CHAPTER III

THE THEME OF ALIENATION

Here is an unfenced existence
Philip Larkin born in a respectable middle class family enjoying all material comforts and emotional security repeatedly recalled his childhood with scorn, derision, boredom and a deep rooted fear. Reticent by temperament Larkin’s poetic sensibility responded to pressures, external and internal to his creative conscious. An innate sense of insufficiency coupled with vulnerability consequent to a speech impediment and disturbances around him caused an instinctive inward withdrawal in his psyche. The disjunction thus experienced found expression in a body of poems permeating with the feeling of estrangement and alienation. Larkin’s work embodies the basic dissension of his personality because the poet constantly hankered for self expression and searched for definitions. Unlike other creative artists Larkin directed his energies to an annihilation or negation of his identity, striving for a state of indifference or neutrality. He achieved this through the unique medium of shredding his personality into manifold voices or “personae” which interact with each other. Such encounters help to underline the thematic patterns of the poems.

Deviating from the conventional poetic designs Larkins rendered the different hues of human personality as “masks” subjective and objective thus making his poems dialectical and dramatic. The self confessional nature of his work also demanded the concealment device for the alienated disjunct. His scepticism and wariness found justification in his disapproval of all illusions. Viewing
existence dispassionately and preoccupied with the desire for anonymity the stance of the alienated being suited him by its very conformity to his needs. He treated with mistrust emotions such as love, hate, desire considering them imperfect and inadequate even though their fusion constitutes human identity. Andrew Swarbick observes:

Larkin wants to resist not only romantic involvement but all forms of commitment because any such pledge to a person, article of faith or way of life involves an illusion.¹

Larkin believed that ultimate happiness was out of reach and relationships, fulfillment of desires, anchoring, roots were artificial and pseudo real. Shorn of moorings existence became one relentless nomadic movement for the sundered intellect.

The two World Wars the establishment and failure of the Welfare State and the liquidation of the British Colonial Empire further affected the susceptible and sensitive poet. His poems according to Stephan Regan depicted:

versions...of insecurities of wartime society through the austerity of the immediate post war years and the new found affluence of the late 1950s and 1960s to the eventual fracture and anticipated break up of the Welfare State in the remaining decades.²

The dwindling authority of the Church as unquestioned entity shattered not only the entire fabric of absolutes but also a complete system of symbols, images, dogmas and rituals which supplied the bedrock of immediate expe-
rience safely containing the entire psychic life of western man. Consequent upon the general perspective of objectivity and a certain desolate vacuity making his externalized extant an alien to himself, despiritualized man became a homeless wanderer. In his search for completeness the individual had to do for himself all that had earlier been done by the Church. Unrestrained advancement of science further sundered him from nature also. Subsequently he was provided with a neutral and detached universe. The growing indulgence in sophisticated gadgetary reduced personal involvement and the sense of individual accountability in routine matters. An iconoclast and a non-conformist by temperament Larkin became a hermit in his own surroundings.

During the post war years the poetry written fell under the broad sweeping category of Movement- a reaction against inflated romanticism, obscurity and mystification of language. Though Movement hardly existed as a coherent literary group it did come to be recognised as a shared set of values and assumptions related to the moods and conditions of those eventful years. John Press, Anthony Hartley, J.D. Scott, Enright and Conquest in attempting to define the term emphasized the need for a liberal human perspective and honesty of thought and feeling through clarity, consolidation and simplification.

Larkin's early poems consisting of "In the Grip of Light", "NorthShip" and "The Less Deceived" represent according to Regan:

this new classicism...especially the struggle for neutral ground, the creation of a self-effacing modest discourse and a self-
depracating ironic persona.³ Larkin however rebelled against group identity and later years saw him breaking bonds with the cliche to operate independently writing poetry exemplifying deeper imaginativeness and greater aesthetic possibilities. Yearning to be anti-intellectual he vehemently controverted discursive verse with disjuncted images, specialized diction, symbolistic and metaphorical language typical to the modernist poetry of Pound, Eliot, and Wallace Stevens. Larkin disliked modernism because it destroyed the quality of delight and was the product of deliberate academism. In his essay entitled "The Poetry of Philip Larkin" Anthony Thwaite observe:

> In a straight forward Wordsworthian sense he was a man speaking to men.⁴

Relying heavily on colloquialism, precision and conventional form for his poetics the main thrust of Larkin’s poetry lay in a realistic representation of mundane problems of daily existence.

Apart from Larkin’s response to contemporary and current bearings in the world of poetry a significant reason for alienation lay in his inability to speak- a tendency to stammer. A school teacher remembers:-

> I can see him (Larkin) sitting at the back of the class as clear as now as then......He was uncommunicative, aloof and reserved, not the sort of boy one could approach and I was loath to appear intrusive.⁵

The poet suffered the psychological trauma of this affliction till he was thirty. He
himself admits:

Anyone who stammered will know what agony it is, specially at school.  

The deep rooted sense of deprivation and inadequacy resulted in an unconscious retirement, finding expression in the reclusive, self-effacing, self-deprecating persona of his poems. Writing helped him conquer his sense of diffidence and insufficiency. In an interview to a London magazine Larkin observed:

What one does enjoy- what the imagination is only too ready to help with is- in some form or other compensation, assertion of oneself in an indifferent or hostile environment, demonstration (by writing about it) that one is in command of a situation.

