CHAPTER II

THE THEME OF DEATH

Nothing stepped like death
Death was a major preoccupation of the Post Modern European and British Poetry. Creative artists had always been plagued by the sheer unpredictability and indisputable certainty of this mysterious phenomenon. Though everybody accepted the inevitability, few wished to formally converse about the occurrence. It was universally believed that probe into its recesses could lend greater meaning to life and the extant. Hence there was a felt need to rediscover rather than dismiss the concept as an abstract notion. The two world wars and the resultant blood bath also created in the western world a death consciousness: weariness at the futility and mindless sanctioned killing in the name of war penetrated into the psyche of the thinkers for whom death had always been a traditional subject for cogitation. With the personality theory of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard revolutionising the thought and life of average man illusions were fast fading. God and religion were things of the past. The serious thinker was rejecting even the refuge offered by theological treatises and established institutions. Promises of immortality which had earlier succeeded in pacifying many now failed to appease the shattered human sensibility in the name of perpetuity of spirit. The fact of death with its attendant mystery, anguish, misery, suffering thus lent itself to easy reference. Viewed earlier as a public event, an external fact with existence outside the individual, the experience became internalised into a personal and intimate encounter with the noctur-
nal forces of darkness.

Further the preoccupation with the motif of annihilation could partly be attributed to deteriorating social conditions and declining moral standards between the two world wars, specially after the second world war. Homer Lane, the psychologist diagnosed it as a moral and spiritual malaise of society dictated by gangster virtues and the individual psyche becoming irrevocably sick.

Though the early 19th century intellectuals maintained that insight into human nature provided awareness into the essence, the basic tenets of the existing philosophy emphasized precedence of existence over essence. Thinkers, explored the finite and infinite in human nature maintaining that individual consciousness does not merely function as spiritual and physical entity, but as a synthesis and amalgam of the two. The persistent interaction of the twin worlds result in pain, pleasure, stress, acceptance, deprivation, crimes, revolutions to mention some. This occurs on the level of the interface. An insight into the state was essential for existence. The fact of death as complete cessation of being increases appreciation for the variety and sanctity of life. It was generally believed that the enigma of death confrontation and acceptance of its factity, and its integration into individual experience imparts added meaning to life. Corporeality, the prime constituent of being entailed suffering, pain, misery, aborted existence, disgust, alienation, death and the bleakly pernicious experiences of life. Peter Koestenbaum in his book 'Is there an Answer to Death' submits that the age was influenced by existentialism and the in-vogue interest in death origi-
nated with prominent existentialist philosophers Kierkegaard, Sartre, Nietzsche and Heidegger who offered to redefine finitude as a neutralizer to the fear of death. Koestenbaum observes:

The anticipation of our death reveals to us who we are. It is an intellectual revelation, in that death helps us define human nature. But it is also an experiential understanding in that death puts us in touch with our deepest feelings—both anxieties and hopes, both needs and opportunities—as existent human beings.¹

English Poetry of the fifties and the sixties thus displayed a penchant for the non-extant. Larkin was no exception to contemporary thought and philosophical patterns of his time. The riddle of death, its enigmatic fearsome approach and the ensuing void became one of Larkin's obsessions also. In a world shorn of all illusions the poet sought to grapple with his favourite subject by connoting the unseen, unknown predator in terms of the manifest, seen and recognizable. The overt and implied image cluster of the death group of poems perform the significant task of demonstrating Larkin's preoccupation. His prime concern was an enquiry into the indisputable veracity of death as a fact, perceiving the subject of the abysmal void not only as an outsider but an insider also. Man was viewed as a helpless victim of circumstances, social conditions and environment. His lot was doomed to old age and death. The encounter with nothingness thus stemmed from external and internal factors as also a de-
cline in faith and religion. In this connection Andrew Swarbrick notes

There he looked at death from life: now he
looks at life from death.²

Releasing the concept from its hiding place he confronts it squarely. Overtly appearing death conscious Larkin was by no means morbid or depressive. Quite reversely the poet demonstrated an analogy between the twin principles of Being and Non-Being, which though counterpoints cannot exist in isolation, independent of each other. His poems exhibit cognizance of moments when deeper probings into the nature of the death premise lent added dimension to the extant. The approach of death is conceived in terms of a levelling anonymity in a language devoid of rhetoric. Its consciousness pervades the fabric as a nullity which threatens to render everything purposeless. Larkin’s poems and letters exhibit him almost preternaturally aware of death as the final annihilation of all endeavour and identity. However the inertia, numbness, pain, panic earlier associated with the cessation of life was skillfully counterbalanced by its irrefutable certainty. Larkin singled out the subject to the extent of rendering its original connotations ineffective. New meanings and definitions emerged forthwith.

Living toys are something novel,

But it soon wears off somehow.

Fetch the shoe box, fetch the shovel-

Ma’m we’re playing funerals now.

(C P., p.130)

The enigma generated in him diverse feelings of fear, defiance and bewil-
derment. The theme became one of his passions and the resultant analogies carefully incorporated private perceptions and moods. The poet also gauged in his reading public the desire for precise information as a consequence of deeper awareness. Larkin realised that modern man had become more vocal and could not be relied upon to passively receive the sedation of fantasy barbiturates. In this connection C.D. Lewis observes

Throughout the whole range of modern words,
from the symbolists onwards, we find a
tendency towards the illogical, away from
the old cause-and-effect sequence of images
within the poems.³

The poetry of the era witnessed a profusion of broken images. Bold, enticing in content they tried to assimilate the inflow of new ideas and newer modern sensibility. Discordant, heterogeneous image patterns having no apparent intellectual or emotional relationship became fashionable and current. For Larkin the end of life was painful, though alluring from a distance. He deciphered it as an unresolved mystery, a cloud which could not be grasped, caught or claimed. Death figured in most of his poems, sometimes at the core, sometimes as a conclusion and often as a passing reference. He makes no attempt to romanticize the trauma of death, nor does he confuse one with the idea of immortality. Under the influence of existentialism Larkin regarded death not only as an experience but also a felt anticipation or as a sorrowful loss.

Andrew Motion and a host of other critics referred to him as “a hope-
The question whether the dominance of the theme of death in Larkin's poetry was the result of his pessimistic nature, or it was the impact of existentialism or the tragic death of his loved ones can only be resolved after analysing some prominent poems which refer to the aforesaid theme. An insight into poems beginning with 'Going' written sometime in February 1946 to 'In Times When Nothing Stood' in 1978, covering a span of thirty two years would serve to substantiate the above assertion.

