CONCLUSION

A poem is always an integer, its theme and imagery being indiisible. What the poet aims at is the total fusion of imagery into the desired theme leading to a consistency of impression. Though driven from a specific single idea of experience, it gathers imagery from the total life experience of the poet, encompassing the contemporary situation, as well as, his private perceptions. This, image-pattern gives us an insight into the poet’s mental state in the very act of creation. As vehicle, imagery helps vivifying the theme and communicates emotions strongly felt by the poet. An image, with its novel diction, tends to evoke imagination for a meaning so far not perceived by us. A symbol, metaphor, or, poetic idiom is influenced by the contemporary ethos, but the poet employs each in the way he perceives and the way he expresses. Often, only mechanical appropriation of metre helps shape an image. A poem as a whole, however, may emerge as an image out of the collective impression of the image-cluster employed in it. Use of metaphor, simile and phrase, apart, very often simple description in a poem builds up a mental picture carved out of the external reality of the poem. With the passage of time the subject matter of poetry also changes, and, with that poetic diction too alters, as does the metrical trend. What is more, metaphors also register a shift in implication. The poet who acquires dexterity in the use of metaphors distinguishes himself thus from other poets. Therefore, the image clusters are to be ‘cracked’ if the theme is to be approached for a deeper understanding and better re-
Larkin's attempts on a particular theme are many, and each attempt is a new start, as if, the earlier attempts were a failure. And, each time, he grows, as it were, and, has better words, phrases, epithets, and image-patterns. He often appears even to contradict himself because the next experience could be contradicting the earlier one, or, deductions differ for that matter. Larkin like all poets creates his own universe in which he is always busy instituting laws, but often rejecting, amending, modifying and sometime contradicting them. Images varyingly appeal to our senses, but, Larkin employs images which engage our sight and audibility simultaneously. The images are so concentrated and so closely threaded within the subject theme centre, that they can hardly be plucked out. Rather, they become part of the themes growth. His conventional images too have a unique flavour. Larkin's poems are different, because the imagery is intensely personal. This may appear quite unusual but the technique fits his themes wherein his private image collage suits more than the conventional ones.

Death, traditionally a mysterious phenomenon marked by inevitability and impenetrability, becomes in Larkin, an occurrence or event which is internalised as an intimate personal encounter. Probing into its recesses, Larkin rediscovers its meaning without relapsing into the erstwhile easy-solution of immortality. Instead, the permanence and perpetuity of spirit is challenged dialectically and dialogically and portrayed as a ceasing in order that the variety and sanctity of life be appreciated the more. The concept of mortality is thus released from its manifestations, including the one
at which, or, after which a void ensues. The death-group of poems in Larkin are apparently fear-obsessed, but, probe deeper into the nature of death helps demystify the trauma, providing simpler meanings to the mysterious and disturbing phenomenon. Thus, even the image clusters are quite unusual in connotation. Larkin perceived the phenomenon of death as quite palpable, and therefore, seen and recognizable. Approach and occurrence of death is made a felt, heard, an seen experience. He begins with traditional negative images of darkness and of a paralysis-numb and imprisoning. Going as the introductory poem of his Collected Poems contains an image-cluster associated with evening that defines death that engulfs life. The experience of the senses benumbed is conveyed through 'it is drawn up over the knees and breast', a feeling that 'brings no comfort'. This is followed by the image of paralysing weighs, 'what loads my hands down?', a something he 'cannot feel?' That image was in the interrogative and asked a question, an, the remaining poems in this group concentrate on the answer to this question. The traditional connotation of 'the tree gone, that locked Earth to the sky?' is counterbalanced by the peculiar contrast 'Silken it seems at a distance'. The evening image is painful, as a nearing-the-end, but life in the poem is made quite an alluring experience from a distance. The gloom of old age and death is rendered, seen and felt by making the 'evening coming in'. as, 'never seen before' for the knees and breast, and hand's felt the 'load'. The cessation of movement concretized in the still, motionless wave-image, further defines death in imerical terms in And The Wave Sings Because it is Moving. Mechanical sustenance and termi-
nation of life is built up with the image of waves ‘rising and falling in the sea’, ‘the harrow of death/Deepens’, and, ‘there are thrown up waves’. The ungraspability and impenetrability of the death-phenomenon is appropriately portrayed in the cloud-image which although clearly visible, yet ‘There is nothing to grasp, nothing to catch or claim’. The weakening life-thread has the wave ‘falter’ and ‘drown’. The usual reactions to death are ‘Laments, tears, wreath, rocks’ but Larkin diffuses the shock by simplifying it as ‘the shout of the heart continually at work’.