His poems were a therapeutic medium to purge and heal the schism caused by the collision between the self and antiself fundamental to Larkin's personality. The incessant conflict of two equally potent impulses prompted a poetry which could best be described as an encounter with forces of one's essential being. In the effort to shake off the miasmatic fog of inner helplessness and the outward forces of predeterminism the poet experienced a virtual trapping which resulted in his sense of alienation with both himself and the external world around him. Larkin states in the required writing:

I’ve never had ideas about poetry. To me it’s always been a personal almost physical release or solution to a complex pressure of needs.
Further Larkin's scepticism, agnosticism, and empericism estranged him from religious beliefs, social and traditional institutions and absolutes governing society. Incompatibility and discontent thus prevailed to encourage a deliberate distancing on his part. He approached the issues of individual identity, choice, isolation, chance, oblivion, through a vocabulary of negation, disjunction and nullity- a "negative self-definition" and "negative sublime". This conscious yearning, withdrawal and retreat into himself gets repeated illustration in his poems, emerging as one of the prominent themes of Larkin's poetry. An insight into some prominent poems provide substantive evidence.

The pathos of deprivation deeply enmeshed in Larkin's sensibility alienated him from society and his own surroundings. *At Grass* on initial reading appears a poem of alienation wherein Larkin distances "horses" from "the glamours of silks", "numbers and parasols", "squadrons of empty cars", "cups and stakes" recording their experience in the context of this displacement. Shorn of the romance of focussed arc lights the poem records total withdrawl from active social life and an encounter with the predicament of anonymity. The horses are neither old and debilitated nor are they on the verge of death and the extinction. Having won several races they have no reason to grieve. They have little cause for identity crisis as, "their names were artificed though to inlay faded". The title *At Grass*, then is suggestive of abstention from participation; with the thrust of the argument focussed on a deliberate rejection and a forced regimentation which makes their extant inessential and superflous. This acts as the decisive determiner.
obliterating past triumphs and joys of participation.

Larkin’s At Grass- a montage of moving pictures graduating from situation to situation, shares decided kinship with Brownings dramatic monologue. The pathos of the predicament gets introduced through the adverb “hardly” which makes the visible image hazy and blurred, with “seeming” betraying partial obliviousness and lack of relatedness.

The eye can hardly pick them out

From the cold shade they shelter in. (CP. p.29)

Larkin displays remarkable dexterity in employing images with visual and emotional concurrence. The “coldness” of the “shaded glade” which supposedly “shelters” them enhances the distress created by the wind. Felt existence becomes italicised through the movement of the “tail” and the “mane”. The underlying theme of repeated desertion and subsequent anonymity accompanied by frightening loneliness gets depicted through the expectant yet helpless “seeming to look on”.

The following stanzas weave word pictures of the triumphs of their glorious past when “two dozen distances” were enough to “fable” them into living legends. The cups, stakes, handicaps and “long unhushed cries” culminated into “stop-press columns”. Larkin juxtaposes the images of the forgotten past when the mere turn of their heads were sufficient to heighten heart beats with the isolation and rejection of their present existential reality.

Reconciliation surfaces slowly and the trauma of the immediate present recedes into the deep recesses of the past. Their conscious desire now is to “shake off” the memories of the “starting gates”. the deafening
cries of the gathered gentry that plague their ears with an irritant buzzing sound, and sink deep into the “shadowed dusk of the unmolesting meadows”. The hurriedly passing summers deepen into the “comfort and ease” and a drowning of identity.

Almanacked their names lives; they

Have slipped their names.” (CP. pp.29,30)

Nameless they are but the crucial issue highlighted by Larkin is that the animals retain the ability to “gallop for sheer joy and happiness”. However the only audience of their present feats are the groom and “the groom boy”. They exist in a void of rejection, insulation and non-participation totally alienated from their surroundings. The poem becomes a manifestation of Larkin’s need, approval as also a perception of failure. The poet views his subject from a triangular perspective of total subjectivity, partial subjectivity and objectivity. The images of the triple perspective of the quietly grazing beasts, the animals in action and the watching crowd coalesce and overlap each other in a perfect collage of visual imagery. The poem stems originally from the feelings of negativity, disillusionment, resentment but slowly and gradually rises above the inanity of these base emotions to a realisation of a distinct and separate identity that lies not in recognition and glamour of the demanding past but in the restoration of their innate dignity vis-a-vis the quite serenity of the lush greenery and serene landscape. Essentially a poem rooted in the rapidly receding ethos of rural and pastoral England typified by shady groves “classic summers” and “unmolested meadows”. At Grass is also a requiem to a lost world. Marked by a distinct heterogeneity in
image patterns Larkin in this poem conveniently progresses from one mode of experience to another.

At Grass thus depicts the trauma of slow and gradual detachment from all people, scenes and objects that had earlier constituted life’s reality and joy. It is a drama of slow estrangement from “states earlier loved” but often taken for granted. The total experience lies in alienation through deprivation.

Larkin’s Church Going echoes the circumstances and inclinations of post war England. Not only does this poem honestly reflect the war weary sensibility but also coalesces the poetic stirrings of the Movement group with which the poet got associated time and again. The neo-romantic poetry of nineteen forties was characterized with mystification and unwarranted obscurity. Larkin’s constant redrafting of creative efforts is evidence of a desire to demystify poetic language from the pseudo intellectual jargon of his predecessors. Honestly confessional in context, his poems are attempts to reach and describe the very core of his experienced subject. Larkin’s manner remains ironic, mocking and nearly always tongue-in-cheek.

