CHAPTER I

LARKIN AND HIS TIMES
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It is a coincidence that Philip Arthur Larkin was born, in the year, *The Waste Land* was published. Though Larkin’s poetic career began in the late 1930s, his sensibility was nurtured under the influence of prevailing thought patterns of the 1920s and the early 1930s. It was the time when Eliot’s theory of modern poetry dominated the poetic horizon so completely that even a juvenile imagination could not fail to imbibe its basic principles. Larkin grew up when Auden, (who radically opposed modernism) was at the helm of his poetic career, and significantly dominated English poetry. In his maturing years, Larkin witnessed the poetic flourish of Dylan Thomas’ Neo-romanticism. The fifties were not poetically very significant, for by that time Larkin had discovered his own voice. Therefore, Larkin’s aesthetic development, with its span of thirty years may tentatively be divided into four stages: the twenties were the period when poetry took seed; thirties saw it evolve; the forties helped it grow; and, the fifties finally matured his poetic expression. Therefore, the twenties and the thirties were important for Larkin as a poet. However, the thirties were more significant, because his indebtedness to this decade is explicitly greater. And, since the thirties are considered a reaction to the twenties, it does not seem irrelevant to begin with a glance over the poetics of the thirties with its attendant social and political compulsions.

It is a well-known fact that the aftermath of the First World War, and the social and political cataclysm in Europe, left the common man bereft of his moral and cultural moorings. Challenges of reorganising society were abundant
because the most striking question was:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish?¹

G.S. Fraser, while dealing with the background of *The Waste Land* sums up the despondency of the situation in the poem:

*The Waste Land...expressed better than any other poem of that decade the sense of hopeless drift which afflicted all the more sensitive members of the post-war generation.*²

The two remarkable social transformations that followed the First World War were the enhanced political strength of the working class, and, the rise of Bolshevism. This resulted in narrowing the social and economic gap between the upper middle class and the ordinary workers. In the intellectual sphere the revival of interest in Marx, and the general acceptance of Freud’s ideology seriously inflicted the unconscious mind of the common man. The global discussion of Einstein’s theory of relativity further shook the reliable absolutes.

Revolutions in thought with the corresponding transformation of social structure coloured the poetic taste and mannerism of the age also. As an effect, traditional poetry was repudiated in favour of symbolist and intellectual forms of poetic expression. T.E. Hulme, propagating the symbolist theory, attacked the romanticism in life and art, which, Ezra Pound too had called “blurry, messy...sentimentalistic mannerish”.³ Hulme stressed ‘discipline, precision’, upon ‘the exact curve of the thing’ and ‘dry hardness,’ and, ‘clarity’. This theory waged a war against ‘self expression as literary ideal’. The untidiness and unwarranted expansiveness of Victorian poetry
was written off. Hulme writes:

I object to the slopiness which does not consider that
a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about
something or the other.  

An explicit sense of disintegration, disquiet, and bitterness prevailed over the whole generation in the post-war period. Resultantly the themes of barrenness and frenzied sexual relationship strikingly recurred in many a novel and poems of the 1920s. Ferocity of language, in dealing with abrupt and broken images, mirrored the chaotic conditions as well as the shattered human sensibility of Post war Europe. Eliot’s Prufrock, Gerontion and The Waste Land, as the archetype of these features, had immense influence on the younger generation of writers. Pound’s Cantos, drawn on a structural canvas, consisting of fragments of contrasting anecdotes, voiced his agitation against the relentless industrialisation and ruthless urbanisation. Perceiving unhappiness and aggressiveness all around Pound longed for the world to retreat to ‘a society of small peasant proprietorship’. Experimental poetry of the 1920s, was an extension of the general mood of restructuring the things anew, after the total disintegration wrought by the First World War.

The Imagist Movement spearheaded by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, though short-lived, set the fashion of clear and precise images. It advocated the exclusion of every extraneous word ‘that did not contribute to the presentation’, as also freedom in matters of metrical regularity. Practice of ‘verse Libre’, initiated at the behest of the symbolists became widely ap-
plauded.

In *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1917), the so-called manifesto of the new poetic theory and practice, Eliot interdicted the use of personality in works of art. Asserting objectivity to help achieve perfection in the artistic enterprise he writes:

> The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.\(^6\)

This complete disjunction of ‘art and event’ gave to poetry a new definition, quite contrary to the Romanticist’s perception of it. In the words of Eliot:

> Poetry is not turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.\(^7\)

Despite the fact that the early works of both Eliot and Pound echoed the sense of isolation of the poet from society, and the melancholy that accompanies that sense, yet this hardly seems to be in conformity with what they later pronounced as well as practised.

The thirties had its younger generation evince a remarkable fascination for Hopkin’s poetry. This young coterie was later classified as the Auden generation. It was impressed more by the rhetoric than by Hopkin the poet’s vision. Hopkin attracted attention for its technique as well as for its moral themes. What was most widely espoused was his innovative ‘sprung rhythm’ which emphasised the count of stresses rather than syllab-
bles. This poetic technique offered a compromise between the extra conversational suppleness of Eliot's poetry and the over-dreamyness of Yeats' early work. Besides, to the practice of poetry in the 1930s it seemed to offer a fascinating combination of freedom and order, and an easy and expansive unravelling of the line, with strong and regular rhetorical emphasis.

The poets of the 1930's who began to react against 'Themuted despairs or defeated ironies of Eliot's work'8 sought shelter under Hopkin. Appraising the literary milieu of the 1930s G.S. Fraser records:

To Young poets, also reacting against the more immediate influences, the positive assertive force of Hopkin's poetry was inspiring.9 Hankering to stick to their old beliefs, these poets seemed to have had the earliest quest for faith of some sort. Hopkin's leanings towards nature and religious devoutness allowed him to express the traditional romantic sense of an immanent spirit behind the beauty of Nature without lapsing either into vague generalities or into semi-pantheism.10

The magnitude of Hopkin's impact can be assessed from Fraser's remark:

.... a fair amount of work by the Young poets of the 1930s tends to strike us, today, as Hopkin's-and-water.11

Meanwhile, the remarkable progress of science and technology unfolded great extents of knowledge and experience. This created diversities in approach and attitude. It would not
be an exaggeration if it is maintained that there were no two poets of identical convergence. Fraser claims:

...the journalistic immediacy which was one common quality of all four poets (W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Day Lewis and Louis MacNiece) in the 1930s was imposed by the immediate tensions of the time rather than by common qualities of temperament or talent.¹²

