CHAPTER ONE
MAKING OF A POETIC SENSIBILITY

Philip Larkin by now is recognized in the literary world as a major poet of the post-Second-World-War period in England. His attitude is taken as a model response of his generation. Larkin was too modest and moderate in everything, hence calling him great would be anomalous. Despite his evasive temperament and unprolific writing, fame has come to him in a considerable way. He is also generally recognized to be the finest poet among his contemporaries.

This thesis is an enquiry into the radically pessimistic sensibility of Larkin and the way it is reflected in his poetry. By "radical" is meant here what is innate, and by "pessimistic" is meant an essentially bleak view of life. The commonest themes in Larkin's poetry are loneliness, boredom, failure, missed opportunities, deprivation, victimization, uncertainty, helplessness, limitedness, suffering, and above all death. This means Larkin mainly draws on the darker or unpleasant aspects of human condition in this world. Larkin seems to suggest that man's fate is only to endure suffering and very little to enjoy as man spends a large part of his life contrary to his desires and ideals. Perhaps for the same reason Eric Homberger has rightly called Larkin as "The saddest heart in the postwar supermarket" (Motion 1982: 59). Larkin has no alternative to offer as his art is neither aimed at instruction nor any kind of consolation. It is evidently
aimed at honest acceptance. Larkin's view is absolutely unillusioned, stripped of any kind of deception or delusion whatsoever. Seamus Heaney has rightly said that Larkin has "an unfoolable mind with its own predicaments, suspicious of any easy consolations" (Thwaite 1982 : 132). So the bleak view of life and absolute honesty about it seem to be the key points about his poetry.

It is not only the critics but even Larkin has said that:

It's unhappiness that provokes a poem. Being happy doesn't provoke a poem... happiness writes white, and you can't read it afterwards... after all most people are unhappy (Larkin 1983 : 47)

He reiterates, that the impulse behind his creativity was necessarily suffering, "Deprivation is for me what daffodils were for Wordsworth" (Larkin 1983 : 47). For such views expressed on a number of occasions Larkin was once asked if he ever thought happiness likely in this world, to which he replied:

well, I think if you are in good health, and have money, and nothing is bothering you in the foreseeable future, that is as much as you can hope for. But happiness in the sense of continuous emotional orgasm, no (Larkin 1983:66).

And when the same interviewer called Larkin a defeatist for such an attitude, he promptly replied "I don't find anything defeatist about being sane" (Haffenden 1980 : 87).

Man is so much given to self-deception that it is difficult to see and accept what Larkin means to say. Of course pessimism which is at the core of Larkin's sensibility is one
of the major aspects and the most predominant one. It is at once, his hallmark and something vital to his art. Larkin is also at his poetic best when he is dealing with the darker side of life. It is for such reasons that this thesis aims at emphasizing Larkin's radically pessimistic sensibility.

I

It seems necessary to record a few relevant details of Larkin's life, which may have contributed towards the shaping of his sensibility, as life and art seem inseparable in case of Larkin, and he himself has stated "Generally my poems are related, therefore, to my own personal life" (Hasan 1988:190). This does not mean that Larkin is autobiographical in his poetry, though the personal element is an inevitable part of it. Most of Larkin's personae resemble him to a great extent. What is essential to Larkin's poetry is honesty to one's own experience. As he has remarked "I suppose I always try to write the truth and I wouldn't want to write a poem which suggested that I was different from what I am" (Kuby 1974:48). So one may not always agree to what Larkin says, but one can not doubt his manner of saying, impeccable as his style is. If Larkin's poems are mostly sad, they are also moving. He has such a gift of expressing precisely and effectively the nuances of experience, that one is convinced that his poetry is despair made beautiful. His art is such that he can change personal failure into a successful poem. He once said "A good poem about failure can be successful" (Larkin 1983:74).
Philip Arthur Larkin was born on 9th August, 1922 at Coventry, England. His family was middle-class and the atmosphere at home solemn and tidy. His childhood was comfortable but uneventful and so boring, as he recalled later. These facts - the provinciality of his hometown, the social status of his family, and the atmosphere at home have a definite bearing on his sensibility. As a child there was nothing prodigal about him. He seemed to have no illusions or longings about his own childhood. Owing to his upbringing he disliked other children who he thought were noisy, cruel, and selfish brutes. He has debunked all the traditional cliche's generally associated with children or childhood. Hence his attitude towards childhood is unromantic and devoid of any visions. He has expressed very explicitly:

If you are more interesting as a child, what is the point of growing-up? I think grown-ups are nicer than children. I hated everybody when I was a child; at least I thought I did. When I grew up what I hated was children. Contact with children is hideous. The whole doctrine of original sin implies that children are awful (Haffenden 1980:82).