'Going': the opening poem of the Thwaite edited anthology 'Collected Poems' has very few concrete images.

There is an evening coming in
Across the fields, one never seen before,
That lights no lamps
Silken it seems at a distance yet
When it is drawn up above the knees and breast
It brings no comfort (CP. p.3)

The regular association of all evenings is to darkening and a slow enveloping movement of night in order to cover fields and forests under a uniform blanket of darkness. This all enclosing cloud can be countered by artificial light provided by lamps. Because of its rarity Larkin's evening “One Never seen before” instead of inviting light further enhances the descending gloom. Evenings such as this can only be understood in terms of old age or death.

The second stanza advances the connotation by developing an absent comfort. The enfolding approach had apparently promised warmth and security. But the expectations are thwarted. The embrace of death pledged contentment but the mortal minds failed to comprehend it.

Silken it seems from a distance (CP. p.3)
The final stanza offers some semblence of meaning because body and soul had together

Locked Earth to the sky (CP. p.3)
With the release of the soul the ‘Tree’ is no longer shackled. The ‘hands’ and ‘loads’ though felt, left him insensitive and numb, as unqualified preliminaries to the final surrender of the body to formlessness.

What is under my hands that I cannot feel. (CP.p.3)
Concrete images employed by Larkin correspond to the senses of sight and touch. The comfort of the body indicated through reference to “knees and breast”, and “the earth and sky”, figuratively also suggest the depth and extent of perception. They provide a correlative to the soul and body. Death thus
emerges as an enigma bewildering the sensibility and expectations defying discernment. 'Going' is an appeal for better understanding, an query about the phenomenon of death. The question it poses is “what loads my hands down”. Larkin searches for the answer to this significant “what” in his subsequent poems.

With the sharpened quest to solve the enigma of death Larkin became more emperically analytical. In “And the wave sings because it is moving” his crystalline images corresponding to the movement of life appear dialectical as they suggest scientific reasons for continuity of life and its abrupt end. The poet maintains that sustenance of human existence requires no divine decree. Instead, it stems out like waves from the incessant ebb and flow of the tide of Being.

The introductory couplet announces the concept of unity of all elements- natural and human; natural being a compounding of the essences. Movement provides the integrality between the two. Cemented by this kinetic ability both the sea of life and the waves get

borne across graves together apart, together; \( \text{(CP.,p.6)} \)

The startling paradox of life is that the lifting wall that protects also imprisons

And so devised to make ourselves unhappy. \( \text{(CP.,p.6)} \)

The image of the wall traditionally represents security and shelter on the one hand and an isolation from the external world on the other hand. The unpredictability of ‘Being’ demands company when stricken by loneliness and longs for solitude among society. This constant flux of meetings and estrangements are represented by the ebb and flow of the tide.
Apart we wish ourselves together
Yet sue for solitude upon our meetings. (CP., p.6)

The stream of unification and disjunction continues till the ‘unhindered turning of
the sea’, a conceit through which Larkin connotes the mechanical termination of life.
The deflection separates the wave from its course thus tearing off all its associations
and bondage. In a Yeatsian manner Larkin visualises grief and comfort as two
equipoised waves each straining to excel and obliterate the other in an effort to
gain precedence. The activity continues till the unstoppable sea of life decides to
change its course ending movement in every quarter.

Till the unhindered turning of the sea
changes our comforts into griefs greater
Than they are raised to cancel breaking them

(CP., p.6)

Larkin pauses on sorrow

Such are the sorrows we search for meaning
Such are the cries of the birds across the water
Such are mists the sun attacks at morning

(CP., p.6)

Dissecting the emotion into its components like ‘the cry’ and ‘the
mist’ he extends the metaphor into ‘laments, tears, wreaths and rocks’.

Whatever the type, the human mind of the quester enquires into the true
or exact meaning of the grief. It desires to know the essential sorrow, its
quality, cause, effect and remedy. He concludes that these are ‘false de-
vices’, which can be effectively countered by

...the shout of the heart continually at work

(CP., p.6)
Transparent grief or misery is described competently through the phrase ‘silver tongued like a share it ploughs up failure’. Deep rooted in failure, sorrow interacts with other sentiments, states and elements. Hence ‘night’, ‘day’, ‘sleep’, ‘sky’, have to offer a share of profit to this ‘silver tongued monster’. This tax is mandatory, and none on earth can avoid it; because sooner or later grief demands and gets its due. Yet even this common sentiment loses power before death. The ‘tithe’ is collected from all excluding death. Sorrows “finds marrow in all but death to feed”. This uniformly felt emotion pales down on confrontation with the phenomenon of nothingness as “death it cannot invoke”.

Larkin’s desire to seek death leads him to the conclusion of a singularity as remarkable as the ‘sun’. Manifested as a ‘lone cloud’ in the vast illimitable sky it gains affinity with the sun which is also ‘alone’. The similitude between the two can also be converted to a study in contrasts with one representing total illumination and the other countering it as absolute and final darkness. Sleep and night are mere shadows or appearances of the final reality of total obscurity. The image of the heart ‘subdued’, ‘restraint’, ‘unquestioning’ at the advent of the nocturnal force of darkness get depicted thus by the poet.

Death is a cloud alone in the sky with the sun

Our health turning like fish in the green wave

Grow quiet in its shadow. (CP., p.6)

Death is without substance, graspless, intangible, beyond claim. The heart strives to oppose the impact, to outlast the intensity, to decipher its
meaning and outline the happening. Survival becomes impossible, for all the expertise practised by the heart is inadequate to escape the inevitable. The single available option remaining is "surrender the irrevocable keys". With the realization of this vital truth, the tangible manifestation of existence in the poem 'the Wave', "falters and drowns". The "coulter" which literally stands for the iron blade attached to the plough has significantly being employed as a qualification for joy. Recognition of one's fate results in the termination of all joy. Larkin objectifies the sentiment in the phrase "the coulter of joy breaks".