Despite the great appetite for poetry in the early forties, critics maintain that the decade failed to produce any good poetry. The decade historically witnessed record turbulence at the social and political fronts which had inevitably to find way in variegated expression in current literature. Of course, experience got variety but literature had no solid ground on which to plant anything substantive. No doubt Robert Graves, Edwin Muir and Kathleen Raine did draw audience in good numbers. Yet an adjectival figure, as well as, accepted poetic standards were missing. A small group of poets vaguely called Neo-Romantics including Dylan Thomas, George Barker and Herbert Read tried to fashion the image preferring this to sheer statement in their poetry. They showed a distaste for conversational idiom, disliked sophisticated imagery, and any specific concern in current events; these were the attributes identified with the Auden school of poetry. Other poets linked to this generation of poets were Vernon Watkins, Nicholas Moore, Tom Scot and G.S. Fraser, all of whom wrote a poetry of unrestrained intellectuality; it was more ornamental and less civilized. Of course, the neo-romantics did not accept the poet as an analyser to study images
on an intellectual plane. They believed that images are born out of an unconscious mind, and therefore carry their own logic, as also, a need to be explicated. This was primarily the influence of Surrealism which made its impact in the late 1930s. Though Breton's Manifesto on Surrealism appeared in 1924, in France, it was revived in English poetry through impressive writings by Herbert Read and Gascoyne. Prior to this, Dylan Thomas' Eighteen Poems in 1934, and George Barker's anthology of Poems the following year, had already set the norms for this school of thought in art and literature. Being influenced by Freudian ideology, the Surrealists advocated free functioning of human mind. Stressing upon irrationality as the prime factor they made incongruity a fashion in art. Logic in argument, relatedness in images, and traditional forms in versification were confronted with a deliberate challenge. The Surrealists, having little interest in matters of day-to-day life, used crude reality of life as the take-off point in their effort to transcend the world. Thomas and Barker, as a matter of principle, disregarded logical reasoning, standard morality and social and artistic conventions. They discarded the idea of art as a deliberate creation which tantamounted to a recommendation for 'automatic writing'. Writing poetry should be automatic, and not deliberate. Incoherence in style and content as a popular mode, was inherited by the poets of the 1940s. Larkin, was testing his poetic sensibility at this time. Earnestly imbibing the topical influences, he himself recalls:

Looking back, I find in the poems not one abandoned self but several......The undergraduate, whose work a
friend affably characterised as “Dylan Thomas”.

The impress is distinct in Larkin’s experiment with the characteristic astray analogies, broken syntax, non-logical and non-chronological order, wandering hallucinations, together with the bizarre, and, apparently unrelated images, in a good number of his poems. It now becomes clear that Surrealism obliquely or unobliquely affected English poetics for all the three decades, from the 1930s to 1950s. However, the 1950s marked a major shift in English poetry with the emergence of what became known as the Movement. It was set move by a group, of which, Larkin was considered an important member.

Therefore, placing Larkin in the context of English poetry, after the Second World War seems difficult, unless the Movement together with its antecedents is kept in proper perspective. Branded as ‘journalistic invention’ and ‘rigorously excoriated for its corrupt ideology, flawed poetic assumptions, theoretical ineptness and artistic inadequacies, the Movement was positively a response to the social and cultural conditions of post-War England. It was formally recognised as a school of poetry when Anthony Hartley noticed it in his review article Poets of the Fifties (1954). These new-bearings were found rising prominently in reviews and literary journals of the early fifties, so Hartley thinks:

New names in the reviews, a fresh atmosphere of controversy, a new spirit of criticism- these are the signs that some other group of poets is appearing on the horizon.
However, Hartley too denied it acknowledgement as a school of poetry with a specific programme or manifesto. Rather, Hartley discerned a ‘group personality’ building up in the new generation with a ‘dissenting and non-conformist, cool, specific and analytical’ sensibility.

In fact, it was Robert Conquest’s *Anthology of the Contemporary Verse*, published in 1956, that finally proclaimed the new trend in English poetry and thought it a Movement. The Introduction to this anthology, generally considered the manifesto of the so-called Movement, made it a clear case of reaction against the romantic exuberance of the poetry written in the 1940s. Conquest thought that the ‘diffuse and sentimental verbiage’ of the forties were discarded in favour of ‘a rational structure and comprehensible language’, a genre championed by the new generation of poets. Disregarding social and historical circumstances of the post-war England as determinants of the shift in this trend of new poetry, Conquest diagnosed the poetry of the forties as ‘sick’, and, that of fifties as ‘new and healthy’. The poetry of the fifties, Conquest claims:

> Submits to no great system of theoretical constructs
> nor agglomerations of unconscious commands.\(^{15}\)

Under the impact of modern philosophy, the new poetry sounded empirical in attitude as it yielded neither to mystical nor to logical experiences.

Whether Movement did ever exist, or, was it a coherent group of poets converging to a single poetic theory, with definite aims and objectives, has been an issue of fierce controversy among the critics. John Press, for instance, in his version states:
To what extent the Movement was more than a lively journalistic invention is not easy to decide.¹⁶

Ian Hamilton sums it as a take-over bid. This controversy exacerbated when some of the group poets themselves shrank from acknowledging their association with the Movement. Larkin, above all, when asked by Hamilton about his commitment to the group, said that there was 'no sense at all.' In 1964, Larkin distanced himself from the group saying:

Bob Conquest’s New Lines in 1956 put us all between the same covers. But it certainly never occurred to me that I had anything in common with Thom Gunn, or Donald Davie, for instance, or they with each other and in fact I wasn’t mentioned at the beginning.¹⁷

Thom Gunn, another group constituent, also remarked:

I found I was in it before I knew it existed.¹⁸

Besides, there is further, a longer list of critics who, if they do anyhow accept the Movement as a tradition in English Poetry after 1945, also appear sceptical about the efficacy of the work produced by the group's writers. This critical opinion will be briefly considered later. Now it shall be worthwhile to discuss the socio-political scenario in the post-war years, along with the features by which this school of poetics is identified.

With the Labour Party coming to power in 1945, a Welfare State was proposed to establish in England in order to mitigate social and political injustices in a class conscious and politically aware society. Great hopes were attached to democratic ideals, and, a liberal humanistic attitude supplanted
an aristocratic, self-centred legacy. As a consequence, dignity of the indi-
vidual was heightened and a man-in-the-street culture became popular. The
general air of reconstruction in post-war England did not spare the literary
ambience as well, and, a need was felt to create an ‘accessible’ unself-con-
scious art, to supercede the traditionally aesthetic and robust writing. The
poets of the fifties espoused conventional forms, and, regular structures of
rhyme and rhythm that had been lost since the thirties. Encouraged by the
ideology of philistinism, unpretentiousness and irreverence, ‘highbrow art’
of the 1940s was commonly abjured. Hence the poetry of the fifties prima-
rily became counter productive, as it too contained the theoretical exces-
siveness of art that characterised the poetry of their immediate predece­sors.
In addition to this, the tense Cold War years did not adapt themselves to
the kind of writing that was persuasively charged with exaggerated emo-
tions. A cool and rational approach, as reflected in the poetry of Movement,
was a natural outcome. Hewison rightly observes:

The cold war tended to freeze public attitudes, and
counseled silence about private ones. It recommended a
guarded private life, in which only small gestures were
possible,...

But then, Welfare State, to a great extent, failed to minimise the
class-diversion and social injustice, the trust in egalitarian ideals also col-
lapsed. Writers tried to balance between traditional inheritance and contem-
porary demands. The ambivalent attitude of this generation towards vari-
ous issues is symptomatic in this sense. The Movement poets, as representa-
tives, chose a non-committal, cautious stance in order to be on the safer side. They took special care to keep the private away from public. The cautious and sceptical bent of mind idealised neutrality in approach, as a desired necessity, because these writers were now confronted with two kinds of audiences: an academic elite class on the one hand, and, a generally democratised public on the other. Apart from this, a guilt-conscious and fear-striken England encouraged the poets to rebuild what had been lost. For this reason, they preferred unrhetoric expression, an ascetic tone, and, an informal idiom. Prevalent liberalistic and democratic ideologies did not accept any mystical and visionary image from the poet. Rather the poet was brought down to earth as a responsible citizen, well aware of his duties. Therefore, avoidance of direct comment and non-commitment to any political doctrine became part of a strategy.