According to Larkin childhood seems romantic and fascinating to certain adult minds mainly because of its freedom from reason and responsibility. Larkin has used expressions like "forgotten boredom" for his childhood in a poem titled "Coming" (Thwaite 1988:33) and another poem titled "I Remember, I Remember" in which he expresses it as "unspent childhood" (Thwaite 1988:81). Contrary to such attitudes,
Larkin in real life is known to have been extremely nice and polite towards children.

Larkin has said that he wasn’t happy as a child, though it was comfortable, stable and loving. The reason for this was his stammer. He stammered until the age of 30. He has, on many occasions, expressed in deep agony how it was humiliating because it estranged him from normal activities. It also made him feel like a victim of an undeserved affliction. Though, as a child he had friends and played games with them, compared to other children he was withdrawn. Larkin has accepted that the fear of failure of speech kept him away from society and hence he had deliberately avoided all kinds of socialization.

Larkin had attended King Henry VIII, a local Grammar School, from 1930-40. He has admitted that he was both unsuccessful and a mediocre schoolboy. He had a profound dislike for any kind of physical activity, and even hated games, as was recalled later by his schoolmate Noel Hughes. Hughes also remembered the loving-kindness of Mrs. Larkin (Larkin’s mother) whenever he visited Larkin’s home. Hughes has expressed her kindness as “unfailing graciousness”. At school especially the influx of the scholarship boys, due to recent changes in the educational policy, used to disturb him. This accounts for his class-consciousness. Larkin has said that he hated all subjects at school except English. Larkin had a great passion for reading and thought that the
school hours were an interruption. Larkin was lucky to have a father who also had profound love for literature and who owned a fairly good personal library which included not only the classics but even a modern writer like D.H. Lawrence. Reading Lawrence in those days was quite a bold gesture. Larkin has accepted that he learned to respect Lawrence from his father.

Larkin's father, who was a City Treasurer and a very highly esteemed gentleman, used to visit Germany frequently on business. He also liked that country. When Larkin was 14, he accompanied his father to Germany once. But the experience of his inability to communicate in a foreign land where a strange language was spoken almost petrified him. This visit seems to have developed in Larkin dislike for everything foreign, and this accounts for his well-known attitude of "English" insularity. He has boldly said that he never read foreign poetry and also suggested that one can never master a foreign language and so one can never really understand foreign literature. He has wittily remarked that if Laforgue wanted his poetry to be read he better write it in English.

Larkin attended St. John's College, Oxford, to study literature. He was an undergraduate there from 1940-43. Even at Oxford he was known to be withdrawn but also studious and he still stammered. Larkin made some good and life-long friends, and especially his friendship with Kingsley Amis was of great consequence. Larkin owes his so called Philistine
attitude particularly to Amis. Besides literature, Larkin and Amis also shared a common interest in Jazz and mimicry. The academic ethos at Oxford was very significant in shaping Larkin's literary sensibility. Larkin and his contemporaries at Oxford came to be associated with a literary phenomenon in England during the Nineteen-fifties known as "The Movement." These writers did share certain common beliefs and attitudes.