Then, there the wall-image in Traumerei portrayed as being ‘an imprisonment’ rather than ‘a protecting’. The wall-image is built up with the gradual appearance of alphabets in ‘D-E-A-T-’. This is almost a figurative spelling-out itself and makes death infinitely more intelligible. Many Famous Feet Have Trod suggests a constant flux in the meaning and definition of death, as a result of which, there is a failure to comprehend the extant and non-extant through their elemental essences. Larkin is distinct with unique juxta-position of images ‘of being wafer, stone, and flower in turn’ connotating subtility, solidity and susceptiblity of life. The image of the ‘old discoloured copper coin’ is cogently descriptive of human mortality which is undecipherable. Thus, each poem in this group registers progress in not only deciphering the mystery of this inexplicable phenomenon but also in portraying it with a new vocabulary, which in its of images is fascinating, enabling a new perspective for an age-old repetition. Thus, The Unfinished Poem metaphorically answers the question, raised in Going. That, approached from whatever angle no single definition could
spell out the mystery of death. What the poet achieves finally is a triumph over his own dread of death. *Ambulances* registers in fast moving sequential image patterns (the reputed ambulance-images) automatic associations with a difference, as he places emphasis on nothingness after death, instead of on a nullity of existence, which is stressed by other poets. Through audio-visual imagery, a formless and imperceptible concept like death is given a perceptible frame. It has 'the shape of his head', 'restless mind', 'unfailing memory', 'bare feet'. However, Larkin fails to give any conclusive definition of the final extinction, yet his knowledge, regarding it graduates from the inquisitive. 'What is under my hands/That I cannot feel?' in *Going* written in 1946 to an 'unfocussed blur, a standing chill' in *Aubade* written in 1977. Apart from this, the group of poems referred to entail many more image-clusters which directly or indirectly help the death-theme concretize variously. Thus, there is 'soundless dark', 'unresting death', 'the dread of dying', 'mind blanks', 'total emptiness', 'sure extinction', 'Not to be anywhere', 'vast-moth-eaten musical brocade', 'furnace fear', 'Postmen like doctors go from house to house', 'closed like confessionals', 'the solving emptiness', 'unreachable inside a room', 'dulls to distance', 'sparrow-trap sky', 'Blue fug in the room', 'air should stick in...nose like bread'. 'The light swell up and turn black', 'still as a stuck pig', 'the famous eclipse', 'one long plunge', 'breathing tightened into a shroud', 'light cringed', 'the door swung inwards', 'A silent crowd walking under a wall' and 'a concrete passage'. These unconventional though tangible images make death a phenomenon which could sit, stand, feel and move.
The next major subject of Larkin’s poetry is Alienation. Analysis of poems belonging to this category indicate that both external and internal constraints contributed significantly to fashion the withdrawal psyche conspicuous in Larkin’s work. Historicist critics may not agree but his shredded personality had a lot to do with his withdrawal. The distancing was a personal factor. Wifeless, childless, and homeless Larkin felt singled out for an excruciating loneliness. It was the factor of a disjuncted personal life that is more conspicuous in his poetry than the over emphasised contemporary shattered social and political ambience. External factors did encourage Larkin to articulate his feeling of estrangement quite honestly, and latent scepticism and a sharp wariness alienated him for all absolutes, all dogmas and rituals. This very private perception incited him to instruct both negative, as well as, positive emotions and feelings of desire. Consequently, Larkin very clearly emerged as a sceptical agnostic empiricist, quite estranged from religious belief, social and traditional institutions, and moral absolutes. It was an incompatibility, and, a deliberate distancing, which enclosed him within his own psyche. The speaker-persona helped him successfully devise a stance of neutrality and indifference. Larkin thus remains in self-opted exclusion, away from all kinds of trappings often surreptitiously abetted by this multi-vocal personae. The dialectical and dialogic, almost colloquial technique of his group of poems help make his concealment-tactic very dependable. These poems throw a spanner over all illusions of permanent happiness, or, fruitful relationships, or, fulfilled desires, and, even the so-called perennial emotional security guaranteed by tradition. The
consequence was an experience of a vacuity which is central to this group
of poems as any expression of a poet, alien to his own self, as well as, his
surroundings.