Cessation of feeling rings the death knell and grooves dig deeper into "Being" cornering existence into caving before the authority and might of the mysterious, inscrutable force. The deeper the penetration of the harrow, reactionary retaliatory 'throwing up' becomes more powerful. The faltering, drowning, throwing, moving, and singing of the waves together summarise the entire history of life and extant. The cycle of existence involves a display of movement and energy. It proved beyond doubt the essential realness of living, the spark and vitality of being alive. Movement on this count proves a generative exercise. The periodic churning of the waves expressed by the meaningful ebb and flow of the tide image visually denotes the life death syndrome. A profound perception of ephemerality of every living manifest in the ebbing water, along with a conviction of the universality of the phenomenon of death concludes the poem.

And the waves sing because they are moving

And the waves sing above a cemetery of graves.  (CP., p.7)
The first line of the above mentioned couplet indicates the joy of being alive. It is coupled with the vibrant image of flux and mobility. The subsequent happiness shows itself in the resultant song. In the second line the same song emanates from a studied cosmic awareness. This knowledge pacifies the poet and the waves receding over the graves in the cemetery generate not sadness but a contentment of his own ordinariness. Larkin no longer feels unique and singular in his own individual plight. He becomes part and parcel of a cosmic scheme in which his cognition graduates from

And the wave sings because it is moving

to

And the waves sing because they are moving. (CP, p.2)

From an identification with a single wave his comprehension enlarges to embrace the entire design of creation in its plurality. Larkin reckons himself as a microcosmic part of a macro reality with common problems, suffering and disorders. The poem furnishes him with several insights. The progress from one to many, the difference between Being and Non-Being, the transience of life and the universality of death are vital insights that help the poet view his subject from yet another angle.

Imagery in the poem has been taken primarily from the sea, agriculture, the human and natural world. References to ploughing, harrow, coulter allude to the time group of associations which in themselves are synonymous with death and comprehensively sum up the entire concept of a trapped, shackled mortal existence. The ‘sun’, the ‘stars’, and the ‘skies’ are mentioned to harness the extra terrestrial in an effort to decipher the meaning of Non Being.
Traumerei operates on the principle of dual perspective. The dream and reality sequence supply the underlying design, which is elaborated into a participant, spectator double vision. The opening and closing lines of the poem represent normal reality involving routine matters, the difference however lay in a dream.

In this dream that dogs me I am part
of a silent crowd walking under a well

and

The walls of my room rise, it is still night

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

The word ‘dog’ and ‘again’ testify to a persistence that obliterates the difference between sleep and wakefulness. Dreams after all overtly represent the preoccupations of the waking mind. Thematically ‘Traumerei’ concentrates on the ceaseless progress of life towards a partially understood goal. It is Larkin’s effort to figuratively spell out the implications of death.

The first prominent visual of a robot like faceless, silent multitude passes by. Agnostic philistinism apart Larkin fails to muster courage to put up retroactive resistance to this demand of abject surrender and his sleeping conscious complies to become a ‘part of the silent crowd’. ‘The football match’ they have left behind was symbolically their final game of life where evenly and unevenly balanced teams battled for supremacy and result. The first wall encountered by them signifies the incessant pressure of a predetermined fate forcing and pursuing all mortality “under the wall” perhaps “or a pit, all moving the same way.” The second wall differs
from its companion by "closing on the right, pressing us lighter." Light, life, energy, warmth get choked through suffocation. With the two walls slowly closing from both sides the helpless individuals are

Shut in like pigs down a concrete passage. (CP., p.12)

Lifting the head the speaker realizes that all source of life has been blocked. The defenceless humanity incarcerated in the prison of mortar could not be better represented. Against the sombre blackness of the surrounding pit, charade like the italicized icons of death make their entry. Three things distinguish them. The size which is 'giant', the colour which is 'stark white' and the remoteness.

much too high for them to recognise. (CP., p.12)

The explanation for the immensity and the florescence of the alphabet 'D' lies in the intention of striking a contrast, because the insensit. apathetic crowd could only be made to notice something singular. Existence flows both inside and outside the consciousness. The awaited ‘E’ appears and passes by as also the other images of life. The unquestioned submission of will to follow with bowed head subtly changes and the need to walk ceases. Movement now involves flowing

Like water through sewers

despite the tread that goes on ringing like an anvil

Under the striding A. (CP., p.12)

The pace of ‘A’ is decidedly more hostile than the previous two so Larkin completes his anvil image by making the striding ‘A’ officiate in place of the ab-
sent hammer. The reverberations of the impact of one metal against another get echoed in the loud beatings of the human heart. The letters move in their respective paces maintaining the remoteness and obscurity. The poet speaker who was curious about his ultimate fate ‘crookes his arm to shield his face’. The next alphabet ‘T’ on appearance seems beheaded even before the end. “The huge decapitated cross, white on the wall, the T.” Awareness hovers within the poets grasp. He struggles for a meaning that eludes him like the last alphabet. The continuum of movement begun with the phrase ‘dog me’ gets restored. The walls enclosing him in the end of the poem are part of familiar reality. They differ in quality from those that had earlier sucked him into near complete oblivion. But this day light reality deprives him of cognition into the greatest mysteries of creation. Larkin’s poems were not merely probes into the significance of death. Several of them endeavored to gauge it in the context of the experience of living. Existence entails not merely birth and death but a host of diverse happening and relationship.

Many famous feet have trod essays to view death from vantage point of keenly felt emotional questions which the poet relates to the elemental forces of nature and mortality. Seeking affinity to these basic components he attempts to analyse his essential theme of Non Being in contiguity with the forces of Being. In this poem Existence does not appear as a foil to non-existence. It instead aides and supports a better understanding of Larkin’s thematic preoccupation, with a greater emphasis on the intrinsic stuff of life rather than the forces of negation.

Larkin opens the poem with an obscure amalgam of certitudes, queries, truths and answers. Punning on the adjective ‘famous’ in an oblique effort to create the multiple images of philosophers, intellectuals, rulers, theologians (who gained ei-
the poet establishes the fact of an incipient elusiveness about the truth behind creation, mortality and eternity.

Many famous feet have trod;
Sublunary paths, and famous hands have weighed
The strength they have against the strength they need
And famous lips interrogated God

Concerning franchise in eternity. (CP., p.15)

Limits of this right of ‘franchise’ were never determined. The seekers unsure of their boundaries had to be content with ‘a moment’s harmony’ in ‘many times and places’. Regardless of their spiritual and intellectual thirst for answers Larkin in this stanza lays emphasis by proxy on the rapid passage of time which gets depicted in figurative phrase bunchings.