Larkin was never to be a political writer, though his politics is implied in his writing. It was fashionable at Oxford in those days to be Left-wing, for which Larkin never had any sympathy. He has boldly accepted that he was always Right-wing or Conservative, and frankly expressed "oh, I adore Mrs. Thatcher" (Larkin 1983:52), but also said in a regretful tone "But I am afraid I don't think she will succeed in changing people's attitudes" (Larkin 1983:52). In fact Larkin was rather facetious about his commitment to Leftism, remarking that he visited their Socialist club in Oxford only once for a cup of coffee! Larkin didn't go to Oxford as a beneficiary of Welfare State Scholarship like most of the other undergraduates but was financed by his father. These scholarship boys were benefited by the recent Butler's Education Act. They all detested Oxford as they thought it to be elite and pro-upper-class. They were initially anti-establishment but as they matured they thought the British Society and culture was after all fair and as such they showed a change of attitude by becoming pro-establishment. Larkin associated the Left with vices and
the Right with virtues. Kingsley Amis recalled later in a memoir saying:

After the initial awkwardness his manner proved to be friendly, informal, even rather noisy.... He is the most enlivening companion I have ever known and the best letter-writer (Thwaite 1982:30).

Even after Oxford days their friendship continued for lifelong and, as Amis said, Larkin proved to be entirely affable, and someone who erected no barriers. Both Larkin and Amis had passion for Jazz, and Amis said "The art-form I associate with Philip at Oxford was not any sort of literature but Jazz, Philip was passionate about it" (Thwaite 1982:24). Amis also remembered, in the same memoir, that at Oxford if any loud music came from a window it was certainly from Larkin’s room. When Larkin and Amis met for the first time at Oxford, Larkin said "For the first time I felt myself in the presence of a talent greater than my own" (Martin 1978:17). Robert Conquest, another Oxford contemporary, has said about the friendliness of Larkin "He was mild in manner, and depreciatingly humorous" (Thwaite 1982:31). At least at Oxford, in a limited group, Larkin was friendly, sociable, talkative, noisy and even a Philistine. Another Oxford contemporary, John Wain, has even said that "we were united in our homage to Larkin" (Timms 1973:7). Bruce Montgomery and Alan Ross were other contemporaries with whom Larkin was closely associated. It would be ridiculous to think of Larkin as a leader of any group or activity, but there were some young men who seemed to have
been attracted to him and so gathered around him, which is obvious from what John Wain says.

When Larkin was at Oxford it coincided with Second World War. So Larkin and his generation had essentially matured under the shadow of war. There was rationing, blackouts and bomb threats. In spite of such inconveniences, Larkin said he enjoyed being at Oxford. When other young boys were called out for the war service, Larkin was rejected on account of his bad eye-sight. This certainly must have humiliated him. He has said that he was surprised for not having been selected but also glad as he could finish his B.A., with first-class honors in English, without any interruption. Larkin says that he did not write much while at Oxford because he thought he was surrounded by better persons. Only few of his poems appeared in the undergraduate magazine. Meanwhile Larkin’s hometown, Coventry, was one of the worst hit places due to the war. The devastation on such a vast scale must have reinforced the already gloomy temperament of Larkin.

After graduation Larkin returned home and had no specific plans for his future. Then the Ministry of Labour began inquiring what he was doing or intended to do. To avoid imposition of any unwanted job from the Ministry, Larkin sought a job as an assistant in a public library at Wellington, in Shropshire. It was a remote and a dreary place, and the work, routine, hard and boring. However, the post determined his future career as he was to remain a
librarian for the rest of his life. He has said his career as a librarian was not by choice but by chance. But he worked hard and honestly, and was reputed to be an efficient librarian. At a very late stage in his life he said he always enjoyed his job as a librarian which somehow suited him.

Naturally, a man like Larkin preferred to remain single. As he says "Yes, I have remained single by choice, and shouldn't have liked anything else" (Larkin 1983: 65). This was so because of his conviction that"Love collides very sharply with selfishness, and they are both pretty powerful things" (Larkin 1983: 54). Such self-assertive and ego-centric but ironic remarks, with pathos added to them, were typical of Larkin. Larkin has elaborately commented on marriage as a self-deception:

I often wonder why people get married. I think perhaps they dislike being alone. I think living with some one and being in love is very difficult business anyway, because almost by definition it means putting yourself at the disposal of someone else, ranking them higher than yourself (Larkin 1983:54).

Larkin's view seems to suggest that if dependence on another person is impossible, then self-reliance could be the alternative. But Larkin's skepticism did not even allow that because of the idea that the self is an illusion which is reflected in his statement:

I think that a point does come in life when you realize that there is a limit to what you get from other people and there is a limit to what your own personality is in itself. (Larkin 1983: 56).