The horse-images in At Grass typify the 'distanced-individual' who
is free of the all-alluring shackles of society and its glamour, and the im-
ages in support are 'stands anonymous', 'faint afternoons', and 'littered
grass'. It is the non-participation-after-participation-in-the-race experience,
which makes the horses appear at a level of existence communicated very
strongly through images like 'the long cry, hanging unhushed', and, 'Memo-
ries plague their ears like flies', as also in 'all stole away', and 'Dusk brims
the shadows'. These images render the social estrangement of the horses at
graze very pronounced, infact, almost tangible in its profundity, not only
visible but quite audible also. In Church Going Larkin also juxtaposes the
images of inclusion and exclusion, of acceptance and rejection, for, while
still in the church, the speaker-persona tries to keep aloof, irreverent to-
wards its sanctity. But then, he does not forget to donate the Irish six pence.
However, the whole poem appears a metaphor of alienation from the estab-
lished absolute of a religious faith, and the images like 'letting the door
thud shut'; 'a tense musty unignorable silence'; 'awkward reverence':
'bored uninformed, the ghostly silt'; 'accoutred frosty barn'; pleases me to
stand in silence here': and, 'A serious house on serious earth' together help
build the theme emphatically. Similarly, Mr. Bleaney is as a poem an im-
age of a rootless wanderer, bereft of social moorings, sceptical of religious
values and human relationships. The poem concentrates on the split-person-
ality of the speaker, assimilating and diversifying with its prototype. Mr. Bleaney. The lone individual is shown to be wry and disgruntled. The resulting image-pattern, 'stuffing my ears with cotton-wool'; 'the frigid wind/ Tousling the clouds'; 'the fusty bed'; and 'one hired box' successfully captured varying moods, gestures, and habits.

The title poem in *The Whitsun Weddings* also builds up the image of an alienated individual, despising the institution of marriage, and reflecting upon the merits and demerits of sociability. Ignoring the sanctified and sacrificing aspect of marriage, Larkin builds up a miserable picture of married people in images like, 'The fathers with broad belts under their suits/ And seamy, foreheads', and 'mothers loud and fat'. The ironical description of marriage as 'religious wounding' and 'a happy funeral' becomes further gloomy with the added association of corresponding doleful imagery. Thus there is: 'tall heat that slept/ For miles around inland', and, 'a smell of grass/ Displaced the reek of buttoned, carriage cloth', and, 'long cool platforms whoops and skirls', as also, 'Children frowned/ At something dull', and 'shuffling gouts of steam', and, 'a cooling tower', with, 'walls of blackened moss'. Vers de Societe exudes Larkin's innate fear of society, visualized as a lot of 'craps'. The fictional 'Warlock Williams' is 'genteel' society, and therefore, a compulsive infringement on individual freedom. This poem grows with images, which make the alienation unbearable. Thus, there is 'Funny how hard it is to be alone', and 'straight into nothingness', as also, 'forks and faces', and 'the moon thinned', and, 'an air-sharpened blade', and, 'A life—sternly instilled'. However, the final reali-
zation comes with, 'All solitude selfish', and 'hermit with gown and
dish', and, 'virtue is social', 'Too subtle', 'Too decent, too', and, 'only the
young can be alone', 'sitting by a lamp', 'Not peace', 'stand failure and
remorse'. Now, all these images of sound, sight, touch and perception, to­
gether appear a poem by themselves. For a break, Deceptions sympathises
with the rapist and counters its guilt associations. larkin employs an image­
pattern which is live and tangible, and strikes our imagination directly.
Thus, there is 'taste the grief/ Bitter and sharp', and 'light, unanswer­
able and tall and wide', and, 'mind lay-open like a drawer of knives'. The
fictional detail 'stumbling up the breathless stair' is compounded with the
conceptual image 'To burst into fulfilment’s desolate attic'.

Through its heterogenous image-patterns and its dialectic of negation,
this group of poems appears to aspire to a place beyond and 'out of reach'
because, Larkin, qua his Self, and his surroundings felt existence quite 'un­
der-written'.