Generally, the fifties are accredited as the inheritors of the thirties, and, the forties are considered shut to its influence. But, a close study of the fifties, indicates that they were neither a complete imitation of the thirties, nor were they a total reaction of the forties. Efforts were made to preserve the best from both the traditions. Poetry of the thirties was evidently marked by political commitment and ideological dedication. The neutral and defensive stance, of the fifties, was definitely a shift from the socialistic bearings of the thirties. And, of all the Movement poets, Larkin’s creation of a persona as almost a perpetual presence exemplifies this restrictive approach as a trend. Wit and irony, a characteristic trait of these poets, was of course, a defence-mechanism, but, avoidance of direct comment was
also in accordance with the urbane and academic poetry of civilised writers who were faced with an academic audience, now well in contact with its poets.

After the Second World War, the creative artist was more disillusioned, and he was not ready to be deceived easily. The air of scepticism in general outlook is abundantly manifest in Larkin’s gesture of a chastened common sense and tough intelligence, which typified the Dylanism of the forties. Larkin introduced an anti-hero image in his poems. It was not only Larkin’s unwillingness to be deceived but also a desire, in general, to stay sceptical of visionary occurrences. Reacting to the immediate influences, the Movement poets wrote a poetry unmystical in content, unobscure in expression, and, simplified in structure. A greater reverence for the real person, and, the real event was a deviation from the practised end of the thirties. Marked by philosophical detachment, their poetry was anti-dogmatic, and, more aesthetically pure. What they retained from the immediate influence, was precision, and, what they retrieved from the earlier generation, was clarity and intelligibility. Surveying the poetry of Movement, Stephen Regan notes:

Many of the poems are too neatly prescriptive and look like pieces of versified literary criticism. Movement poetics, as it comes to its own, makes its course between the Auden school and the Dylan tradition. It appears cool and rational and contrary to the inflated rhetoric and sentimental excessiveness of the neo-romantics. Aesthetic philistinism and chastened purity accompanying linguis-
tic arrangements are Movement typicalities, independent of any heritage. In his appraisal of Movement poetry in *Rule and Energy*, John Press discerns:

Cautious scepticism, empirical attitude, measured accents, alert wariness, with colloquial ease, decorum, shapeliness, elegance.\(^{21}\)

It is in a language marked by: precision, gravity, decisiveness and clinching finality. It is for these reasons that critics have often referred to it as neo-classicism in English poetry.

Larkin was identified with Movement adventitiously. It was only after he had appeared in print in several literary journals and anthologies, in the early fifties, that he was associated with the Movement group for his distinctive poetic susceptibility typical to all other poets of the group. Poems in *The Less Deceived* show his analytical bent of mind and his ability to state complex ideas simply and with clarity. Andrew Swarbrick attributes Larkin's identification with the Movement to the success of *The Less Deceived*. Most of the poems in this collection register close affinity with the Movement programme. To what extent his poetry conforms to the Movement ideology can better be determined only after analysing his poems individually done in the chapters that follow. But only a casual reading of *The Less Deceived* will help understand, how, for the most part, it falls in line with the principles the Movement stood for. Creation of persona with self-effacing, self-deprecating, modest and ironic stances synchronizes with the guarded, restrictive gesture. His persona, a real existing being, though urban and civilized in behaviour, is wary of the metropoli-
tan, as well as, the cosmopolitan culture of post-war England. Attitudinised ambivalence in matter of propositions, closely related to human life, is conspicuous in many of his poems, as is Church Going in The Less Deceived.

Despite all possible effort on his own part to detach himself from any group identity, Larkin's representation with eight poems in D.J. Enright's Poets of the 1950s, and, nine poems in Robert Conquest's New Lines the ten major contributions to Movement Poetry, is ample evidence that he was very much a part of the Movement. Donald Davie, one of the notable members (though later a bitter critic) recommended some guiding principles in his Purity of Diction in English Verse (1952) which he expected the members of the group to follow. In this self-styled manifesto for the Movement, Davie prescribed certain poetic virtues, such as, a language of prose for poetry, a reasonable approach to issues, an expression of common experiences, as well as, promotion of community feeling among themselves, as also their readers, a moderate style, and, most significantly, de-mystification of poetic perception. Davie realized the value of a purified idiom, which he thought, was preferred by some of the late eighteenth century poets. He viewed that Conservatism was more important than innovation, in the situation that prevailed, for dignity of the individual human being first needed to be restored at that juncture. Critics have also reproved Larkin's poems in the light of Davie's thesis, because, Larkin was private rather than public, and, he wanted his poems to have their own characteristic universe. However, much different in its own characteristics, Larkin's
poetry, of course, represents the new generation of poets, who, having identical social backgrounds, being all of lower middle-class, had assembled at Oxford or Cambridge by virtue of their scholarship. Taking it up as a point venture, they wrote a poetry of academic value and marked a movement in the study of poetry, when the teaching of genre became an important part of the university curriculum. The widely used pronoun 'we' in their poetry as against 'you' in the poetry of the 1930s, shows that these poets were trying to foster a communion with their readers, through a colloquial idiom and affable gestures. A moderate and intellectual approach helped reached a consensus amongst them. Larkin’s conversational accent and courteous attitude is expressive of this very community feeling. His persona is always unpretentious, clear-headed, and courteously rational. I Remember. I Remember is an example of the 'anti-romantic' and the 'anti-phoney' aspect of the Movement:

    ....I sat back, staring at my boots.
    ‘Was that’, my friend smiled, ‘where you’ ‘have your roots?’
    No, only where my childhood was unspent,
    I wanted to retort, just where I started.

    (Collected Poems. p81*)

* - Collected Poems-Edited by Anthony Thwaite, Faber & Faber, London, 1988. All future references in this thesis to poems of Larkin will be marked as CP., p.-
Larkin’s early poetry is characterized by its austerity, caution, weariness, apprehension and the restrictiveness of the post-war years which also saw the establishment of a Welfare State. The Less Deceived has many poems which conform to this mood. The circumscribed technical accomplishments, turn on endings, and, inconclusive arguments in his Reason For Attendance and, No Road are some of the instances of technicalities identified with most of Movement poetry. Following the traditional iambic structure, his poems repeatedly develop through rational arguments. The emotional weariness in his poems is an archetype of the Movement’s typical withdrawal from all and any kind of political commitment. There is a neutral tone as a stereotype in Whitsun Weddings and High Windows. In presenting his persona as an awkward and sceptical individual, wavering between two extremes, Larkin emerges the sole representative of social and cultural duality in post-war England.

The question whether Larkin gained recognition from affiliation with the Movement, or, the Movement benefitted from Larkin is too complex to be answered. His conformity and non-conformity with this programme has been discussed at length. From the very beginning, Larkin tried to break from the group, but his renouncement was more pronounced in 1955, when he dismissed the very idea of adherence to any poetic theory as fundamental to his poems. On one occasion, when Enright requested Larkin for an introduction to a volume of poems which Enright was compiling, the poet observed:
I find it hard to give any abstract views on poetry and its present condition as I find theorising on the subject no help to me as a writer.\textsuperscript{22}

This casts a shadow on Larkin's trust in the principles, the Movement school espoused. Larkin never favoured the intellectual and cerebral poetry written by some of the Movement poets. On the contrary, Larkin's poem often appears to carry emotion along. And, \textit{Maiden Name} and \textit{Born Yesterday}, among many others, are typical examples. Larkin echoed this dissension off and on, and once even wrote:

\begin{quote}
We seem to be producing a new kind of bad poetry, not the old kind that tries to move the reader and fails, but one that does not even try.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

In \textit{The Pleasure Principle} Larkin sounds indignant at poets who wrote poetry for self-aggrandisement. He finds their poems habitually unintelligible because of unrelated references. They did not seem to aim at inculcating pleasure in their poetry. To the contrary Larkin claims:

\begin{quote}
But at bottom poetry, like all art, is unextricably bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet loses his pleasure seeking audience, he has lost the only audience worth having, for which the dutiful mob that signs on every September is no substitute.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Larkin's scathing attack on the kind of poetry, notably written by the poets of 1950s, lays bare his relations with the Movement and its poetic assumptions. Dissenting with the 'academic sterility', Larkin distances him-
self from it stating:

For my part I feel we have got the method right—plain language, absence of posturing, sense of proportion, humour, abandonment of the dithyrambic ideal—and are waiting for the matter: a fuller and more sensitive response to life as it appears from day to day...”