Socialization, according to Larkin, is another kind of
illusion. He is well-known for his reclusive behaviour, and has deliberately avoided public places and occasions. He saw life "more as an affair of solitude diversified by company rather than an affair of company diversified by solitude" (Larkin 1983:54). Some people try to overcome their sense of isolation by traveling, about which Larkin remarked in his usual wry manner:

I suppose everyone tries to ignore the passing of time some by doing a lot, being in California one year and Japan the next, or there is my way-making every day and every year exactly the same. Probably neither works (Larkin 1983:58).

So if one is honest, whatsoever you do you cannot overcome isolation. It is the inevitable fact of life. Larkin never liked visiting new and strange places, as he thought such an idea was too adventurous and exotic. Instead, he preferred to a stay in a familiar, quiet and comfortable place:

I don't really notice where I live: as long as a few simple wants are satisfied peace, quiet, warmth - I don't mind where I am (Larkin 1983:54).

Larkin also had an intolerance for discomfort and that is why he said he did not go away from home because "The further one gets from home the greater the misery" (Larkin 1983:55). For such a preference for reclusive life and simple wants Larkin was rightly called as "the Hermit of Hull", Hull being a remote place north of England where Larkin worked and lived for thirty years, as a librarian, from 1955 to 85. Besides reclusiveness another important aspect of Larkin's character is ordinariness. His life-style was so much like other unpoetic people.
My life-style is as simple as I can make it. Work all day, cook, eat, wash-up, telephone, hack writing, drink and television in the evenings, I almost never go out (Larkin 1983:57).

People who were close to him have recalled that he was unpretentious in his behavior and against all kinds of snobbery. His life-style exemplifies that a poet is not a strange or an extraordinarily inspired creature, but just the man next door. He preferred an uncharismatic personality and remained determinedly simple. He suggested to his interviewer once "Please don't think I am great. I am noticeable because I seem good and I seem good because others are so bad" (Haffenden 1980:87). Like many of his personae he has actually lived a dull and unspectacular life. He has succeeded in creating a picture of himself as an ordinary man in an unromantic modern world. He further told the same interviewer:

I don't want to transcend the commonplace.
I love the commonplace. I had a very commonplace life. Everyday things are lovely to me (Haffenden 1980:92).

Larkin's ultimate scepticism was expressed by him in regard to Christianity and the question of faith:

I am not someone who lost faith. I never had it. Religions are shaped in terms of what people want. No one could help hoping Christianity was true, or at least the happy ending rising from the dead and our sins forgiven. One longs for these miracles and so in a sense one longs for religion (Haffenden 1980:91).

Larkin's refusal to transcend the ordinary life not only during the life on this earth but even after death and beyond
this earthly life, makes him all the more interesting. This was the result perhaps of upbringing in a non-conformist family and also due to the influence of the Oxford intelligentsia which was skeptical about everything.

Larkin shows his awareness that there is limitation to all human concerns. Traditional consolations like childhood, love, sex, marriage, family, community; even nature and religion are all illusions. They render no consolation to him. Such extreme honesty about one's scepticism is bound to sound pessimistic. By denying traditional consolations or illusions he was not offering an alternative way, if he had done that, it would have been another illusion. Larkin has no alternative to offer.

Larkin died at the age of 63, on 2nd December 1985, at 1.24 pm. in the Nuffield Hospital, at Hull. Besides his friends, colleagues from the library, University staff and students, his admirers; the funeral was also attended by his only sister and his niece who were the only survivors as Larkin had never married.

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Larkin has debunked the notion of a poet's development by quoting Oscar Wilde's statement that "only mediocrities develop". This also shows his own concern when he said, "I don't think I want to change; just to become better at what I am" (Hamilton 1964:77). It is true in a way as some critics have observed that Larkin's poetic concern is limited, but it
is also equally true that he is never monotonous. His limited themes appear every time with more precision and poignancy. This section considers Larkin’s works to highlight the course of his literary output. In addition to his volumes of poems, his fiction and non-fiction are also discussed as they do throw some light on his sensibility.