Chapter IV concentrates on yet another persistent theme in Larkin's
poetry: this is the theme of Choice. Larkin maintained that freedom to pre­
fer or choose is quite illusive because a man is a trapped-victim of events
rather than or personal decisions. Many of Larkin's poems, though appar­
tently dealing with other issues, are, significantly rooted in the subject of
Choice. The dramatic presentation and dialectical treatment lend them a
stamp of illusion. These poems are dramatic monologues, and Larkin em­
ploys the speaker-personae to help cancel the available alternatives, so that,
what finally emerges is what has been coined by Andrew Swarbrick a
‘negative sublimity’, in all that is left of existence. The desires and expectations with which the individual identifies himself remains unfulfilled. Ironically, happiness of either a right or wrong choice enhances the illusion further, setting into motion an endless chain of illusive choices. Poems in this category strive for the ‘negative sublime’ which the dialectic and analogic technique in each case, helps the poet almost achieve. What such poems assert has been recognized as a kind of ‘affirmation through negation’. The unavoidable reality of a particular situation is dramatised in the individual psyche highlighting the thorny dilemma between two alternatives. To create the necessary amount of tension in each poem, the persona is dialogically involved in arguments and counter-arguments. The poems, under the theme of choice, therefore, persist with perpetual tensions. Thus, Toads and Toads Revisited are profound reflections on the value of work. Analogueing work with a loathed creature, Toads collects images despicable in connotation to help cancel out the choice of choosing his own kind of work, as because there are images like ‘the brute’, and appelations like ‘lispers, losels’, ‘loblolly-men’, and ‘louts’, and their ‘unspeakable wives’ who are ‘skinny as whippets’, and, ‘their nippers bare feet’. The forced choice is represented by the toad with its ‘hunkers heavy as hard luck’ and ‘cold as snow’. There is an abortive attempt to ‘drive the brute off’, which ‘soils’ with its sickening poison. There are despairing sketches of ‘black-stockinged nurses’, ‘Palsied old step-takers’, ‘Hare-eyed clerks with the jitters’, ‘waxed-fleshed out-patients’, and ‘characters in long coats’, and ‘All dodging the toad work’. However, Toad Revisited is a des-
perate pleading for work as a process to help sustain life because there is
'Nowhere to go but indoors', and 'No friends, but empty chairs', and, there­
fore, a longing for 'My in-tray, My loaf-haired secretary', and 'My shall­
I-Keep-the-Call-in-Sir'.

Again, Dockery and Son and Self's the Man are quite involved de­
liberations, debating marriage and celibacy as alternatives. Dockery and Son
concentrates on the futility of marriage as the unmarried is represented as
'a strong unhindered moon' 'To have no son, so wife/ No house, no land',
but only 'a numbness registered the shock'. Choice is concretized as 'warp
tight-shut, like doors', like 'sand-clouds, thick and close'. But in apposi­
tion to this is "harsh patronage" only. Self's the Man debates the notions
of selflessness and selfishness as two different modes which also represent
two attitudes to love. Argumentative to their core, these poems rarely
employ images directly affecting the theme. The two types of existence
sketched as comparisons comprise the bachelor-speaker a permanent-pres­
ence, and, his antagonist who is an implied presence not often seen or
heard. Finally, choices cancel each other out and a counterpoise emerges
between both kinds of lives:

So he and I are the same

because:

For Dockery a son, for me nothing,

In almost a similar vein, the perplexity of choice between perfection-
in-art, and, perfection-in-life is debated in Reasons For Attendance and
Poetry of Departures. The poems end, either equating the two preferences,
or, subverting both. The image of 'the wonderful feel of girls' is contrasted against the powerful call of 'that lifted, rough-tongued bell' of art. Finally, both options get eliminated because they lack permanent happiness. Places, Loved Ones infers that desires are never fulfilled as the achievement never ever matches the expectations. It reinforces the idea that freedom of choice is a mere delusion, because, perfect bliss in either eventuality is an illusion. The analogies of Arrivals, Departures reveal that the entire idea of choice is a mockery, because, compulsions exist to force contrary choices making the dilemma more traumatic, reducing the issue to a mere myth. The striking image is of the advent and departure of both love as well as life; for between birth and death, is forever suspended the tension of an illusory choice. Life with a Hole in it is an unsophisticated version of the illusion of choice and imagines 'Life... an immobile, locked... unbeatable slow machine'. This poem offers the final verdict on the prolonged debate on the integrity of choice. Concrete imagery each time helps crystalize a situation of choice, its futility, illusiveness, and deceptive tension between two available choices.

Along with the aforesaid themes that dominate, Larkin also treats themes which though not as pronounced, are treated with no less seriousness, for, his other pre-occupations are, Love, Sex, Change, Time, Old Age, Incompleteness and Faithlessness. Among these, Agnosticism, Time and Old-Age and Incompleteness are more prominent. Poems analysed under the theme of Agnosticism deduced that Larkin's ruthlessness was largely a part of self-disillusionment rather than an expression of the much touted
post-War scepticism. In fact, faithlessness as guarantee of personal integ­
rency had long become an integral part of Larkin’s psyche.