Church Going marks an attitudinal progress in the poets approach to the theme of alienation. Earlier it was a success, failure, rejection resultant pattern. In the present poem he focusses attention on the ambivalent status of one of the most important institutional pillars of morality, ethics and society. This typically Larkinesque poem requires reading on two levels. Firstly from the point of view of parallel equation of the speaker and
the subject, and secondly from the visual angle of graphic imagery. Scep­
tical of institutionalized thinking assisted by rites, ritual observances and
religious ceremonies the poet opens the poem with a general air of irrev­
erence and disrespect:

“Once I’m sure there’s nothing going on
I step inside letting the door thud shut”. (CP. p.97)

Deliberately breaking “the tense musty unignorable silence” by the noisy
“closing of the door” the poet an alien feels forced to “pronounce the verses”
which end louder than usual and are echoed through sniggers. His intrinsic
reaction becomes evident from these petty rebellious gestures. The speaker
next summons the Almighty to surmise on the “time” required for “brewing”
the “silence” he subconsciously desired when he made sure.

“...there’s nothing going on” (CP. p.97)

However it is yet another unremarkable church with the telling images of “books”.
“matting”, “seats”, “stones”, “dry brownish flowers” cut for sunday “brass” and the
“next organ”.

The next stanza continues the familiarly unfamiliar pose of conscious disasso-
ciation. The “roof” looked “almost” “new”, “cleaned” or “restored” arousing natural
curiousity which is deliberately snubbed by

“Someone would know, I don’t” (CP. p.97)

The mood betrays not only an inherent scepticism but also a professed ignorance
The perception:

“.....I peruse a few

Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
Though ironical in content manifest a sense of strangeness and disenchantment with the spirit and essence because accustomed reading could have been less laboured and more moderate in tone. Larkin’s stance becomes reflective of the post-war tendency of disbelief, scepticism and estrangement from long held ethical codes of conduct, behaviour and human relation. The implicit image of boredom and lack of interest in the heavily trudging lines:-

...Back at the door

I sign the book donate an Irish six pence reinforce the earlier impression of laboured effort and disinterestedness as the speaker had merely chanced to visit an obsolete musty antiquarian monument. The lines close with a satisfied rejoinder of

The place was not worth stopping for

The following stanza registers a subtle transition in the mood of the speaker. The disjunction noticeable earlier was not a consequence of a spiritual vacuum or vacuity, nor was the visit an inquisitive peering into a strange world. On the contrary it was a conscious search for answers, roots and moorings. The helpless confession

Yet stop I did in fact I often do,

And always end much at a loss like this,

Wondering what to look for,... illustrates the futility of the search and an almost passive inertia and indifference because of a betrayal by religion. The disillusionment experienced makes him wonder over the future of these cumbersome monuments of antiquity. Disused they
could only be turned into museums with “parchment plate and pyx” locked in showcases and the rest offered “rent-free” to nature and its creatures. The last line continues in essence the earlier stated disenchantment.

Larkin continues to construct through relevant image patterns to visual picture of his subject and its predetermined fate of being reduced to an object perpetuating superstition which will survive even after belief finally ends. After dark dubious women in search of lucky stones and mascots for their “sick children” could also encounter “dead ones”. The illogical, irrational power of “good”, “evil” or “some sort” prevalent in the immediate present will cease some day, the ghost of belief and disbelief exorcised the building comprising of

Grass, weedy pavements, brambles buttress, sky.” (CP. p.98)

will be unrecognisable. It will merely be an outer shell marred beyond recognition. The positivistic affirmative values of hope, faith, charity, selflessness, love, duty earlier manifested in it becoming more and more obscure, the speaker wonders “who” will in the future seek it for these quintessential virtues. His scepticism duly answers his own queries. Possibly the “crew that tap and jot and know the rood-lofts”, or some “ruin-bibber”, or “christmas-addict” hunting for antiques, organ-pipes. The reference to “myrrh” evokes images of an earlier staunchly Christian belief and monumental transition from those basic tenets of religion. With the experience of alienation total and complete because the poet acknowledges

...for which was built

This special shell? For, though I’ve no idea

What this accoutred frosty barn is worth, (CP.p.98)
the diatribe gradually weakens into a self assessment. The speaker searches for weakness innate to his own psyche and perception. He wonders whether his insularity and isolation were not the result of his own boredom, lack of true knowledge, ignorance and a concerted reaction against traditionalism and ritualism because though alienated he experiences a compulsive urge to return again and again seeking something. It may only be the “pleasing silence” or “the sombre serousness” of the house and the “earth”. It could possibly be the “blent air” that quenches his thirst and assuages the hunger he feels in himself. Institutions can fall apart, become obsolete, fall into ruin and disuse but the spirit, the essence persists duly remembered by different names in different epochs. Destiny, fate, compulsion call it what one may reserves the right to surprise a basic human response in all psyche and evidence of the perception can be found in the countless number of dead buried in the churchyard.