The real magnitude of Larkin’s poetic class, indeed, does not lie in following the lines of the Movement programme, rather, in following the lines of the Movement from his volumed poems *Whitsun Weddings* and *High Windows*. Grevel Lindop contributed an interesting article with the title *Being Different from Yourself: Philip Larkin in the 1970s*—published in *British Poetry since 1970: A Critical Survey*—where Larkin himself is quoted from a radio broadcast that he would prefer to write ‘different kind of poems; that might be by different people’. Lindop quotes Larkin saying:

someone once said that the great thing is not to be different from other people, but to be different from yourself."

In Samuel Hynes’ estimation ‘Larkin’s work is more expansive’ and ‘more wide ranging’. The majority of critics value Larkin greater than all other Movement poets. Stephen Regan perceives that in Larkin’s poetry, in contrast to the work of other writers belonging to the cliche that the Movement had become, not only is there a deeper imaginative apprehension of social experience and its contradictions, exemplified, but there is exhibited in Larkin a far greater range of formal and stylistic devices and a more pro-
found sense of the linguistic and aesthetic possibilities of modern colloquial English.

The Movement or its associated bearings may be a phenomenal phase, but the itinerary of Larkin’s musings formally runs from *The Northship* (1945) upto *High Windows* (1974). Diverse stances, or, attitudes and vulnerable moods implicit in Larkin’s works affirm that he is undoubtedly a poet of contradictions. The chronology of his poetic expanse is too involved to pin him down to any single criterion. What he articulates in *The Less Deceived*, and, prose writing, in the 1950s deflects from what he had said and practised in *The Northship* and other writings in 1940s. *The Whitsun Weddings*, in 1964, and then *High Windows*, in 1974, post another diversion from his earlier practice and ideology. The metamorphosis is the consequence of the continuous introspection he practised, from the beginning, to examine his own personality and establish his identity as an artist. In the early poems, Larkin appears paradoxical, on the one hand he seems to yearn for identity, and, on the other, he tries to move away from personality. In this effort, the poet employs the use of a ‘mask’ through which he succeeds in partial self-revelation, as well as, in simultaneous anonymity. Andrew Swarbrick observes:

> He (Larkin) eventually constructs or ‘finds’, his identity by searching for anonymity.²⁷

Infact, Larkin’s creative genius got shaped with an amalgam of varied influences including romanticism, experimentalism, symbolism, imagism, surrealism, neo-romanticism and academicism. In the introduction,
which he added to the later edition of *The North Ship* he confesses:

> Looking back, I find in the poems not one abandoned self but several- the ex-school boy, for whom Auden was the only alternative to 'old-fashioned' poetry; the under-graduate, whose work a friend affably characterised as 'Dylan Thomas', but you've sentimentality that's all your own'; and the immediately post Oxford self, isolated in Shropshire with a complete Yeats stolen from the local girls' school. This search for a style was merely one aspect of a general immaturity."

Anthony Thwaite in his introduction to Larkin's *Collected Poems* maintains:

> The earliest poems are what Larkin....called 'Pseudo-Keats babble."

Despite his bravado against modernist poetry, evident traces of Eliot’s reflection cannot be completely ruled out in his early poems, since the poetry of the 50s, is said to have revived the tradition of the 30s. Also, predominance of Auden in his poems does not come as surprise. His first ever poem published in *The Listener*, in 1940, entitled *Ultimatum*, presents a model of Audenesque elegance and vitality. By his own admission:

> Auden’s ease and vividness were the qualities I most wished to gain."

But Auden was substituted by Yeats as soon as Vernon Watkins visited the English Club in 1943, and, Larkin attended a meeting with him. Larkin
Impassioned and imperative, he swamped us with Yeats....As a result I spent the next three years trying to write like Yeats, not because I liked his personality or understood his ideas but out of infatuation with his music. In fairness to myself it must be admitted that it is a particularly potent music, pervasive as garlic, and has ruined many a better talent.\textsuperscript{31}

Later, his reading of Hardy again gave a turn to his poetic impulse and he wrote Waiting For Breakfast in December 1947, which, more than anything else informs that ‘the celtic fever abated and the patient sleeping soundly.’

“When reaction came, it was undramatic, complete and permanent. In early 1946 I had some new digs....I used to read. One book I had at my bedside was the little blue Chosen Poems of Thomas Hardy.\textsuperscript{32}

Quick shifting, from one writer to another, suggests Larkin’s essential power of absorbing certain vital poetic practices in his formative years which ‘helped him to produce a better work of his own. Larkin himself says:

\ldots\ldots in fact the principal poets of the day- Eliot, Auden, Dylan Thomas, Betjeman- were all speaking out loud and clear, and there was no reason to become entangled in the undergrowth of Poetry Quarterly and Poetry London except by a failure of judgement.”\textsuperscript{33}
However, attempts have been made (Larkin himself encouraged it by his
Introduction to *The NorthShip*) to undermine the poems in *The NorthShip* as
humours of juvenilia, but, the volume acquires significance in many respects.
It not only provides the history of Larkin's gradual poetic development, along
with his experiments with different models, but it also records the successive
failures he met with in his personal life. Swarbrick feels that the Larkin of *The
NorthShip* never disappeared:

His whole career can be read of as the often unresolved
conflict between a romantic, aspiring Larkin, and the
empirical, ironic Larkin, between the aesthetic and the
philistine.34

There were a number of reasons, from personal and psychological, to
circumstantial, which were responsible for the contending dualities in his po­
etic personality. He was obstructed by his ‘fatal gift for pastiche’ which was an
extension of his childhood interest in mimicry.

His early poems “....and many of their successors, in effect extend that
gift for mimicry.”35 As a boy Larkin was a precocious reader. In his early age
he perused through most of his father's library which contained works by Hardy,
Lawrence, Shaw, Bennet and Masefield. He recalls “....I must have read a book
a day, ever, despite the tiresome interruptions of morning and afternoon school.36
He remained uncommunicative aloof and reserved because of the taxing
debilities of short sightedness and stammer. Speech impediment, by his own
admission, was 'a source of deep psychological estrangement and emotional
scaring'. For him, observed Tim Trengove Jones, “Writing was a way of van-
lishing fears about the diminishment of self, and, not 'his tenderly nursed sense of defeat' as alleged by Charles Tomlinson. In his essay, *Not The Place's Fault*, published in 1959, Larkin recalled his boyhood at Coventry, to the time of his entry to Oxford in 1940. "I wrote ceaselessly...now verse, which I sowed up into little books, now prose, a thousand words a night after home work...." The three years stay at Oxford proved crucial as his creative instinct got sharpened thoroughly, coming into close contact with Kingsley Amis, Noel Hughes and Montgomery.  