Larkin has five volumes of poetry to his credit and the following are the titles in their chronological order:

1. The North Ship (1945)
2. XX Poems (1951)
3. The Less Deceived (1955)
4. The Whitsun weddings (1964)
5. High windows (1974)

The first volume, The North Ship, clearly shows the struggle of a young poet in search of one’s own poetic voice or identity. It is clearly a work of an adolescent mind. The predominant mood in the volume is gloom, which is Larkin’s hallmark. But here the poet is suffering in the abstract. Larkin accepted later that the book was not very good. It was mainly written under the influence of W.B. Yeats, and the poems, mostly romantic lyrics, are in a superficial and bardic style. He would reject in future such a style entirely. Larkin said that though the style was borrowed, the mood was his own. One of the major poets and a noted critic in England today Andrew Motion, has rightly got the spirit of the book when he said:
Almost all the poetry of *The North Ship* is languorously drooping in their rhythms and inventively romantic in their references. They frequently borrow direct from Yeats, and general resemblance abounds. The mood is invariably gloomy without justification, their time of day, dawn or dusk; weather cold, rainy and windy and symbolic details monotonous occurring without extraordinary frequency and no distinguishing features (Motion 1982:33).

Larkin’s future themes like Love, Time, Nature and Death have roots in this volume. It is interesting as the early work of someone who became a very good poet in future, rather than for its own intrinsic merits. The most striking thing about the volume is its technical excellence about which Elizabeth Jennings, Larkin’s contemporary, remarked: "It is good to know that Larkin could write so well when young" (Martin 1978:124).

This first volume was reprinted in 1966 which contained an additional poem titled "Waiting for Breakfast while she Brushed her Hair". Larkin called this poem as a Coda. This poem shows a striking departure from Larkin’s earlier practice, as the style is at once so different. This poem shows that Larkin’s impassioned quality is replaced now by a much mature voice. The language and the situation of the poem is ordinary, as against romanticism of the earlier poetry. Larkin remarked that this new poem shows "the Celtic fever abated", by which he meant the end of Yeats’s infatuating influence which was, in his own words "as pervasive as garlic". In the introduction to this revised edition, which has great literary significance, Larkin has
said that the change from the earlier vague symbolism to concrete realism occurred since he came across Thomas Hardy as his literary mentor. It was Hardy, he said, who taught him a more rational approach, and to be less hysterical and less empathic.

Larkin's second volume of poems *XX Poems* was printed in a limited 100 copies order and privately circulated. It was printed in Belfast, Northern Ireland, where Larkin was working as a librarian from 1950-55. This volume went mostly unnoticed.

The next volume *The Less Deceived* at once brought him fame as a major poet of the post-war period. Its success was quite unexpected, and the volume went through three printings in the first nine months. John Wain, one of Larkin's contemporaries, commented "If there is an avant-garde in English poetry, its chief document is Larkin's *The Less Deceived* (O'Connor 1958:48). Even T.S. Eliot said that the poet of this volume was worth encouraging. This is something curious because as a literary editor of Faber, Eliot had rejected earlier Larkin's volume of poems, titled *In the Grip of Light*, for publication in 1948.

However, this new volume *The Less Deceived*, shows that Larkin has overcome all his earlier romantic tendencies and that he was at home with his own newly found poetic identity since he came across Hardy. Now the tone is more mature. Instead of adolescent selfpity, there is now stoicism and cynicism.
These poems are also bleaker and the general tone is predominantly one of disenchantment. Larkin in these poems is more a man speaking to men rather than to himself. If the earlier personae were more or less alike, speaking about the same things in the same manner about the same attitudes; now the speakers, subjects, situations, tone and technique are much more varied and complex. In this new volume, Larkin speaks more about real time and real place and convinces one that his empirical tendency is becoming stronger. There is also a growing preoccupation with death, and he mostly writes about life necessarily as suffering, aging, and personal extinction. Larkin seems to be drawing nearer to his philosophy of pessimism.

If nature in The North Ship was mainly unspecific but predominant, and used as a backdrop to reflect the poet's gloomy or melancholic state of mind; now in The Less Deceived there is a major shift from nature to the urban landscape. And instead of speaking about himself Larkin now speaks more for the human condition, if not universal then definitely about contemporary England.