Images of light, birth, life, day get ingeniously compressed in “the gold surf of the sun”, “sheet of light”, “places of light”, “shining river”. Each connote myriad possibilities of living amidst warmth, familiarity and relationships. The ‘gold surf’ hints at vibrant energy and intellectual vigour consumed during the metaphorical combat with forces of nothingness. The advent of night engulfs the luminosity. Just as the sun has to set every evening after exhausting its energy, needing the revitalization of a long rest (a period in which its lights gets eclipsed plunging everything in darkness) so too human life.

The trodden way becomes the untrodden way
We are born each morning
The river shining through the field of graves. (CP., p.15)
Night and sleep imply semi cessation involving a continuum. Larkin intends to emphasize this constant flux of everything mortal. However, such renewal "argues down" all "legacies of thought" which become automatically 'unsuccessful' because of their own impermenance. The rigid pattern of birth and death puts to naught all determined efforts by intellectuals to capture time and temporality within bounds of a stationary situation. Through the ages 'annals of men' have strived 'untiringly' to change thinking by fracturing the extant into its elemental essences. The hetrogeneity in implication of the 'wafers poverty' suggestive of exploration and penetration, the factity of stone, and the fathomless, fragrance of flowers have been individually notice for verdicts on the human predicament.

But never tried to learn

The difficult triple sanity

Of being wafer, stone and flower in turn. (CP, p.15)

The individual was broken into components and viewed merely as an embodiment of one constituent rather than an amalgam of all elements- the evident, the real and the perceptible which blend to constitute life.

After much deliberations on the nature of life Larkin ventures to explain it in relation to death. He discovered that the dichotomy between the living "silver coin" and the dead "discoloured copper coin" was limited to appearances, and disappeared on closer examination. Both were impenetrable.

Reverse or obverse, neither bare

A sign or word remotely legible. (CP, pp.15-16)

The spinning movement, "the double warp", "light and waking", "dark and
sleep”, join into an endless stream of metaphors and image clusters used by Larkin to explain the mystery of Life, Death and Being. Like the earlier mentioned coin image where difference was only skin deep and existence was found sharing similitude with Non Being. For instance, the element of uncertainty, mystery about the future and the feeling of incompleteness constantly dogging Being were also present in the death phenomenon. With the “double warp” signifying a mutuality, a correspondence of two opposites mortality becomes constantly dwarfed and trapped

Easier to balance on the hand
The waking that our senses can command,
For jewels are pebbles on the beach
Before this weaving, scattering, winged and footed
Privilege.... (CP, p.16)

On account of the accessibility of life, the sensitivity of the primary senses and the availability of explanations which are like “jewels and pebbles on the beach”, and the privilege of living ‘weaving, scattering, winged footed’, the human sensibility is able to read meanings into existence. Though “an unrecurring luck” even life is an unpredictable enigma. Becoming a correlative to death it objectifies all the intangibilities. Both emerge as parallels complimenting each other rather than opposing contraries.

Having successfully established an analogy between Life and Death, the poet explains the nature of the real legacy bestowed upon the human kind.

Two lineages electrify the air,
Lineage of sorrow; Lineage of joy. (CP, p.16)

Like “pennons from a mast” the jointure so deeply permeates “sleep, life and death” that even the sun is powerless to decoy the single seed of their origin. The difference, if there exists, is between these two emotions.

No longer think them as aspects of the same;
Beyond each figures shield I trace
A different ancestry, a different fate. (CP, p.15)

Elaborating on the subject of misery the poet maintains that it is engendered by “all that’s bad”, “each foiled weakness in the almanac”, “the instinct to turn back”, the common factor behind these causes lies in human weakness and vulnerability which Larkin confesses.

..."if there are sins should be called a sin.” (CP, p.17)
because this instinct betrays preoccupation with the self, misery over unfulfilled desires and a mortal dread of death. He concluded that the urgency to arrest the instant in order to gratify wishes and a strong sense of lost time lay at the root of the death dread.

Because tides wound it;
The scuttling sand; the noose
of what I have and shall lose,
Or have not and cannot get;
Partings in time and space. (CP, p.17)

The “wounding”, “scuttling”, “nooses”, are images reminiscent of the existential predilection of visualising life as a drudgery. Sorrow, a resultant of self love is never
coupled with a feeling of its own insufficiency and ineffectuality. Larkin who sen-
sitively realises the apposition between them confesses

    I know what it will not know.  (CP., p.17)

His probings had brought the cognition that /years in winged span go across and
over our heads/ Existence envisages a permanence against “dissolution” by erect­
ing “houses of wax” while the speeding time “flies east to the ebb of dark”. Efforts
to capture transience lending a modicum of permanence and stability are compa­
rable to the “spider busy on a forgotten web.”

The “lineage of joy” stems out of this very flux when misery and sorrow de­
manded effort, and happiness is described as “motionless excitement”. It was a
wave running counter to the parent current. Ultimate confluence with the ocean of
nothingness was a foregone conclusion, but the resistance to “the flying years” form
the central paradox of existence. Robert Frost captures a similar experience in his
West Running Brook.

    The black stream catching on a sunken rock
    Flung backward on itself in one white wave
    And the white water rode the black forever
    Not gaining but not losing...^5

Larking also rejoices in ‘a mile-long silken cloth of wings/moving lightwards out
of death/Lineage of joy into mortality hurled/”. The poet discovered this potential
of resistance in joy to be an effective opponent to “slovenly grief” for happiness
needed no goal and is enjoyed for the supreme pleasure of the experience itself.
With patience to expose false desires, it is never stale and silent. Joy becomes the
only medium of sustenance in an otherwise morbid, hypocritical existence.
The poet perceives that the fact of death has always been indisputable. Sorrow and grief are therefore not unusual in this mortal temporal world. But if the human mind learns the lesson on contentment accepting the time left as a respite, continuing to feel the pleasure of living, then life becomes meaningful. Transience and ephemerality instead of goading and defeating the consciousness must act as spur to guide the mind into a deeper awareness, appreciation and better understanding of the essence of Being.

The Unfinished Poem written in 1951 attempts to reassess the death coda by skilfully counterbalancing conventional belief with some unusual answers provided to the poet by his own questioning mind. In the absence of complete understanding he had to be content with the partial fruits of his endeavour. When ‘Going’ recognised the cohesion of soul and body and released from temporal shackles, ‘Traumerei’ stressed the ontological dimensions of death, the ‘Unfinished Poem’ dramatised an effective encounter between Being and Non Being. Each effort marked a significant progress in understanding the mystery of this inexplicable phenomenon. In the present poem Larkin ventured to discover the truth about death by offering his own cognizance as a guinea pig for experimentation. The place determined for the combat of the equally potent twin forces happens to be a segregated lonely attic reached by ‘squeezing up the last stair’. The poet consciously chose his locale to authenticate his death wish.