Church Going manifests Larkin’s characteristic tendency of adopting a “persona” to examine a state and consciousness of being. Truly aware of the dissension in his own psyche he employs the therapeutic medium of poetry to settle scores and arrive at conclusions. His poems as noticed by Andrew Swarbrick are

existential encounters with his being

Larkin self-consciously bares his soul in his poetry hence the need for anonymity and concealment. The mask and personae, consistent self-mockery are efforts to hide his vulnerable self from complete exposure. Significantly the symbols chosen by Larkin for this soul searching experience of alienation rests yet again in a concrete image. Object by object, the poet
builds the complete visual of a derelict monument with its accompanying trappings and unlooked after unkempt surroundings. Its antiquity and the importance to art dealers and fanatics whom he deridingly addresses as “ruin-bibbers” get emphasised often. The cycle-clips”, ”the Irish-sixpence”, “the weedy pavements”, “brambles”, “parchments”, “the dubious women”. “the samples for cancer” are all image clusters culminating in a totality of “an accoutred frowsty barn”. However tangible and graphic the imagery Larkin chooses in order to describe the obsoleteness of the church the significant emergent fact lies not in these outward embellishments but the emotional sustenance, the deep profound and serious silence towards which the speaker of the monologue gravitates unintentionally and without conscious volition.

Mr. Bleaney written in May 1955 forms part of the poets third collection The Whitsun Weddings. Decidedly biographical in content, the poem is a bleak representation of one man’s isolation and alienation from his moorings. It renders in clinical terms the abject rootlessness of an individual and manifests yet another angle from which Larkin viewed the theme of alienation. The tendency for estrangement stems from the individuals thwarted need to fraternize with other living beings and correlate with the props offered by society and existence. Deprived, rejected and isolated, the Bleaney’s are sceptical of the sustenance offered by religion and kinship. Larkin aptly observes in his poem Here.

Here is unfenced existence...

Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach. (CP. p. 137)
Apparently, the world of Mr. Bleaney is peopled by three characters—the landlady, the new tenant and Bleaney himself. The poem, a characteristic dramatic monologue depicts the interaction between the aforementioned people. It would simplify equation if the scholar views the poem as the poets recognition of his own being. Preoccupied to the point of obsession with existential flux, Larkin’s poetry embodies the many images of his own self. Mr. Bleaney is an experimentation in the mode of splitting his personality into different personae- in the pattern of association, disassociation and a repeated association. The tenant of the poem is the poet’s own voice—a deliberate counterpoint to the protagonist which gradually merges into the Bleaney personae to offer a summary statement on the perpetual emotional impoverishment of the lone individual.

The deceased (indicated by the recurrent use of past tenses was, stayed, moved) Bleaney’s lonely existence gets pieced together through a succession of images. The otherwise “flowered curtain”, “thin”, “frayed” falling five inches short of covering the window sill become poetic prelude into an incomplete life that lacks spiritual fulfilment. The “garden” outside that the protagonist had taken charge of is a mere strip of “littered”, “tussocky” land. The poet does not specify whether the “litter” and grass grew after Bleaney’s departure or was in evidence during his period of stay. However, the present state of the garden becomes a sad commentary on Bleaney’s exercise of responsibility because that bit of land can hardly boast of being labelled a garden. The lone bed, the single-chair and a dim insufficient glow with absolutely no hooks to hang garments and space to scat-
ter books and bags are almost clinically listed by Larkin. The protagonist who had spent the “whole time he was at the Bodies” in this bleak cold room; never felt the need to “relate and connect”. Larkins present poem, therefore, is no mere collacation of images pertaining to a particular theme but becomes a metaphor of alienation.

The purposeful decision of “I’ll take it” spoken on behalf of the Larkin personae begins the exercise of association wherein he occupies “the bed” stubs his fags on the self same saucer souvenir. The Larkin-Bleaney fusion becomes counterpoint to the earlier stance of disassociation which is again repeated when the poet distances this combine from the scenes that follow. Hence “my” ears are stuffed to drown “the noise of the set he” pursuaded her to buy. “His” habits, “his” preference for sauce, the time “he” came down, the uncertain reason “he” kept plugging at the four-aways. “his”visit to the Frintonfolk and ’his’ sister at Christmas time gradually telescope the formers entity as an added dimension to the psyche of the protagonist. It is, however, observed that the disjunction with the earlier consciousness seems forced and sudden because of the anthropomorphic representation of the “frigid wind tousling the clouds” the identification turns full circle. The “he” of the sixth stanza gets projected into the “we” of the seventh.

The prominent images of the second last stanza enhance the spartan austerity of the surroundings by relating it to the inclement weather. “The frigid wind” “disturbed clouds” and the “fusty bed” indicate a basic hostility. It is, therefore, not surprising that Bleaney thinking of “home” grins
to the accompaniment of a dread and a shivering. The evocation of the image of home with its related comfort and belonging is in contradistinct­
tion to the earlier picture of a rootless nomadic existence led by Bleaney.

The near complete identification of the speaker, the personae and Bleaney become evident in the pronoun “we”. Larkin next strives to sum up his commentary on alienation by seeking a pertinent definition for the plight. He was aware that

...how we live measures our own nature (CP. p.103 )

The Bleaney estrangement, the poet clarifies, was not on account of forced circumstances because the choice was never arbitrary. His protagonist had deliberately rejected “home” and “family” to live his life in a “hired box”

...at his age having no more to show

 Than one hired box. (CP. p.103)

The poet desires to emphasize that the individual is known by his sur­roundings and his temperament and mentality can be gauged by a measure of his habitual activities and daily schedules. The obdurate Bleaney

“...warranted no better” (CP., p. 103)

The significance of the conditional “If” and the tentative reminder “I don’t know” of the closing lines are also studied pointers to the fact that Larkin desired to withdraw behind the wall of uncertainty and project the plight of Bleaney as a characteristic condition, a state of mind typical to the alienated being. The information imparted is meant to lend credibility to his fantasy fig­ure. The poem is an attempt to assess through a shift of focus the multiplicity
of moods, gestures and habits typical to an estranged lonely rootless existence.