Larkin also gained notoriety for his obsession with music. A peculiar passion for jazz has played an important role in his life. In the Introduction to *All What Jazz: A Record Diary 1961-68* published in 1970, he attacked non sensical modernism in all forms of art as represented by Parker, Picasso and Pound. It was when the reading of D.H. Lawrence brought him close to his society that he learned to express his 'suppressed emotions and impulses'. In his essay on Jazz written in 1943, he exposed his close affinity with the Lawrentian concept of unconscious art:

Jazz is the closest description of the unconscious we have...The decay of ritual in everything from religion to the lighting fire is resulting in the insulation of the unconscious......Jazz is the new art of the unconscious, and is therefore improvised, for it cannot call upon consciousness to express its own divorce from consciousness."

After romantic ideals failed his aspiration as an artist, a concealed wrath became
explicit in his wryness and was exposed in Toads and Money which remind us of the Lawrentian influence on the poet.

If personal life has anything to do with later attitudes it was the failure to get into civil service that probably accounted for his wryness and permanent intransigence. He was forced to seek a job of a librarian at Wellington, in Shropshire, which ran counter to his deepest dearest ambitions. In sharp contrast to Oxford, Wellington was a cultural desert. He had to cope with loneliness and frequently visited Bruce Montgomery who worked at a nearby school, but his lonely Wellington solitude, also made Larkin work relentlessly. Most of the poems in The NorthShip were the result of this prolific period. His second novel A Girl in Winter was also completed during this stay. The NorthShip comprises poems which the poet finished between 1942 and 1944. The early phases of his poetic career attain the metaphorical dimension of a rudderless boat, which, in its search of right direction, could even be influenced by the nudge of a current, and change course for sometime, if not permanently.

In a historical perspective, Stephen Regan has tried to see Larkin’s poems, written between 1938-45, as war-time poetry for the most part:

The insecurities of wartime Britain helped shape a poetry of restricted choices, quiescent moods and disappointed ideals, but in a more positive way produced a poetry of tenacious survival and vigilant awareness.40

This perspective is also supported by Larkin’s own comment:
Larkin contributed ten poems, mostly written between 1943-44, to the Poetry From Oxford in War time, an anthology published in 1945. These appeared in The NorthShip also, and, at about the same time. Utmost caution and uncertainty mark the mood of these poems. The Moon is full tonight, for instance, solemnizes the loss and the full moon 'definite and bright' is placed in contrast to the sceptical and chaotic world below:

The moon is full tonight
And hurts the eye
It is so definite and bright
What if it has drawn up
All quietness and certitude of worth
where with to fill its cup,
Or mint a second moon, a paradise?-
For they are gone from earth. (CP. p.274)

In the follow up, 'The horns of the morning' is pained to see the world full of unprecedented misery:

Here, where no love is,
All that was hopeless
And kept me from sleeping
Is frail and unsure;
For never so brilliant,
Neither so silent,
Nor so unearthly, has
Earth grown before. (CP. p.275)

One of the longest of the early poems After-Dinner Remarks, published in The Listener (Nov. 1940), carries a serious and sombre mood of ‘failure and remorse’ in the restrictive conditions of war. With war-time imagery, the poem sounds a warning of impending ‘horrors’ and ‘imminent death:

All the familiar horrors we
Associate with others
Are coming fast along our way;
The wind is warning in our tree
And morning paper still betray
The shrieking of the mothers (CP. p.241)

Ultimatum is another despairing expression of fear-stricken Britain. It paints a state of hopelessness and lost faith in the ancient saying: ‘Life is yours’, because, ‘There are no tickets for the Vale of Peace’. As an elegy on the war-dead A Stone Church Damaged by a Bomb, published in Oxford Poetry (June 1943) describes the afflictions of war when ‘The dead are shapeless in the shapeless earth’ and ‘Nothing but death remained/ To scatter magnificence”. Many other poems written between 1940-45, such as, Observation, Conscript, New Year Poem, Out in the lane I pause, may be characterised as war-poetry for their immediate experiences of war-stricken Britain. Images of ‘night and darkness’, of ‘confinement and entrapment’, and ‘anxieties and dilemmas’ of ‘a society at war’, typify these poems to
show the emotional weariness of wartime Britain.

War poetry characterized a phase in Larkin’s early work, *The NorthShip,* the title poem, is also marked by the tension between the perfection of life, and work. He cannot resist the temptation to

> Let me become an instrument sharply stringed

> For all things to strike music as they please

(On p.301)

but the problem was

> How to recall such music, when the street

Darkens?, ..........................................

and, that there were ..........................

Only hurrying and troubled faces. (On p.301)

Oscillations between love and isolation, or, community and solitariness, or, work and leisure, echo very often in his poems reflecting this very same anxiety. Owing to this, poems in *The NorthShip* appear sullen in perception as well as imagery. In the XXIV poem of *The Northship* volume, romantic involvement, for example, is disdained and is thought not to help achieve perfection in art and therefore:

> Love, we must part now:” because “In the past

> There has been too much moonlight and self pity.

(On p.280)

This mars in its implication, the artistic excellence of the earlier poetry. The title poem, *The NorthShip,* is allegorically drawn on a canvas of coldness and erotic love. His apprehension of sexual indulgence finds expression in the last
A Woman has ten claws,

Sang the drunken boatswain. (CP. p.305)

The main thrust of the poems in The North Ship is the issue of relationship between life and art which maintain their significance throughout his poetic career.

A study of Larkin's work prior to The Less Deceived, though less recognised and often forgotten, becomes imperative for its variety, as also, for the added benefit of helping to know him from his earliest days. The intervening period between the publication of The North Ship, in 1945, and The Less Deceived, in 1954, is marked by an abortive attempt at his first novel, Jill, in 1946, a second novel, A Girl in Winter, in 1947, and, also, the unsuccessful collections In The Grip of Light, in 1947. None of them could bring him the desired recognition. The reading public responded positively, yet his identity crisis remained unresolved. It continued to dominate the poems in The Less Deceived. The genesis of The Less Deceived lies in these successive failures.

Apart from personal regressions, The Less Deceived, has its roots in circumstances more disturbing than Larkin's Introduction to The North Ship cared to admit. The troubling circumstances were most probably the striking socio-political conditions of the post-war Britain. The illusion of a welfare state, created with the Labour Party coming to power in 1945, was deflated by 1951 when the party was ousted from power. Welfare programmes of a healthy free education, and, employment and housing did not
make much headway. The reason was lack of consensus among political parties. Stephen Regan observes:

Consensus became much more difficult to maintain in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{42}

The Labour Party's slogan 'Fair shares for all', and, the Conservatives pledge 'To set the people free' as election campaigns, culminated in a fierce debate on true freedom which was cherished with great celebration after 1945. Britain's dream of becoming a world power had also been shattered following its fast declining imperial power and clout.

In fact, The Less Deceived, may better be understood as the extension of the very mood of uncertainty and scepticism. The title itself converts Ophelia's statement in Hamlet "I was the more deceived". The 'sad-eyed' (and 'clear-eyed') realism as referred to by Larkin himself, in connection with this particular volume determines the extent of his disillusionment in ideals. Larkin strives in vain to make some compensation through a rationalistic and logical approach. Therefore, his polemics on work and leisure, marriage and isolation, love and sex takes up the major part of this volume.

However, Stephen Regan finds Alfred Ayer's Language Truth and Logic (published in 1946) as an immediate influence on the substance and meaning of The Less Deceived. Ayer had insisted on the verification of any proposition after getting through 'some possible sense experience', in order to determine its integrity. Deception (previously titled The Less Deceived) incorporates the very notion of 'verification of experiences and propositions' which Regan perceives 'a recurring impulse throughout The Less
Deceived. Larkin’s ‘sad-eyed and clear-eyed’ perspective, identified as the empirical bearing of Movement poetry was a part of the general tendency to re-evaluate traditional beliefs and values under the shattered post-war conditions. Utmost caution and implicit scepticism in The Less Deceived becomes symptomatic in this sense. Regan observes:

...........loss of power manifests itself in the wistful melancholy and elegiac lyricism of the poems, and it helps us to understand Larkin’s ‘sad-eyed’ realism.”