Retreating from the world of living the poet speaker lay “quietly smoking”. Loneliness prompted his mind to compress the entire history of his extant into a few visual moments. Images pertaining to constraints of mortality, paucity of essentials and bareness of surroundings namely

\[ T = 5563 \]
That was a way to live - newspaper for sheets,

A candle and spirit stove, (CP, p.60)

get contrasted to the surfeit of noise, shouts, congestion,

a trouble of shouts

From below somewhere, a town smudgy with traffic!

That was a place to go, that emaciate attic! (CP, p.60)

The cold, dank grave like room surrounded by a glut of everything around it, deliberately objectified through the image of ‘emaciation’ and ‘impoverishment’ encouraged in his sensibility a latent wish to “escape” leaving the world of absurd contrasts. The poet employs the situation of stressed destitution to counter the customary dread of death evoking instead a decided yearning and anticipation to ‘let go’, and meet it half way, because perception and meaning in the guise of “seeds of light” could be achieved only after a fruitful encounter. As he “lay on the bed - There” patiently expectant

So it was stale time, day in, and day out

Blue fug in the room, nothing to do but wait...

..And the sun and the stove and the mice and the gnawed paper

Made up the days and nights when the missed supper,

Paring my nails, looking over the far below street

Of tramways and bells. (CP, p.60)

The figure of death with form, intelligence, memory, thought gradually emerged from out of his own consciousness.

For (as you will guess) it was death I had in mind,

Who covets our breath, who seeks and will always find;
...Taking his rents; yes I had only to look
To see the shape of his head and shine
And the creep of the world under his sparrow-trap-sky,
To know how little slips his immortal memory. (CR, p.60)

Larkin may have been sceptical about age-old Christian values of perpetuity of spirit but was confident about the immortality of the death phenomenon because its obdurate, undeniable inevitability could never be denied or dismissed. In the poet's ephemeral mortal world death only boasted of deathlessness. There was no license for overdue rents as little slipped its "restless mind" and "immortal, unfailing memory." Hence the poet protagonist had no choice but to remain waiting till he heard the ascent of the imperturbable step on the stairs, the sad announcement of its advent, the consistent sound coming closer and closer even though

To keep out of his thought was my whole care,

Yet down among sunlit courts, Yes, he was there. (CR, p.60)

Assumptions had prepared him into a death consciousness believing that its obliterates life without struggle-breathing choked, light blocked, total blindness as a resultant. With a view to circumvent the unflinching aim of its issued warrant Larkin allows himself a breather cunningly postponing the onslaught by shamming or preponing in the single minded hope of deluding Non Being through dissimulation - thus distracting its attention to images full of life

.......................... so I shammed death

Still as a stuck pig, hoping he'd keep concerned

With boys who were making fig when his back was turned.
Total escape was never possible and the premeditated took a definite form to confront his privity. Myriads of images collocate together to word paint the remarkable encounter of life with the spectral forces of negation. The helplessness of the extant in images like “time shrank”, “there was no defence”, “I sprawl to my knees”, “light cringed”.

The crack in the floor
Widening for one long plunge?
In a sharp trick, The world lifted and wrung

dripped with remorse.

The fact of breathing tightened into a shroud merge to face the formidable confident adversary which was not deterred by closed doors. The inexorable approach of the forces of annihilation relentlessly pursuing their quarry came “straight to my door”. Larkin goes to great lengths to strike a contrast between the crippled impotence of Being and the pitiless strength of death, stressing the incongruity of a parallelism. Life thus is always at the mercy of death. Uptil this point the poet had been seeking to establish an equation and his conclusions are not very different from traditionalisms. It is in the final stanza that Larkin deviates from the existing norm because even though he was apprehensive of death the final emergent picture does not conform to a fear obsessed cognisance. The “seeds of lights” though sown upon the failure of the evening had already prepared him for a vision with a difference, an antithesis of his expectations therefore awaits him on
the threshold of the attic.

Nothing like death stepped, nothing like death paused,

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

Amazed at the singularity of the figure the poet incredulously asks

Why are your feet bare? Was not death to come

Why is he not here? What summer have you broken from?

(CP, p.61)

Which echoes an earlier

...down among the sunlit courts, yes, he was there.

(CP, p.60)

The 'Unfinished Poem' significantly titled thus explodes the traditional premise by seeing death surrounded not by its customary adjunct darkness but by the light of summer amidst the colour of spring. Released from its persistent lot of nullity it became viewed with a potential for association. The realization added a significant dimension of perception to Larkin's sensibility, enlarging upon his earlier decipherment. The poem as mentioned earlier was "unfinished"- as no single effort could offer a complete assessment. They were all explorations into the inevitable death enigma.

By reason of its remoteness the riddle of death fascinated Larkin inviting his probe for solutions. The poet was aware that no single definition could sufficiently explain the mysterious conundrum; so he approached it from diverse angles seeking to reach the latent truth. It was also an exercise in conquering his own personal dread of the phenomenon. Each poem therefore enlarges the earlier understanding
and added a little to its already established meaning. "Ambulances" aims at gauging this in its own individual manner. The obscurity of the fact, occurrence and experience of death demanded a correlative objectification through concrete imagery to fully impress the significance of its state. In a search for exactitude Larkin selects the symbol of the ambulances which automatically brought in tow its corresponding associations. The poem replete with imagistic pattern represents yet another attempt at defining death.

Closed like confessionals, they thread

Loud noons of cities, giving back

None of the glances they absorb. (CP., p.132)

Beginning with a two pronged attack the poet couples the connotations of his chosen symbol with inferences attendant to the specific ritual of confessions. The small confining cubicle where the devout christian "weighed", under a burden of guilt confessed his misdoing was a tangible reality. The closed oppressiveness of these tiny rooms shared similitude with the atmosphere of the vehicle which like death is unerring in its destination. The implications from the twin world of religion and death share a mutuality. Manifesting an identity in his primary symbol Larkin surrounds it with a virtual medley of images- "the weaving and threading through the streets, "the loud noon of cities", the absorption of received glances, "the light grey colour", the distinctive monogram of "arms in a plaque" and the temporary rest at the kerb patiently follow its unmistakable movement confident in the knowledge that no street shall be missed. The visitor though unwelcome was unavoidable.