Two more poems from "The Whitsun Weddings" and "The High Windows" substantiate the theme of alienation. Vers de societe is an ironical treatise on society, sociability and social relations. The Whitsun Wedding deftly sketches the assembly and dispersal of crowds on a moving train. The title poem enlarges upon the earlier discussed Bleaney metaphor which can aptly be described as Larkin's alienation motif. Both poems directly and indirectly deal with the merits and flaws of society, emotional devastation, consequent to isolation, preferences for solitude and the relative merits of sociability.

The Whitsun Weddings a much deliberated and archetypal poem renders a montage of the myriad pictures of life. The journey and the sequential clips intermingle as participation and separation punctuate the shifting canvas of the world in seeming transition. Experiencing both alienation and oblique communion with the parties assembled on the platform simultaneously Larkin enjoys the position of a spectator participant. The paradox of this situation continues to permeate the fabric of the entire poem. The journey described is biographically a factual one. A white Sunday, the seventh after Easter is observed as a church festival in commemoration of the descent of the Holy Spirit. The trip undertaken by the poet became a liet motif for various constituents. The ceaseless progress of life, periodic congregations, the temporary and permanent estrangements, ritual marriages and divorces and sexual encounters form fluid collages, clustered under the central journey motif. The poet's disjunction with his environs is suggested by the very first image of the introductory stanza.
"That Whitsun I was late getting away" (CP. p. 114)

The reason for the delay lay not with him but the train which was "three quarter empty" had "shuttered windows" and "cushions hot". The unsympathetic reception that awaited him in the humid cage of voluntary imprisonment dampened his earlier enthusiasm. Thus

"all sense"

Of being in a hurry gone (CP. p. 114)

The familiar scenes of "horse-backs" blinding windscreens", the smelly "fish-dock" glide by and the gaze rests on the meeting point of the river, sky and land symbolized by the Lincolnshire landscape. The illusion of conjunction apparent from a distance does in no way undermine the separateness of their distinct elemental identities. The poet seemingly suggests that an individual despite his anchorings, relations and associations remains basically alone, a lonely alienated being surrounded by the artificialities of rituals and absolutes. These constitute the external trappings and though enmeshed deeply in the existential plight are divorced and separate from it. Recognition of this indisputable certainty makes the individual rudderless and alone.

A marked negativity in the poet's approach to industrialization and increase in progress oriented junk becomes starkly evident in the following stanza. The extension of "heat" through the metaphor of height and horizontality measure the long afternoon. The word "all" embraces "heat" in all its dimensions. Fleeting images of "wide farms", "short shadowed cattle", "the floatings of industrial froth", "dipping and rising hedges" move
by and entrance into a new town which is “nondescript” yet characterized by “acres of dismantled junk” betray Larkin’s disenchantment with consumerism and industrial expansion. The journey, however, continues despite it.

The metaphor of marriage which is crucial to the poem becomes Larkin’s next preoccupation. His apparent concern is to describe with the precision of a faithful spectator everything crossing his line of vision. The train, the journey and the onlooker supply, the unifying link to the disparate impressions. Larkin, a confirmed bachelor, despite his many liaisons with women viewed marriage with scepticism. His style is openly ironical and disrespectful and observation minute in detail. However, the poet’s intention to extend the significance of the motif beyond the limitation of the visual cannot be treated lightly. “Marriage”, which connotes a meeting and conjugation of two individuals in this poem, becomes analogous to all relationships though with a very significant qualification. The meeting is almost always short and temporary. Hence, the train with the platform, the passenger with the train, the rapidly passing nondescript towns, the crowds of people who frequent the station represent the casual encounters of life. Futility and impermanence thus enhanced the poet stands all alone in a crowd of faces. The poem is a statement on alienation with the constant flux of being rendered through the image of the train movement. Past and present reality get juxtaposed in a surrealistic stream of impressions against the certitude of a predetermined mortal existence. Beginning with the “long cool platforms”, “whoops and skirls”, “the grinning and pomaded girls”, to authenticate the experience, Larkin journeys with interest along the irreso-
luteness, nostalgia and sad “good-byes” to “something that survives”. With a change of mood to curiosity he

Saw it all again in different terms. (CP.p.115)

Worried fathers with “seemy foreheads” “loud and fat mothers” overburdened uncles “shouting smut” get differentiated from the brides of the day who are word painted in the following manner.

...........................................the perms

The nylon gloves, and jewellery substitutes,

The lemons, mauves and olive-ochres that

Marked off the girls unreally from the rest. (CP. p.115)

Larkin’s intention is not merely to separate this image from the rest of the congerie but to push it centrestage in order to generate fresh images. Hence, while the timorous girls

...gripping their hand bags tighter, stared

At a religious wounding (CP. p.115)

the spectator observes that

............................................the rest stood around;

The last confetti and advice were thrown,

.........................each face seemed to define

Just what it saw departing; children frowned

At something dull; fathers had never known

Success so huge and wholly farcical,

The women shared

The secret like a happy funeral; (CP. p.115)
because the perception of the extreme ludicrousness of this success and the secret of this joy whichbeckoned misery in tow was available only to the disillusioned older generation. For them

.........the wedding days

Were coming to an end (CP. p.115)

“Free at last” from the cumbersome burden of this avoidable ceremonial sending off the figurative train proceeds along areas that Larkin actualizes through concrete images, namely the city of “London” and “gouts of stream” emanating from the roaring engine, fields, building-plots poplars and major roads. Fifty minutes get telescoped into moments.

