leave them now is money. (CP., p. 171)

Going, Going, also from High Windows, is another example of a socially and politically committed Larkin who seems very much concerned about growing modernisation and rampant commercialization which profoundly threatened the environment of the country. The poem mourns a regressive pastrolism:

And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.
There'll be books; it will linger on
In galleries, but all that remains
For us will be concrete and tyres. (CP., p. 190)

Of course, some examples from his poems could be exceptions. however, ultimately Larkin concluded at what he had always aspired to achieve. It was a sense of exclusion, and also a sense of failure, which had
permanently irked him that had also finally overwhelmed him as a poet where after he could not restrain himself within a persona any longer and became very lyrical.