After establishing the certitude of death's eventuality the poem contrasts the
extraordiriness of its occurrence with the absolute normalcy of common life.

Then children strewn on steps or road,

Or women coming from the shops

Past smells of different dinners,... (CP., p.132)

The image of the playing children described by the unlikely conceit “strewn”, the shopping women, the different dinners is at variance with “the wild white face” beneath “the red stretcher blanket”. The starkness of the latter dwarfs the former image lending death a perpetuity and real life the “felicity of an occasional episode”. The women waited with arrested attention for yet another victim whose blanched face “overtops” the hallmark “red blanket” to be “carried in”. Though the sufferer displayed signs of life in his “wild face” he was still “stowed” and “taken away” as an already dead corpse. This mental picture helped Larkin realise the close mutuality between Being and Non Being. The undercurrent of this inexorable movement continues throughout the poem.

In that single moment it appeared as if the dehumanised human mind had come close to solving the mysterious puzzle of “emptiness”, vacuity and non-being. The evasive answer seems tantalisingly close to the periphery of understanding.

And sense the solving emptiness

That lies just under all we do,

And for a second get it whole,

permanent and blank and true.(CP., p.132)

Larkin maintained that mankind collectively suffered from a death con-
sciousness primarily because it was believed to be more real than reality itself. The apparently "permanant, blank and true solution" suggested "only for a second" cancelled its own validity and the tentative answer is conveyed through fugitive words like 'sense', 'solving', 'lies just under' with meanings lying just beneath the surface of cognition. The realization of the imminent though occasionally overlooked was never forgotten. It, thus, continued to impress human sensibility with its importance. The drama of death, personified by the coming of the ambulance to take away the individual behind "fast receding doors", elicited only a "Poor soul", from the living as an answer to their own distress rather than sympathy for the dismembered soul.

In continuation with the earlier pattern "loud noon", "solving emptiness", "fast doors receding", to signify death related connotation Larkin reinforces his symbolic image by visualising the atmosphere and surrounding air to be "dead". The distant ambulance had performed its duty in more than one way. In addition to the customary 'stowing' the vehicle had woken mortality from the stupor of a false hope of permanence. It served as a cruel reminder of the inescapable future.

For borne away in deadened air
May go the sudden shut of loss
Round something nearly at an end,
And what cohered in it across
The years.......................... (CP., p.132)

This could very well be the cause for the "deadened air", as the spectre of nothingness threatening to sever the bonds of existence looms before all
eyes. The “sudden shut of loss”, therefore, continues the “misery” of the preceding “whisper of distress” in being a lament for one’s own self. The anthropomorphic “something” feeding for years on the life force gradually comes to an end. A slow loosening of ties with families and association begin. Sensibility which earlier thrived on the spatial with no seeming boundaries of life to start collecting itself for an interaction within limits of the approaching, encroaching darkness.

............................... Far

From the exchange of love. (CP, p.133)

The extant has to step into a state of complete dis-association becoming estranged from all moorings because the final destination of a room beneath the ground was “out of reach” for all but the chosen. Impressed by the simultaneous singularity yet regularity of the event

The traffic part to let go by. (CP, p.133)

All the might, wisdom, status, and pomp of the world gets eclipsed by the still stronger forces of negation. Being slackens grip and the reality of Non Being establishes itself

Brings closer what is left to come

And dulls to distance all we are. (CP, p.133)

“Ambulances” published in January 1961 may have had its origin in post-war trauma. The poem embodies the immediacy of the death experience in an extremely underplayed fashion, when all the while the poet clearly intends to awaken humanity to the truth of its mortality. It is Larkin’s acceptance of the fact of death, and manifests a desire to objectify the mysterious to explain its enigma.
"Aubade" or the sunrise song appeared in the November/December issue of The Times Literary Supplement in the year 1977. Having journeyed at length through the city of blanks through dreams, nightmares still incredulous at death's summary arrival and departure into nowhere, Larkin decides to collect earlier arguments assimilating them before proceeding into a fresh perception. His encounter this time takes place in the dead of the night progressing ahead with the growing light of the day.

Tired after a long days work the poet visualises himself asleep in a drunken stupor of discomfort "waking at four". It was a twilight hour when the world is still surrounded by the remains of darkness from the preceding night and the tentative light of the coming dawn waits around the corner to obliterate it from another horizon. Until then the poet has to lie in 'the soundless dark' with many questions regarding death and Non Being plaguing him.

Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
Making all thought impossible but how,
And where and when I shall myself die. (CP, p.208)
The fact of death has been proved certain. Every twenty four hour spent brings the living people closer to the vacuum. Death itself was 'unerring and unresting' and unrelenting', a sentiment echoed from the earlier written "Unfinished Poem" which had mentioned 'the restless mind' and 'the immortal memory' of the phenomenon of nothingness. Hence 'how' and 'when' and 'where' could only elicit factual answers linked to the other certainty 'I shall myself die'. Though the queries were believed to be futile or 'arid interrogation' yet
Of dying, and being dead,

Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.  

The 'growing light' in time not only shows all things 'that were really always there' but also accelerates the fear and dread of the impending event.

The mind blanks at the glare (CP., p.208)

Owing to the engulfing darkness the poet feels that despite a concerted "I stare" he was denied comprehension. No sooner does the luminosity of light break into the curtain of darkness, the vision and intelligence withdraw into themselves as a result of the shock of glare. In normal course, fear of the dark ends with the coming of the morning light. The difference in Larkin is that apprehension is further intensified. The darkness of the night may be an illusion but for the poet the light of the day is also illusive because the stark reality of 'total emptiness forever' is revealed. In order to avoid misunderstanding of any sort Larkin clarifies that the 'mind block' was never a consequence of compunction or unrequited love, or a 'good not done' or even time wasted and misused because

An only life can take so long to climb

Clear of its wrong beginnings,... (CP., p.208)

The poet wished to impress the fact that the allotted span is insufficient to begin, make mistakes, rectify and start all over again. The arrested attention if not the result of the above mentioned options had to have a justification. Larkin explains it in the latter half of the stanza, when death is explained through graphic 'thought patterns' and 'Total emptiness', 'sure extinction', display his mortal fear of the non extant
...Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon, nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