This may have the shades of his personal experiences also, including his reading of Hardy. Frustration in love, failure to gain fame, his disenchantment of routine life, and his concept about individual freedom in contrast to love, marriage and belief. Larkin’s claims that his poems in The Less Deceived, Wedding-Wind (completed in Sept. 1947), for instance, have their origin in Larkin’s romantic involvement with Ruth Bowman. Despite all hope for happiness, and the ecstatic mood of the poem, there seems concealed a scepticism about the permanence of the moment in the question:

Can even death dry up...? (CP. p. 11)

This ambiguity of feeling finds outlet in No Road, written in 1950, and in If My Darling (May, 1950), which are explicit statements of his severance of relationship with Ruth Bowman. The former portrays the broken bond as a disused road, and pronounces a final verdict that “no such road will run/ From you to me.’ As a follow up, the latter misogynistically shocks the listener with:

And to hear how the past is past and the future neuter

Might knock my darling off her impriceable pivot. (CP. p. 41)
An anti-woman offensiveness is distinct in the bluster which makes us feel sorrier for the woman than the man. It "shows a kind of unbuttoned intemperate-ness which would never have been allowed in The North Ship." These were some of the poems first published in XX Poems, and, then included in The Less Deceived. But, later in Latest Face, written in Feb. 1951, this stance seems to soften, in favour of relationship and emotional involvement, and it is discovered that the object of longing is best left remote and unattended. From hence forth unattainability of ideal as an imperative to avoid disappointment becomes a repeated assertion in the poems. After breaking his engagement, Larkin wrote to James Suttan:

Remote things seem desirable. Bring them close, and I start shitting myself.

The Less Deceived is anxiously preoccupied with the question of making a choice which, Larkin believes, shapes personality and decides the course of life. The poems, in this volume, voice a struggle against the trappings of identity, passing through various involvements and commitments, which per se involve illusions. Larkin deals with personal issues and externalizes them by employing personae, in an effort to escape identity. A sense of failure dominates most of the poems of the particular volume.

Larkin's departure from Belfast, in March 1955, marks the beginning of his third poetical phase. The Whitsun Weddings registers a phenomenal shift, not only in Larkin's creative sensibility, but also, in the social and cultural texture of British society between the late 1950s and early 1960s. Stephan Regan unhesitatingly refers to the period of The Whitsun Weddings as a phase of
change, 'From austerity to affluence.' His thesis is probably influenced by G.K. Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society*, published in 1958, lamenting the careless mushrooming of materialism in the United States which foresaw the trend to be followed in Britain. There were reasons in evidence, as consumerism started riding high, in British society too. The necessity of rationing food, fuel, clothing was substituted by the luxury of refrigerators, television-sets and washing machines. Regan notes that 1957 was thought to be the first year of the new affluence and that it was in this year that Harold Macmillan told the people of Britain that they had never had it so good.

The booming economy was subsequently followed by rapid progress in the field of construction, providing indications that Britain was emerging from the post-war hardship. These were the social and cultural borders of a particular stage, in transition and transformation of the formerly imperialist society, which Larkin was obliged to portray in *The Whitsun Weddings*. But the poems in the volume do not merely reproduce pictures of society. Larkin explores areas, in an inimitable manner, to write his own individualistic statements. Eventually the perspective of the changing world becomes confrontational. The torment of his imprisoned soul echoes in *The Importance of Elsewhere*, a poem, that informs his perception about a sense of acute alienation, he feels among his people and their climate. Written on return to England from Belfast, Larkin in this poem, mourns for many reasons, ranging from personal to professional. In a nostalgic mood, the poem signifies strangeness as a positive sign for creativity which Larkin reaffirms in one of his interviews:
The best writing conditions I ever had were in Belfast.46

Besides in England Larkin’s personal life seemed threatened on account of the incongenial company of his widowed mother, and, formerly estranged woman friends, whence he perceives,

‘Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.

(CP.p.104)

Andrew Swarbrick rightly observed that the pre-eminent theme of nearly all Larkin’s work was ‘the relationship between self and “others”, between the individual and society.”47

But poems in The Whitsun Weddings are distinct responses to the immediate social and cultural metamorphosis. Here, for instance, opens the volume showing the growing impact of consumer culture, characterised by their desires of ‘cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies, electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers.’

Larkin’s seeming disapproval of the transformed vista is vivid in:

Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster,

Beside grain-scattered-streets, barge-crowded water.

(CP.p.136)

Mr. Bleaney, written in May 1955, is significant in the sense that it was the first poem Larkin wrote after his return to England. The poem resorts to combine his maladjustment with the ‘hired box’ surrounding ‘whose window shows a strip of building land/ Tussocky, littered’ and his dissidence with the culture of ‘the jabbering set’. Larkin resents the increasing urbanisation and exasperating
industrialisation. In *Nothing To Be Said* he is keenly perceptive to:

*In mill-towns on dark mornings,*

*Life is slow dying.* \(\text{(CP. p.138)}\)

*Essential Beauty* and *Sunny Prestatyn* exemplify the world of advertising oriented glamour. To Larkin, it was

*Pure coldness to our live imperfect eyes*

*That stare beyond this world.............. \(\text{(CP. p.144)}\)*

A variety of stances or attitudes is voiced in the poems of *The Whitsun Weddings*. Thus, if *Toad Revisited* depicts reconciliation, *Dockery and Son* attempts at justification, *Ambulance* stands to warn, *Afternoon* grieves and mourns. Larkin succeeds in fusing together colloquialism and lyricism even while dealing with irony and parody. The dialogue form through slightly differentiated persona, creates dramatic effect and becomes part of his distancing strategy. After arguing at length Larkin leaves the verdict of the issue to the reader. This strategy often leads to a misunderstanding of his own attitude. This manner of complexity in his poems seems to be the extension of the confused state of the contemporary social structure. Regan maintains:

*In a very overt way, the poetry of ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ functions as social discourse; its language is scored through with the conflicts and tensions of that historical turning from austerity to affluence.*\(^{48}\)

Consequently there is an oscillation between alienation and integration all through the poems of *The Whitsun Weddings*. Here, Mr. Bleaney and *Dockery and Son* are cognitive of the comparative contrast, between two
lives, distinct within different classes and cultures. Many more such poems in the volume offer resistance to the changing landscape of post-war Britain. Larkin tactfully balances the images of past and present Britain, in his delineation:

Luminously-peopled air ascends  
And past the poppies bluish neutral distances  
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach  
of shapes and shingle.  

Poem after poem, *The Whitsun Weddings* portrays consumerism rampaging on the ideals of the welfare state. The social fabric was undergoing a complete transformation. Gloomy representation of this state of affairs echoes Larkin’s disapproval. However, a characteristic movement towards coherence is conspicuous in *Rich Industrial Shadows*, and, in *Here*, implying flourishing prosperity on one hand and distinct spoliation on the other. Larkin was not averse to the diverse constitution of the new society, with regard to the post-war democratic framework, but, he insisted on some kind of concord in the matters of value.

Archetypal tension, between classes and their cultures, dominate the poems of this volume. In this connection, Regan says:

Differences of class and culture are much more pronounced in *The Whitsun Weddings* than in Larkin’s earlier volumes.  