Just long enough to settle hats and say

I nearly died. (CP. p.116)

In one such moment, the metaphorical and actual

A dozen marriages get under way. (CP.p.116)

but

..........................none

Thought of the others they would never meet

Or how their lives would all contain this hour. (CP.p.116)

because Larkin christens it “a frail travelling coincidence”. The undeniable certainty of the destination notwithstanding, wheresoever it lay atomised the ephemerality of the temporary contact. The poet asserts that although such encounters enhance the feeling of individual loneliness, they also alter the human mind in a subtle way. The “slowing” and “tightening of brakes” the “swelling” and “falling” are legitimate human experiences which certain fate
like an arrow shower

Sent out of sight (CP.p.116)

Whether it carries the potential of “becoming rain”, only destiny can predict. The poet passenger on the meandering locomotive, remains a part, yet, apart from the rest in his separate lonely existence.

The italicised introduction of the Vers de societe wherein the poet and his mythical wife invite society as “craps” to “waste their time and ours” to a still more insulting destination is positive assertion of Larkin’s genuine dislike and aversion to society in general. The query

............... perhaps

You’d care to join us? (CP.p.181)

which is indicative of uncertainty and tentativeness also betrays Larkin’s counter desire to be left alone undisturbed by external forces and pressures. The reason for the invitation rests in his confession:

I’m afraid. (CP. p.181)

The singular Warlock Williams, his addressed confidante becomes sole recipient of this honest revelation and the coarsely framed opening statement which explodes all decency of language has seemingly been triggered by the image pattern of innate fear. Thus, the extended invitation is consequent to an awareness of the dread and fear of loneliness uncared and mortally afraid of the plight of rejection. The “gas fire breathing”, “the sombre swaying trees”, attenuated darkness and encompassing obscurity of the night gradually intensify the feeling.

Stephen Regan in his book “Philip Larkin: An Introduction to variety criti-
The polite middle class society of warlock Williams is made
to appear as uninviting as possible.\(^{10}\)
Andrew Motion notices the "sinistery comical nature" of the name and feels
that it has been used as a device to sabotage and undermine the false gen-
tility of society. In typically Larkinesque manner the imaginary Warlock
Williams personae dramatically asserts the conflict between individual
yearning for solitude and compulsive infringement of society, on individual
freedom and artistic excellence.

Later Larkin reaffirms his earlier avowal by visualizing himself
interacting in different situations. The first of this series embody the poet
speaker as a lonely individual bearing the harsh trauma of his plight, the
second image depicts a man of the world and the third an individual who
has probed into the deep recesses of truth and realized that

> All solitude is selfish \(^{\text{CP.p.181}}\)

The situations instead of being counterproductive are complements as each
logically leads to the succeeding mode. Hence, Larkin, the loner, who ac-
knowledges

> Funny how hard it is to be alone \(^{\text{CP.p.181}}\)

transforms himself into a gentleman “holding a glass of washing sherry” spending
half his evening listening to inane conversation and responses of socialities who
lacked intelligence and mouthed drivel that elicited cant or insincere jargon in re-
sponse. The poet feels condemned to “company” with which he enjoys no mental
compatibility. The experience only intensified his excruciating feeling of alienation
and an occasion to ponder

Just think of all the spare time that has flown,
Straight into nothingness by being filled

With forks and faces. (CP. p.181)

The focussed images of his wife and Warlock Williams, who represented definite people earlier gets diffused into “some bitch” which graduates into “forks and nameless faces”. Family, friends and mentioned formless, faceless people constituting the external world encroach on the desire for solitude, and time devoted to them flies into the void of nothingness leaving the human being abjectly alone. The tirade against society and its unreasonable demands softens into an expression of finer feelings and sensibility when the poet seeks to define solitude. “The noise of the wind”, “the sight of the thinning moon” which gets reduced to an “air sharpened blade”, “the repayment” provided by the promises of life’s total enjoyment, “the relaxed rest under a lamp” are visual and auditory images tangibly manifesting the experience of solitude. Yet, such is the selfishness of this mode that it can only be attained after a total rejection of the demands of self and society.

The contradiction which serves to enhance the creative tension inherent in the Vers de Sceult lies in the comprehension of the futility of hankering for solitude because

All solitude is selfish, (CP. p.181)

and Larkin’s conscious preoccupation with it as a personal preference. The hermit with his “gown and dish” communing with an absent God required solitude as a condition and a theological necessity. But
No one now/Believes him. (CP. p.181)

In Larkin’s world of post modern beliefs emphasis rests on social interaction.

Being “nice to people”, “doing it back somehow”, “Playing at goodness like going to Church”. These social rituals and routines become boring because of their mandatory forcedness and a consciousness of social ineptitude on the part of the participant. The crude, coarse and indecent jargon of decent niceties elicits a disgusted “O hell” from Larkin.