(CP., p.208)

The frequent repetition of 'not' and 'nothing' communicates his existential suffering at the idea of the total decimation of Being, which was not only terrible but true also. In poem after poem His cry of despair becomes more poignant. Each encounter with the painful truth leaves him feeling small and helpless. No amount of deception and trickery could outwit these powerful nocturnal forces. The dread evoked by them was therefore triggered by the inescapable certainty, in 'a special way of being afraid'. Employing an audio-visual image, of the "vast moth eaten musical brocade" for religious paraphernalia, Larkin recalls earlier times when the large singularly patterned interwoven cloth of religion provided the individual with answers. But the poet felt that the changing times have surrendered the legacy of the brocade to the moths because prior to its destruction by the insects it was discovered that religion was just 'an implausible pretension'. The deception about the true nature of death lay within religion yet it was powerless to explain. Creative thinkers like Larkin disowned religion because of inane answers as 'we never die'. This promise of perpetuity or immortality was to Larkin a deliberate effort to avoid facts and hoodwink, the gullible believers. He was even sceptical of the contemporary existential thought of his times branding it 'spacious stuff' to maintain that

...No rational being
can fear a thing it will not feel... (CR, p.208) because it is this formlessness and imperceptible quality of death that he fears. This feeling of total obliviousness, when there is

...........no sight, no sound,

No touch, or taste or smell, nothing to think with,

Nothing to love or link with. (CP., p.208)

The estrangement from all moorings, the severing of bonds and ties, the utter defenceless impotence and powerlessness to combat or resist, leaving the individual prostrate before these forces. He christened it 'an anaesthetic' from which none come round because it delinks all association of love and relationships. His agnosticism convinced him of the sheer impossibility of an immortal life. In his poetic world nothing remained alive after the chilly encounter with death's numbness.

Encouraged by his own findings Larkin delves deeper into the recesses of this mystery. His earlier discoveries led him to a conclusion which is yet again echoed in the present poem ‘Aubade’. The probable, yet elusive, solution to the riddle and the objectification of the experience go hand in hand, the only knowledge about the experience of death is through gradual progression from ‘an unfocussed blur’ to ‘a standing chill’ and finally ‘the condition’ of total indecision. Its very inevitability becomes sufficient cause for the dread and terror of the phenomenon.

And so it stays just on the edge of vision,

A small unfocussed blur, a standing chill. (CP., p.209)

In his attempt to demystify death the poet in the above lines manifests
the solution ‘it’ with an individual identity worthy of notice. The image of this identifiable thing remains “on the edge of vision” with the supposed rationale of distinctness if the pupil of the eye twins to view it manfully. The uncertainty of the definition gets pinned through transfer of epithets. The reinforced perception retard the impulse and dulls the mind. All decisions get influenced by its inevitability.

Most things never happen, this one will
And realisation of it rages out
In furnace-fear when we are caught without
People or drink....

(CP, p.209)

The ‘raging furnace fear’ paints the poets over petrified sensibility. He confesses the need for company or liquor, realising the inefficacy of the twin panaceas also. The definition of “courage gets changed”. Instead of indicating strength and mettle it implies “not scaring others”. Suffering, complaints or bold confrontation, no individual gets exemption from the death experience.

...Being brave
Lets no one off the grave.

Death is no different whined at than withstood. (CP, p.209)

The poet reverts back to his earlier premise of the slow rise of the sun, which in contrast to his dismal preoccupations lends life and form to the room. In the increasing light all objects in the room gradually gain shape. This idea has been proficiently indicated through the concrete image of a ‘wardrobe’. Larkin explains that the human psyche has never been in doubt about the veracity of the death principle. Human mind still refuses to
accept this vital truth preferring pathetically to escape the issue by avoiding it.
And just when some members of society are grappling with the evasive fact, the
rest of mankind continues to live uncaring and oblivious. The poem con­
cludes with a surfeit of tangible images. The telephones crouching ‘getting
ready to ring’, ‘locked offices’, ‘uncaring rented world ready to rouse’, ‘the
sky if white as clay’ render a comprehensive image of an active and alert
world busy in its own independent fashion. The activity is also unceaseless
because

\[
\text{Work has to be done.} \quad (\text{CP, p.209})
\]

The final statement ‘Postmen like doctors go from house to house’though
indisputable as an illustration of life’s essential flux’, conceals an implicit
analogy. The twin representation of existence merely imitate the regimen of
forces of negation. The poet finds it difficult to differentiate between the
regularity of the latter from the preoccupations of the former. Both main­
tain schedules, both visit all doors; why then Larkin seems to question that
one is called life and the other death. The image of death becomes as com­
monplace as postmen and doctors. Lessening the mounting tension on
Larkin’s sensibility it allowed him to gradually to terms with its awful cer­
tainty.

The four lines “In Times when Nothing Stood” was written sometime
in March 1978. It figured in 1946-83 section of the Collected Anthology.
Larkin’s search for interpretation and, insights covered his entire poetic ca­
career, when some poems pessimistically accepted the human lot and
others treated the theme with singularity the above mentioned poem
propounds a novel idea. It provides a summary statements of Larkin’s deductions regarding the opaque indefiniteness of death. Never a believer of God and religion the concept of immortality had failed to impress him. Still the idea of perpetuity was not foreign to Larkins thought. In fact, the lack of perpetuity in the affair of death bothered him; but its certitude left no option for scepticism. Larkin’s thought therefore is a queer mixture of belief and heresay. In an otherwise imperminent universe the poet appreciated stability even if it was manifested in a fact which had always puzzled him. He summarized his conclusions thus

In times when nothing stood
but worsened, or grew strange
there was one constant good:
she did not change. (CP., p.210)

The ‘one constant good’ for the first time relieves Larkin’s mind of his tense burden. Death comes through the long journey as a dearly loved beloved who does not change in an otherwise unstable constantly worsening alienated world. It becomes a truth like Keat’s Grecian Urn. A reader unfamiliar with Larkin and his preoccupation with this part, thence will certainly interpret it as a love poem complete with romantic ardour. Larkin, on the contrary, asserts that human world and existence is trapped emotionally and biologically within space and time. Death is beyond these limitations and trappings and the only permanent. Mortality, existence and other inconstants revolve around it. Constancy is its solitary goodness yet counterbalanced against the mentioned conditions of estrangement, change, aggravation and ephemerality it becomes the only goodness to live
for opposing 'Nada' or nothingness which implies complete negation, death appears friendly in a positive, dependable way. Viewed thus it ceased being the cadaverous monster of human imagination. The simplicity and compactness of the poem adds to the concentration and intensity of its implications. Larkin seems to have finally come to terms with the mystery of death having reached an amicable solution to the inscrutable secret of existence.