*Here* and *Mr. Bleaney*, among many others, have been pointed out as exemplary in exploring social and cultural differences. However, *Nothing To Be Said* appears a futile attempt to equate these dif-
ferences by emphasising the final inevitability of death which remains indiscriminate:

So are their separate ways
of building benediction,
Measuring love and money
ways of slow dying. (CP. p.138)

In similar fashion, ideological incompatibility between two persons is dramatised through a persona in Dockery and Son:

For Dockery a son, for me nothing (CP. p. 153)

but ultimately they are paralleled because:

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

The title poem The Whitsun Weddings regarded one of the finest poems of Larkin, achieves significance in seeking unity in the multiplicity and disparity of perceptions. Either it is about changing landscapes of town and country, or, in tastes and values, or, among different cultural attitudes. Regan asserts:

The interest of ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ lies not just in what is seen but how it is seen.50

The poem, at the bottom, seeks to establish a common understanding in the varied perspectives, which were distinctly characteristic of a transitional period. Through a panoply of contemporary urban and rural Britain, the speaker of the poem asserts an integral homogeneity among the apparent social and cultural differences of geographical and historical values. Ignoring the ritualistic significance of the oc-
occasion or the title, Larkin also conveys the agnostic tendency in the later part of the twentieth century. The absence of transcendental meaning in all issues relating to temporal life becomes prominent. Consequently the volume remains tormented by the obsession of loneliness and death. However, its landmark success reconciled even his bitter critics, like Al Alvarez, who very quietly recognised Larkin as a representative poet of his time:

Perhaps his special achievement is to have created a special voice for that special, localised moment: post-war provincial England in all its dreariness, with the boredom of shortage no longer justified, the cheap, plastic surface of things which nobody wants and everybody buys.¹

The Whitsun Weddings was followed by Larkin’s last collection, High Windows nearly a decade later, in 1974. The volume attracted a large public, and had to be reprinted in the same year after 6000 copies were sold out, in just three months of publication. The cause of this acclaim was that Larkin, by this time, had consolidated his position as a poet of national reckoning. Andrew Motion sums up his progress thus:

‘The Less Deceived’ made his name; The Whitsun Weddings made him famous; ‘High Windows’ turned him into a national monument.²

While grading Larkin’s poetic stature, Motion surprisingly ignored his first collection The North Ship, the poetic piece which had prepared the ground for the
rest of his work. Grevel Lind op's observation about *High Windows* has a particular significance in this reference:

More unexpected is the fact it (High Windows) shows the re-emergence of tendencies kept carefully out of sight since Larkin's first collection 'The NorthShip'.

Therefore, with a slight alteration, a metaphorical classification may be made thus: *The NorthShip* tilled the ground; *The Less Deceived* ordered the place; *The Whitsun Weddings* built upon it a house; and *High Windows* vociferously enthroned him in it.

*High Windows* appears Larkin's outcry against all inhibitors, rather than a swan song. The sense of desperation seems intensified in the spiteful idiom of the poems. More than anything else, the dread of old age and final decay strains his relationship with community. Many poems in this collection refuse integration. Significantly, the opening of *High Windows* with *To The Sea*, and, its ending on *The Explosion* symptomatically informs that Larkin was grieved over the loss of British glory. However, the concluding poem reflects the predominance of senility and extinction. *To The Sea* invokes the morning at the sea-shore as part of century-old English tradition with a nostalgic indulgence:

To step over the low wall that divides
Road from concrete walk above the shore
Brings sharply back something known long before-

(CP.p.173)

There is a feeling of satisfaction that the old English is 'still going on, all of it, still going on!' but, sad realization comes immediately, for it is discovered
that the ‘The white steamer has gone!’ In Show Saturday, he celebrates the
country agricultural show, and yearns, ‘Let it always be there.’ Representing a
group of poems in High Windows, Going, Going is a poetic piece that shows
Larkin’s anxiety for the loss of pastoral England:

I thought it would last my time-
The sense that, beyond the town,
There would, always be fields and farms.  (CP.p.189)

But it is a hope in vain, because:

And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guild halls, the carved choirs.  (CP.p.190)

But unfortunately ‘greed/And garbage are too thick-strewn/to be swept up now’.
(CP.p.190)

More or less, in a similar fashion Livings, The Card Players, Dublinesque and How
Distant show Larkin’s so far unrecorded concern for the social and historical past
of Britain. The figures in Livings and The Card Players represent a world which
is bizarre, for its incline towards boorishness and inhibition on one hand, and,
distinct wonder and marvel on the other. Larkin’s poetry as a whole, and, High
Windows in particular, portray the very grotesque in:

............sullen fleshy inarticulate men, stock brokers,
sellers of goods, living in thirty-year old detached
houses among the golf courses,...father’s of cold-eyes
lascivious daughters on the pill...and (of) cannabis-
smoking jeans-and-bearded stuart-haired sons, the men
whose first coronary is coming like christmas; who
drift........into the darkening avenues of age and incapacity.\textsuperscript{54}

Despite the fact that in \textit{High Windows}, Larkin emerges as a wry, self-depricator, conscious of the delusiveness of hope, the volume shows ample sign of development as compared to his earlier work. What is central to \textit{High Windows} is his effort to be a poet different from himself. In earlier works he made best use of masks, to project various stances and attitudes which were most of the time ironically self-critical. But in \textit{High Windows}, writes Andrew Swarbrick:

Larkin speaks much more unambiguously in propria persona, sacrificing the earlier masks.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{The Old Fools} exemplifies his unmasked bluntness in articulating his sickening fear of old age and approaching death. However, some critics have taken it as a positive move, from the strategy of detachment towards the compassionate identification with the trauma of old age:

\begin{quote}
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?....
\end{quote}

(CP.p.196)

Larkin’s disgust with old people, because they frighten him reminding of his own future senility and death, is more unguised and direct. Bitterness in language plays importantly in denuding the latent dread. James Booth sums up this poem as ‘embarassingly obvious’ displaced terror of death.\textsuperscript{56}
In High Windows Larkin seems to have failed ‘to be different from himself’, though he wished it desperately. He is very much present in these poems with his frustration and sense of loss. His attempt is further defeated by the philistinism and juxtaposing cynicism all through the volume. Aware of inevitable senility and imminent death and deeply frustrated in life, Larkin is found disturbed in this particular volume. Desperate and guilt-conscious he writes to Monica Jones:

I feel rather scared these days, of time passing and us getting older. Our lives are so different from other people’s, or have been,— I feel I am landed on my 45th year as if washed up on a rock, not knowing how I got there or ever having had a chance of being anywhere else.......Of course my external surroundings have changed, but inside I’ve been the same, trying to hold everything off in order to write.’ Anyone would think I was Tolstoy, the value I put on it. It hasn’t amounted to much. I mean, I know I’ve been successful in that I’ve made a name and got a medal and so on, but it’s very small achievement to set against all the rest.57

Critics emphasise the characteristic loss of social and political consensus of 1970’s as the basis of ‘the fractured linguistic contours of Larkin’s final poems.” They point out the industrial unrest, severe economic recession and ideological conflicts and divisions which loom large in many poems of High Windows. Regan says:
If High Windows is sometimes savage and vehement in its outlook, it is also the most socially committed and ideologically engaged collection of poems that Larkin produced.

Regan’s thesis is strengthened by the direct and jeering satire in *Posterity*, and *Homage to a Government*.

Next year we shall be living in a country
That brought its troops home for lack of money.
The statues will be standing in the same
Tree-muffled squares and look nearly the same.
Our children will not know it’s a different country
All we can hope to leave them now is money.