The final stanza compares the freedom of youth with the ephemeral transience of time left at the disposal of old age. The duration of peace peters off into clouds of rumination bringing disquiet and “other things” entailing past failures, lost causes, self-realization, nostalgia, memories and remorse. The individual, thus, in his escape from society seeks solace in solitude which offers no panacea but opens old wounds. The difference between isolation and solitude ends, and for Larkin they become two sides of the same coin.

The theme of alienation continues to permeate a vast body of Larkin’s work. Poems such as “Here”, “Deceptions”, “The Importance of Elsewhere”, “Reasons for Attendance”, substantiate the claim that his creative genius thrived on conscious difference from the conventional. The novel and unconventional appealed to his poetic sensibility. His technique consisted in presenting attitudes essentially contradictory to each other, in the initial stage Larkin inevitably concludes the arguments betraying secret sympathy for the exceptional.

The controversial poem “Deceptions” originally titled “The Less De-
ceived” employs Henry Mayhew’s “London Labour and the London Poor” to initiate a debate about desire and suffering. Essentially it is a poetic record of the manner in which an innocent girl was drugged and raped. The poet sympathises with the victim in her unconsolable grief. The occasional references to the excruciating misery felt by the victim get registered in lines such as:

...I can taste the grief,
Bitter and sharp with stalks, (CP. p.32)

and

...All the unhurried day
Your mind lay open like a drawer of knives. (CP.p.32)

and

...I would not dare
Console you if I could. (CP. p.32)

But Larkin, the alienated philistine, becomes operative in the following line when his sympathies start shifting from the victim to the perpetrator of the shameful act making a subtle distinction between the grief “exact” and ill defined betrayal by one’s own desires and expectations. Andrew Swarbrick, in his book on Larkin, observes:

The girl, the rapist and the speaker are fundamentally isolated: the girl in her desolation, the rapist in his delusion and the speaker by history.11

Though all three are loosers, the poet felt that the rapist mocked by his own illu-
sions became the worst sufferer and the greatest looser. In his instance, deception was complete. Larkin so sympathises with the 'agent' that he too becomes an accessory. The poet's stance and treatment of this very controversial subject, however, were evidence of his desire to be different. The deliberate effort to break away from the moral and ethical coda of believed and practised values illustrate Larkin's iconoclastic break from norms. Estrangement in this instance is attained through identification with those that are socially and morally ostracised.

In Reasons for Attendance the poet chooses alienation as a justification for his art. The title emphasizes its own negative implications lending support to the non-conformist predilections in Larkin's temperament. Hence, the poem defines reasons for not attending rather than the obviously stated. The motif of dance and music gather in their wake images of movement, energy, sound, feelings, sensation and colour. "The trumpets voice", "the lighted glass", "the flushed face", "the best of happiness", "smoke and sweat", "feel of girls" concatenate to establish the pleasure of sex. Yet in a typically Larkinesque manner the poet disqualifies the happiness as he is conscious of

Sheer/Inaccuracy, as far as I'm concerned, (CP. p.89)

thus, countering all earlier arguments. The dance acquires added dimensions as a metaphor for art and literary proccupations. The poet later explains, thus

What calls me is that lifted, rough tongued bell
(Art, if you like) whose individual sound

Insists I too am individual. (CP. p.80)
This concerted design by desire to remain singular individual not joining the mainstream of creative activity remained an obsessive concern of Larkin. He was an alien by choice because he acceded to the dictates of his inner psyche.

It speaks; I hear. (CP.p.80)

The bell though coarse and rough tongued appealed to the recesses of his poetic sensibility and Larkin elevates the poem from an ordinary dance hall situation to a philosophical truth about the individualistic nature of art. The speaker prefers individual fulfilment in art to yearning for happiness in partnership. Hence the conclusion

...others may hear as well,

But not for me, nor I for them; (CP. p.80)

Therefore, he decides to “stay outside” believing in the truth of his observations and experiences and they continue to “maul to and fro” assured of the authenticity of their happiness. The final statement

If no one has misjudged himself Or lied (CP.p.80)

reiterates the importance of personal preferences and individual compulsions in matters of life and art.

“The Importance of Elsewhere” depicts the speaker as a recluse, an alien in his own environment. He feels comfortable with strangers in a foreign country where cultural differences, variations in dialect and speech emphasize and underline the fact of his individual identity. Alienated in his own native country as self and ego got reduced to a cipher, Larkin welcomed isolation as it aided awareness and perception. Ireland, in this poem epitomised the
land of alienation whereas England symbolised the traditional conventional value ridden world where the poet had been trapped against his will.

The loneliness felt by Larkin got ratified by the realization that “it was not home”. The compensation lay in the recognition of his Separate identity:

Strangeness made sense (CP.p.104)

through its very eclectic nature and dissimilarity to the usual. The hurdle he had to cross was “the salt rebuff of speech insisting so on the difference”. This distinction provided him with a particularity and specificity. Once it gets recognised “we are in touch”. The endemic draughty streets”, “end-on-hills”, “the archaic smell of dockland”, “the herring-hawker’s cry” are employed as topical representational image traits. Yet, they italicize the separateness of his existence and simultaneously establish a “workable” relationship with the Irish people.