Larkin's next volume of poems was The Whitsun Weddings. This new volume and the previous one, that is The Less Deceived, can be considered as Larkin's major poetic achievements. Larkin's fame as a major post-war poet in England was further confirmed with this latest volume. Thematically these poems reiterate earlier concerns. The imagery of urban life becomes more prominent. As an observer of community life and
social detail Larkin stands aloof from their joy and bustle, and by putting himself against the community his isolation is made sharper. The accuracy of portraying social and communal life brought a considerable praise for Larkin. Eric Homberger's comment on Larkin as "the saddest heart in the postwar supermarket", quoted earlier, seems more appropriate in the context of this volume. Apparently The Whitsun Weddings appears more buoyant compared to earlier poetry, but there are equally darker poems reminding the reader that Larkin was never far away from his pessimism.

High Windows happened to be the fifth and the last volume of poems published during Larkin's life. This time despair is again predominant. Without opening up any new areas Larkin deals again with his peculiar themes. With this volume the contours of Larkin's poetic sensibility become clearer. In fact Larkin becomes better at what he already was. Almost all of his darker attitudes are given poignant expression. High Windows has been considered as Larkin's finest collection because there are excellent poems. It is the quintessential Larkin, and he has proved that dealing with the same topics is not a defect. It is not the subject but how the subject is handled that is more important. The tedium of repetition is overcome by the use of bright and sharp language, and the tone and the voice of the speaker reflect an intensely accumulated experience. The speaker has also grown older, suggesting that time now is running short. Larkin's poetic concerns are reinforced and given new energy
rather than merely repeated. If the persona has grown older, then his voice adopts the overtone of the serenity of wisdom, instead of outraged bitterness.

Larkin has written two fairly good novels: *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl In Winter* (1947). A comparison of Larkin's novels and poetry shows that the difference is only formal or generic. He has handled both the genres successfully and he can very well exchange one for the other. His novels are as poetic as his poetry could be novelistic. Larkin did not have a very high opinion about them, but in fact they are much better than what he thought about them. Though both the novels have identical themes, their modes are basically different. *Jill* is realistic, whereas *A Girl in Winter* is symbolic; and Larkin has handled both the techniques with equal efficiency. The common subject of both the novels is maturing or coming to terms with the facts of life. Accepting and facing what is real rather than console oneself with illusions, seems to be the lesson of both the novels. Such realism is also the inevitable part of his poetry. Isolation, which is central to Larkin's sensibility, is also very much a part of these two novels. In fact Larkin's novels and poetry are complementary to each other.

In writing these two novels Larkin overcame the vague and shadowy diction of his early poetry, and he knew what direction to take. In writing the novels he arrived at a point where the authorial consciousness no more needed characters. The assumption of a mask or character was
incorporated within a poem by the extended treatment of a single character. It was only after the experiment of writing novels that Larkin was able to come to a poetic technique that has the sense of ease and a sharpened sensibility which characterizes his subsequent poetry.

In addition to the five volumes of poetry and two novels discussed earlier, Larkin has to his credit one anthology The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse (1973), and two non-fiction books All What Jazz (1970) and Required Writing (1983). Common to all the three books is Larkin's firm anti-modern stance.

The poets Larkin selected for the Oxford anthology were mainly those who either predated Modernism or those who consciously evaded it. The book is considered by most of the critics as idiosyncratic, because according to them many poems included have no generally perceived poetic value. The anthology is particularly unsympathetic towards recent poetry. It shows Larkin's bias towards minor and neglected poets and also for traditional forms. Larkin justified his choice as a deliberate reaction to Modernism. When asked why he chose such unfamiliar poems, he replied "I saw them as unexpected flowers along an only too-well-trodden path" (Larkin 1983:73). Most of the critics have attacked Larkin for what they consider his narrow taste. However, the anthology became extremely popular and went through several editions subsequently.
Larkin has made several statements regarding the problems, difficulties, as well as its importance and uniqueness, in bringing out such an anthology, though they are not approved of by some critics. Larkin said he relied heavily on his own taste in preparing the anthology and depended on his own judgment. In the end he thought his endeavor was unique, and never repented for his choice. What was unique about the anthology, according to Larkin, was that like other anthologies it was made not out of existing anthologies but he spent four and half years reading the entire Twentieth Century poetry. It was a stupendous task which worried him on occasions. In the end Larkin was happy about the anthology, and thought he did his job with hard-work and honesty. He accepted that he did not make any major discoveries, but at least tried to make Twentieth century poetry sound nice. And this was, he thought, his achievement and contribution.