(CP.p.171)

Several other critics also analyse the poems in *High Windows* as belligerent reactions to the changing social and political situation in the 1960s and early 1970s. Regard for mass values in his earlier work, significantly under the welfare-state ideals is absent in *High Windows*. The life-long conflict between a sense of identity and the value of art is brought to a despairing end. He lost faith in a shared sense of fear and deprivation. Therefore, there is hardly any compassion for other’s failure and misery. He ceased to ‘think of being them’. The shift from implicit meaning to an explicit assertion, also amounts to an admission of a loss of shared understanding between the poet and his audience. But Trotter interprets it differently:

......by shifting to a far more militant and assertive
stance than he had ever adopted before...Larkin began to affirm a connection between individual experience and shared meaning which he might once have left to chance. The shaming pragmatism of the sixties drove him to speak his mind, to give his poems the authority of conscious and unequivocal dissent.\textsuperscript{59}

Larkin seems to have overcome his silence which was formidably languishing with him since long. He is said to have written \textit{High Windows} into silence. As a result there were the tensions between consensus and conflict, between integration and disintegration, between aestheticism and philistinism, between compassion and rancour, and, all this lay bared as the central theme of the volume.

Larkin’s sense of worthlessness was intensified with growing age. Though he was profusely honoured towards the end of his life, he wrote very few poems after \textit{High Windows}. Once when he was requested to write a poem in 1983, he answered:

\begin{quote}
Poetry gave me up about six years ago and I have no expectation of being revisited.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

The complexity of Larkin’s multivocal poetry has invited diversified critical opinion about his achievements as a writer. The criticism of his poetics may broadly be divided into two categories. One that appraises his poetry prior to \textit{High Windows}, and, the other, which reassesses his worth after this last work. The critical response after 1974 revolutionized all what had been said about Larkin previously. Earlier accusations of mediocrity, boredom, suburban mental-ratio, got substituted by an image of a provocative disquietening and original
artist of words.

Charles Tomlinson in his review of *New Lines* entitled *The Middebro Muse*, in 1957, criticised Movement poetry in general, but, focussed his attack on Larkin whose poetic assumption he found lacking in many ways. He did not approve Larkin’s anti-romantic stance which he thought was just an unconscionable amount of self-regard, of acting up to one’s mirror image of one self.\(^1\)

Tomlinson seems impatient of his xenophobia and defeatism when he writes:

> I can not escape the feeling of its intense parochialism. More over, the tenderly nursed sense of defeat, the self-skitting go hand in hand with an inability to place his malaise and an evident willingness to persist in it.\(^2\)

The charge of ‘parochialism’, or, ‘insularity’ implying ‘The Suburban mental ratio’, which, Tomlinson thinks ‘impose on experience’,\(^3\) is now seen as a prejudiced, hostile to democratic ideals. Andrew Swarbrick claims:

> It is easy to detect here an anxious anti-democratic bias, a contempt for ‘suburbanism’ and ‘relativism’ which characterised some of the hostile reactions to the Movement (which was incipient in Larkin and Amis).\(^4\)

Tomlinson’s criticism mainly rests on some of the few words like ‘Middlebro’, ‘provincial’, ‘suburban’, which become part of his aesthetic judgement. Swarbrick claims:
Tomlinson could not know the buried history of Larkin’s romantic aspirations now evident in the posthumously published poems and newly available manuscripts and private material.⁶⁵

Another significant name in the criticism on Larkin is that of Al Alvarez whose polemic against Larkin in The New Poetry published in 1962, is directed to Larkin’s apathy to ‘a more urgent, experimental poetry, as being produced by modern American writers’. He charged Larkin for succumbing to ‘negative feed-backs’. Making an example of Larkin’s Church Going he writes:

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, underpaid, overtaxed, hopeless, bored, wry.⁶⁶

Another point of Al Alvarez’s criticism is ‘the concept of gentility’, that, ‘life is always more or less orderly...That God, in short, is more or less good.⁶⁷

Larkin’s poems, for example Deceptions, Wants, and, Absences deal with the existential trauma and psychological problems as opposed to the notion of gentility. Andrew Swarbrick comments:

This would have been less evident to Alvarez in 1962, but there is nothing in Larkin to support the reading of a God who is, in short, more or less good.⁶⁸

The hostility of criticism from Tomlinson upto the most recent time was crucial to show Larkin’s poetry unadventurous, and, aesthetically and experimentally timid.
Colin Falck in his review of *The Whitsun Weddings* makes an issue of 'Larkin's sense of futility'. Donald Davie, onetime Movement colleague of Larkin, disproves his being 'numb to the nonhuman creation in order to stay compassionate towards the human.' However, without opposing Falck's thesis, Davie supports Larkin's 'humanism':

Hardy and Larkin may have sold poetry short; but at least neither of them sold it so short as to make the poet less than a human being...I can sympathize with Falck's outraged refusal of the diminished world which Larkin's poetry proffers as the only one available to him; but he cannot escape that world as easily as he thinks.

What is an absolute disjunction in Larkin's work between desire and its object' is for Falck a romantic tradition of non-fulfilment, for John Bayley:

Disillusion is a working part of the dream...For Larkin, disillusionment actually intensifies the enchanted comforts of elsewhere and becomes part of Them.

Stephen Regan, one of the most balanced and genuine critics of Larkin in recent times, writes off all the traditional approaches to Larkin, including the thematic approach, practical criticism, as well as the linguistic approach.
ing a 'historicist study of his poetry' Regan argues that through these traditional approaches 'Larkin's poems are flattened out into a uniform body of work, with little regard for the relationship between the poems and a rapidly changing social context.' Regan recognises that Historicism criticism tends to regard 'literature' as social discourse, a language activity within a particular social structure. The varieties of language found in different literary texts 'constitute' different world views or interpretations of 'reality.' Espousing structuralist criticism, Guido Latre categorised Larkin's study on two levels, thematic and stylistic, which further interpret his poetry on two planes, one is 'monistic' which emphasises mainly one pole in the opposition, whereas the other is a 'dualistic' interpretation and determines the essence of Larkin's poetry as a tension between two equally strong antagonistic forces. Under the latest critical trend, Larkin has been discovered an ambivalent inheritor of modernism. Barbara Everett in Philip Larkin: After Symbolism claims:

His poems appear to have profitted from a kind of heroic struggle not to be modernistic, not to be mere derivative footnotes to a symbolism as much disapproved of as admired; they have wished to be, not merely after, but well after Eliot.

Most significant of all is Andrew Motion's Study of Larkin, in which Motion attempts to answer all the antagonistic inferences about Larkin's poetics from an over-all perspective. He says:

Larkin re-invigorates a 'native' tradition by marrying...
it to some aspects of an 'alien' modernism which is perhaps a way of allowing Larkin to have the best of both worlds.\textsuperscript{75}

Larkin's masks emerge intensely self-revealing, and therefore, Swarbrick infers:

> At the centre of Larkin’s poetry is the pursuit of self-definition, a self which feels threatened by the proximity of others but which fears that without relationship with otherness the self has no validity.\textsuperscript{76}

Therefore, the apparent conflict between solitariness and sociability in apposition to selfishness and selflessness is an existential argument which is very much concerned with the nature of individual identity. In solving these questions Larkin goes through the vocabulary of separateness, of exclusion and difference, establishing a kind of negative self definition. This 'vocabulary of nullity and anonymity, suggesting both the ultimate desire for oblivion and an absolute terror of death'\textsuperscript{77} oblige critics to identify 'a defining voice of Englishness' in Larkin's poetry.