Life in England deprived him of the right to stand apart. He suffered an identity crisis on account of being a mere number among the innumerable. In his native country Larkin experienced an unseen yet distinct coercion as

Living in England has no such excuse
These are my customs and establishments
It would be much more serious to refuse (CP.p.104)

Citizenship, nativity, familiarity have their own demands, compliance being one of them. It, however, results in the drowning of the essential human personality and individual will. The Larkin personae, therefore, prefers the cultural alienation of a
The concept of distance "Here", "there", and "Elsewhere" continued to be a recurrent subject of Larkin’s poetry as the perspective offered by spatial and temporal remoteness helped reinforce his own thematic preoccupations. Toying often with the pattern of juxtaposition of the far and near in terms of existential reality the poet simplistically translated it on the basis of their antithetical contrast. The closeness of "here" and the distance of "elsewhere" provided him with the polarities between which he could dextrously manipulate his images to accentuate the feeling of a fractured disjunct.

The opening poem of "The Whitsun Weddings" entitled "Here" ostensibly described a town through which he travelled aiming for a destination that was always "out of reach". In the course of the journey the poet "swerved" thrice. The initial movement was towards "east" away from rich industrial shadows and traffic. This was followed by a detour through fields and meadows to "the solitude of skies" and "the widening river’s slow presence." The third conscious exercise of choice to his surprise delivered him to a town. Characterised as a "large" place it boasted of details which Larkin listed for the next two stanzas:

Here domes and statues, spires and cranes-cluster
Besides grain-scattered streets, barge-covered water.

The town also catered to the whimsies of the consumers
Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes iced lollies
Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers (CP. p.136)

The concrete urban jungle continued through the tattoo shops, consulates, and the "mortgaged half-built edges" receding slowly into the "isolate" villages of the Suburbia. The 'here' of the title becomes defined in the concluding stanza and the hard images of the earlier lines taper into the luminosity of colour and feeling. The all pervasive "silence" that could "stand" in its continuity, the profuse "leaves" thicken and unnoticed weeds display their ability for the occasional flowering. The flow of water quickens and the scented air ascends past the poppies into "neutral distance". Could this be the hereness that Larkin was in search of because existence is free. However, the soothing balm of his surroundings failed to supply him with the props of relatedness. The "unfenced existence" which was "untalkative" on account of its uncommunicative nature remained tantalisingly peripheral. The alienated soul persists in its quest for pseudo supports to establish compatibility, correspondence flitting from one unfamiliar mode of existence to another remaining unsuccessful.

The image patterns in Larkin's poetry become powerful mediums for communicating the manifold possibilities of his prominent themes. The imagery in a poem roughly speaking involves mental pictures conjured through the evocation of memories and associations stored in the subconscious mind. It is an illogically structured self-subsistent world ruled by the governing principle of the theme. The perfect concord between the themes and images is essential because the former grows by the deployment and control of the latter. Images, thus provide a concentration of expression for
correlating emotions and unsuspected mental analogies.

Larkin skillfully exploits singular and unusual probabilities in his use of images and imagery inorder to explore the theme of alienation. The feeling of disjunction stems from an inability “to connect”. This failure to relate to people, ideologies, institutions, absolutes, society and above all his own self got rendered through motifs, figurative language-clusters, juxtapositions, collages, patterns and the dramatic medium of viewing his persona from different angles. The interaction provided him with necessary perspective and distance to successfully render a picture of his alienated self.

The poems analysed are Larkin’s private, almost esoteric experiences in estrangement. Church Going, The Whitsun Weddings and Vers de Societe depict his incompatibility with established outmoded rituals defunct beliefs, and human huddlings in the name of society. Employing the core image of an old church, a dance and couple of weddings which are manifests and can be usually presented through concrete imagery and sense perceptions, the poet weaves a web of picturesque designs teeming with images of all colours. Against the tangible symbol of the church, the poet places the abstract concepts of belief, attitudes and proclivities narrowing upon the central theme of isolation and estrangement retaining the ambivalence of the Church as a persisting symbol despite the cleavage between theory and practice.

“The Whitsun Weddings” is a procession of moving pictures, comprising of assemblies and dispersals. The governing motif of the poem is the train journey. The rhythmic movement of the locomotive, its association
with the successive platforms and the people, congregated to welcome or bid farewell to the wedding parties gets unfolded through a bunching of precise images which actualize the experience. The visual, the seen and the felt is in constant flux. *Verse de Societe* represents a similar tendency of deploying the dance metaphor to convey the fact of his preference. Society isolation, solitude are imparted tangibility. For this Larkin yet again takes recourse to concretization through pertinent and proper images the intention being to present a composite picture of the relevant theme.

“Mr. Bleaney” is a metaphor of alienation. It is an illustration of Larkin’s technique of splitting his personality into separate voices. Each dismembered psyche has its representative image cluster to graphically lend credibility of portraiture and roots to the figure. The estranged Bleaney thus lives in a world very different from the other persona. This Larkin poem depicts his alienation from himself. Bleaney is a disjuncted sensibility. The images are thus less concrete and the language of the poem is figurative. Time sequences have no significance as chronology collapses. Past, present coalesce as each becomes projected into the other mode with the utmost dexterity. In “Deceptions” the picture of the ravaged girl and the misery of her devastation could not have been presented in a key lower than exploited by Larkin. The underplayed emotional trauma, the shifting sympathy and the shock delivered by the concluding lines have Larkin’s hallmark.

Larkin employs language to good use. The unusual phrase constructions generate novel meanings. Though the images used by Larkin are often concrete yet they do not share empathy with the brittle, hard, brilliance of
the Imagist poetry of Pound and the dislocated non-sequential and esoteric images of Eliot. In Larkin's poetic world innumerable fluid sensory images glide by in absolute synchronisation enhancing the semantic content of the poem.