Larkin's interest in and passion for Jazz music is well-known. As a result he wrote a book called All What Jazz. The book shows Larkin's profound knowledge and insight into this Black-American art form. The book is of course written for a limited audience of Jazz lovers, and it proved to be erudite, witty and provocative. Occasionally this book is terse and didactic, and yet extremely readable. The tone is nostalgic as it reflects the decadence of the kind of Jazz Larkin loved as a young man. Even for the readers who have no knowledge of Jazz it offers a very fascinating commentary
on modern art and popular culture in Britain and America. Larkin’s views of Jazz can be related to his notions of art in general and poetry in particular, hence it has a great literary significance. Especially, the introduction to this book can as well be read as Larkin’s poetics. Larkin suggested that he identified Jazz and dance as a kind of folk poetry which has shaped his poetic sensibility. So while talking about Jazz he was as much talking about his poetic principles. It is curious that Larkin should like this non-native art-form, as he has boldly and firmly expressed his dislike for anything foreign. Otherwise a recluse, Larkin discussed and corresponded with many people regarding Jazz, which built a wide net-work of friends not only at home but even abroad.

Required Writing is a book of miscellaneous prose tantamount to his defense of poetry from which much of Larkin’s poetics can be had. While talking about other writers he is clearing his own grounds and revealing his own poetic concerns. Such a practice may remind one of Oscar Wilde’s statement that “Criticism is the only civilized form of autobiography”. The book also shows that Larkin is writing not as a professional or an academic critic but as an amateur. Though Larkin is well-known for his anti-academic stance, he demonstrates that he has acquired the necessary jargon of formal academic writing. Within the book the more important essays are on traditional poets like Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas, A.E. Housman, and John Betjeman, which account for his
traditionalism in poetic art. He showed his annoyance at the negligence of these poets. Larkin has special praise for Betjeman who retrieved the audience for poetry.

This book is a collection of essays Larkin wrote over the years. The tone is at once intimate and informal. Most of this writing is impressionistic as he heavily depends on his own taste. There is a strange mixture of subversion and grand pronouncements, confidence and doubt, boldness and humility. Throughout the volume Larkin is against any absolute claims, and he recommends tentative validity. He thought such a stance necessary because whenever we discuss literature we deal with complex and hidden matters of the human spirit, which is by nature inconstant. So any notion of a final solution is an illusion, according to Larkin. Larkin has a very subtle way of persuading the reader. It has been rightly said that this book defends Larkin's own point of view rather than persuade the reader to agree to what he was saying.

On the whole this book clarifies some major attitudes of Larkin regarding literature, such as traditionalism, anti modernism, aversion to experiment in art, a sense of an audience, etc. This book is one of the Wittiest books of criticism. It was well-received by the literary world and it brought fame and status to Larkin as an important spokesman of literature.
3.

An attempt is made here to discuss some influences on Larkin from the tradition of English poets who perhaps helped in shaping his sensibility. Until Larkin found his own poetic voice he tried different ways of writing poetry which account for his seeming imitation and similarities with some of the poets of the past. About imitating the past masters he said he did not mind it because it helps to learn one's job better. About the relation between a poet and his tradition Larkin has remarked:

All poets master their craft by studying the works of their predecessors and a poet whose work bore no relation to that of earlier writers would be a freak. A poet attains originality when he thoroughly absorbs the lessons of his masters, and has found a voice of his own in which he can communicate to his readers his own experiences. When you start your own stuff other people's manner won't really help (Hamilton 1964:73).

So it would be more appropriate to say that Larkin absorbed the lessons of his masters rather than merely imitate them. The earliest formative influence on Larkin was of W.B. Yeats whose fame was at its height in those days. Watkins had visited Oxford and spoke brilliantly on Yeats and also hauntingly recited Yeats's poetry. Larkin was an undergraduate then at Oxford. Larkin was so much influenced by Watkin's performance of Yeats that for sometime Larkin was writing like Yeats.