Images and theme are interdependent each specifically promoting and enhancing the implication of the other. The understanding gets gradually extended as each poem in the cluster dealing with a specific experience. The imagery is quite unusual and at times apparently unpoetic. But the language synthesizes with his attitude to the theme. It is an esoteric intense and evocative mode of delineation. The interconnected image patterns lend strength to each other. Excessive obscurity made Larkin occasionally obtuse but the brazen novelty of his images strike the imagination with wondering revelation.

Imagery basically consists of mental pictures deployed by a creative artist to convey a totality of elements cumulatively involved in an experience. They can signify tangible as well as qualities of sense, perceptions, describe visual objects or employ figurative language of metaphors, similes, patterns, clusters, motifs. By correlating emotions with unsuspected associations, they provide a concentration of experience and evoke the individual conscience. Emphasis shifts from boldness and intensity to a congruous pattern highlighting the central theme or preoccupation of the concerned artist. A single theme may be ex-
emplified through thought patterns from the entire experience of life. Apparently discordant these images merge into the thematic fabric with total concord becoming so much a part of the poem as to seem its natural language.

In the death group of poems Larkin’s imagery embraces a wide range of perceptions. The subject of death has its related associations namely- darkness, nullity, nothingness, extinction, spectral, being an inexplicably, surreptitious and unwelcome visitor from the subterranean world. Annihilation and night, its most common inferences and correlatives from nature, the seasons, and attendant fraternities were employed with great fineness by the poet to denote this experience of death in its entirety.

Beginning with ‘Going’ the first poem analysed, it is noticed that emphasis is on contrasts. Primarily a visual depiction the approximation and opposition of light and darkness, spatial and temporal, distance and adjacency connote the sense of loss evoked by the onslaught of these negative forces. The conclusion witnesses a concretization of images in which the physical corporeal adjuncts feel the burden of trapping and imprisonment. Death in such a situation becomes a release from the shackling and locking, it had been subjected to earlier. Progressing from this block of collages, the representative images of And the wave sings because it is moving are crystalline and dialectical in content. There is an excessive use of analogies from nature and an identification with the plight of human beings and the existence; because the essential principle behind everything extant, is flux. Nature thus became Larkin’s principal motif to connote the unending movement. The unification and disjunction of the two indicate abstruse emotions
and an abjectification of feelings like grief and comfort is done through reference to concrete symbols such as the plough, harrow and coulter.

'Traumerei' the third poem analysed for its apposition to the relevant theme, ontologically emphasizes the various components constituting the phenomenon. Each alphabet brings added comprehension to the faceless, helpless multitude which remain mute witnesses as testimony to the remorseless majesty of death. The 'closing walls' signify imprisonment and paralysis the uncountable number represent the universality of the occurrence and absent 'H' betrays the continuing mystery of death. The missing alphabet stands for complete comprehension which is denied to the mortal mind.

Cosmic energy, light, sun, elements comprise the visual montage of Many famous feet have trod. Being is divided into components, and the distinction and mutuality between death and light becomes highlighted through the coin image. Larkin rises above the subject of this obsession to assess what life has to offer. He concludes that 'Joy' is a patent to lessen the grief of loss and deprivation which is the essence of the death experience. Every moment of happiness- 'a mile long silken cloth of wings' is an ebb of a regression against the perpetual motion towards extinction. This opposing force deadens the impact, lessens and alleviates the sorrow stealing something precious from death.

The 'Unfinished Poem' concentrates on the conflict between Being and Non Being within the person of the poet. His own psyche becomes the battle ground. The title itself is a metaphor for his incomplete understand-
ing. Using the symbol of the attic as the grave, Larkin manifests death with
form, figure, movement, volition, intelligence and decided human qualities.
It is personified through allusions to normal human activity. The poet in-
tends to cheat death but gets in turn cheated as the apparition does not con-
form to conventional norms. It is different from Larkin's expectations. His
deductions about death are seen going through surprising changes because
instead of winter darkness and autumnal depression death appears in the
guise of summer and spring.

'Ambulances' replete with imagery from the world of religion, hos-
pitals and existence in general connotes Larkin's thematic preoccupation in
its entirety. The reiterated contrasts and juxtaposition of images of the liv-
ing and the dying, the charged pace and the equally rapid stilling of move-
ment resulting in severing bonds, punctuate the fabric of the poem. The
vehicle itself becomes a concrete symbol of death. Its advent serves as a
warning of its imminance the certainty of the fact and an awakening to the
mortality of every single individual living. The distress and anguish ex-
pressed is not for the dying but an expression of their own extreme help-
lessness before the forces of annihilation.

In 'Aubade' the images of light and darkness act as continuous foils
to each other. Comprehension is associated with luminosity. Throughout his
poetic career Larkin coined phrases to express his feelings towards death.
Repeated references to 'total emptiness', 'sure extinction', the blank, void
and dread in the 'not' 'not', 'nothing' 'nothing' are attempts at defining the
inscrutable mystery. His 'nothing' is different from Hemingway's 'nada' in
which the nullity is the rootlessness, vacuity and futility of existence before
death. Larkin’s ‘nothingness’ prevailed after the occurrence. It betrayed a
sense of estrangement and break from the moorings emanating from the life
force. A universality of the phenomenon concludes the poem with the state-
ment that

‘Postmen like doctors visit every door’. (CP., p.209)

The shift in Larkin’s perception about the theme of death had been noticed and
mentioned before. The fear and bafflement of the earlier poems had slowly given
way to a gradual acceptance of its certainty and a stoicism regarding its imminance.
Ratified thus the image of death underwent a slow change and ‘In Times When
Nothing Stood’ the poet summarises his deductions. The four line poem concen-
trates his previous images in a set of three compact phrases- ‘the transience’ in
‘nothing stood’, the aggravation in ‘the worsening and the disjunction’ in ‘grew
strange’. In the world of complete transition where things became bad to worse
Larkin discovered that death was the one phenomenon that remained ever constant,
ever differed nor changed.