The Self in Larkin is jealously guarded against all challenges to its integrity. Larkin was not altogether irreligious. He felt rather a dire need of a secular faith which he expresses in Water. However, the concept of spiritual edification or eternal bliss pleaded by religion was not approved by his muse. Yet, church as a part of a cultural tradition was desired to be continued as in Church Going. Faith, recognised as psychological exigency for emotional purgation was also accepted in Faith Healing. Though Larkin manoeuvres to show how the credulity of women is exposed to exploitation, he also lays bare his own male irreligious penchant. Mockery of Faith sometimes vehement, becomes quite a conspicuous feature of his poems. Images of ‘dubious women’, ‘sheepishly stray’, that ‘stay stiff’, or, ‘twitching and loud with deep hoarse tears’, and ‘a kind of dumb/ and idiot child’ exist along side with the speaker-persona wandering in the church scepti­
cal and irreverent, or, the Evangelist ‘upright in rimless glasses’, ‘direct­ing God about this eye, that knee’. Together they leave the cumulative ef­fect of a poet who is quite irreligious. Yet, all this is finely counter-bal­anced in Water which appears a metaphor for purity, with transparency and catholicity becoming the poet’s substitutes for a church religion ‘where any­angled light/ would congregate endlessly’.

Poems catagorised under the Time-theme emphatically note that ex­istence could only be understood in terms of the lapse, or, temporality of time, that is, against a negativity, as against an eternity. Past, Present and
Future counter-act against each other and establish the temporality of Time and its negativity. Therefore, the Time-theme poems conclude that Time-as-eternity, or, Immortality has little meaning. Rather, Time is in graspable and, Past, Present and Future for a human being cannot exist all at once and together. Larkin tried to achieve victory over Time using a photograph album as in Lines on a Young Lady’s Photograph Album, or, in a tape recorder, playing a jazz record as in Reference Back. The giant-image of Time in Send No Money dwarfs the speaker persona. The delusiveness of Time in Present, Past and Future categorised in three stanzas in Triple Time is crystallised in image-patterns like ‘empty street’, ‘sky to blandness scoured’, ‘A time traditionally soured’ unrecommended by event’, ‘An air lambent with adult enterprise’, ‘A valley cropped by fat neglected chances’. ‘Thread bare perspectives’, and ‘seasonal decrease’. In Reference back the cruelty of Time too is conveyed through ‘the unsatisfactory prime’. Send No Money concretizes Time with ‘the fobbed impendent belly of Time’, ‘the hail of occurrence-clobber’, and ‘the trite untransferable’.

The theme of Old-Age too is full of all its horrors. The Old Fools exposed Larkin furious at the loss of sensibility that would follow final decay. Direct and declarative, the poem is replete with horrifying images. like ‘mouth hangs open and drools’, ‘crippled or tight’, ‘on pissing yourself’. ‘Ash hair’, ‘toad hands, prune face dried into lines’, ‘the constant wear and tear’. a ‘crouching below’. Many more poems though dealing with other subjects, end at the thought of old age and death. Finally, there is the theme of Incompletion as pointed out by Andrew Motion that conclude all
other themes of Larkin’s poetry. Death, Alienation, Time, Old-Age and an illusive Choice make the poet also think of Incompleteness. Poems worked out in this context specify that Larkin remains inconclusive about his themes in all poems prior to the appearance of High Windows. For example, in Church Going the persona does not meet a full-blooded agnostic; in Dockery and Son and Self’s The Man it could not pursue to remain an alienated bachelor; in Traumerei it does not release ‘H’ to complete ‘DEAT’ into death; and, in Unfinished Poem it is frustrated in its realization that ‘Nothing like death stepped.’ Even in the most love-excited moments in Wedding Wind and Talking in Bed the personae’s experience remains unfulfilled. And most symptomatically of all, persona is almost choked in The Dance with ‘something’, that is ‘half-way between the gullet and the tongue.’ In High Windows only Larkin emerges direct and declarative, harsh and conclusively polemical, for, here he finally bursts out, breaking all constraint and restraint, into unabashed lyricism. About many poems in this volume, it has and can be justifiably said that they desperately conclude Larkin’s persistent conflict between the identity of the ‘Self’ and the perception of an aesthete. Effacing ‘Self’, these poems long ‘for infinity and absence’, the beauty of ‘somewhere you’re not.’ Poems in the last collection once again witness Larkin’s lyricism, where as those of The North Ship had appeared evidently threatened by a ‘mocking philistinism’; the anti-poetic stance intended to break away from the traditional mode of poetry. Infact, what should be emphasised is that this very philistinism which refuses ‘to accept’ art as ‘theology’ seems in practice to guarantee
Larkin's poetic integrity. Thus, whereas *The North Ship* had Larkin just a lyricist, *The Less Deceived* and *Whitsun Weddings* find him a self-deprecating ventriloquist. However, in *High Windows* he appears to posture as a philistine lyricist. This entire development, the First Chapter has already noticed in detail, and, the chapters that follow explore how this is done by the poet through his characteristic imagery.