Larkin imitated Yeats's early manner in particular which is in a forlorn and melancholic mood and it somehow suited Larkin's gloomy temperament. Larkin has said that he decided
to write like Yeats to overcome Auden's influence. As Auden left for America in 1939, he proved to be a "God that failed". Auden was probably the only choice for Larkin's generation as an alternative to the old fashioned poetry.

Kingsley Amis, Larkin's closest friend at Oxford, recalled later that the poetry Larkin wrote when at Oxford was very much like Auden's. Larkin's lyricism, wit, argumentative tone, use of flippant language, and combination of ingenious form and sinister content are very much in the manner of Auden. Ultimately Larkin found him exasperating for his linguistic puzzles. Another early influence on Larkin when young was that of Dylan Thomas, who was then in fact a sensation. Every young poet was trying to write like Thomas and Larkin was no exception. Later, Larkin would take an anti-romantic attitude to childhood in reaction to Dylan Thomas who had glorified and highly romanticized it. So Yeats was particularly chosen as a new literary mentor to overcome Auden's and Dylan Thomas's influences.

Then in 1946 Larkin came across Hardy and at once he realized Yeats's limitations. Since then Larkin developed differently. This shift from Yeats to Hardy was a shift from romanticism to empiricism, from idealism to fatalism, experiment to tradition. No doubt Yeats's influence was direct, sweeping, overwhelming, but it was short, whereas Hardy's influence has been more profound and lasting. If Larkin imitated Yeats, then he totally absorbed Hardy.
Hardy and Yeats, despite their differences, are equally pessimistic. They both seem to imply that the world is necessarily unsympathetic to man. They both see the disparity between the ideal and the real. As an antidote, Yeats proposes escape whereas Hardy proposes stoicism. Larkin's notion that man's fate is to endure suffering surely has a Hardyean touch. Pessimism is inherent in all the three Poets: Yeats, Hardy and Larkin. Changing the mentor from Yeats to Hardy reflects a shift in the manner as well as sensibility.

Larkin especially objected to Yeats's occultism and came to dislike his impassioned quality. Yeats's romantic antirationalism makes vitality and energy seem amoral and imprecise. Yeats's firm disrespect for reason, which has shades of the romantic heritage, did not suit Larkin. Yeats may have proved that private myths can provide an excellent frame-work for poetry. To Larkin such poetics was unacceptable. Larkin is too earth bound, plain, simple and ordinary, as well as contemporary. Even other Yeatsean manners like exalted mood, extravagance, autonomy of the imagination and the belief that poetry is an alternative to real life, the poet as a hypersensitive esthete, were impossible ideals for Larkin. Larkin thought that the role Yeats assigned to the poet was essentially anti-social. As against Yeats's extravagance, Larkin is in many ways moderate. If poetry for Yeats was "the religion of wilderness", then for Larkin "Poetry is an affair of sanity,
of seeing things as they are" (Larkin 1983:197). It was natural that Larkin would reject Yeats. Retrospectively Larkin remarked "After that Yeats came to seem so artificial - all that crap about masks and Crazy Jane and all the rest it all rang so completely unreal" (Rossen 1989:26).

The manner in which Larkin found Hardy as a literary ideal and the changes that took place in Larkin, is an exciting episode of Twentieth century literary history. The way he felt after choosing Hardy as his model is elaborately expressed by Larkin:

When I came to Hardy it was with the sense of relief that I didn't have to try and jack myself up to a concept of poetry that lay outside my own life, one could simply relapse back into one's life and write from it (Timms 1973:59).

Hardy rather helped Larkin to find his own inner reservoir, "Hardy taught me to feel rather than to write" (Press 1977:135). Perhaps the most important thing Larkin learned from Hardy was the pain of life. "What is the intensely maturing experience of which Hardy's modern man is most sensible? In my view it is suffering, or sadness" (Press 1977:136).

A large part of Larkin's pessimism comes from Hardy. He seems to hold the view that pessimism is not a negative attitude to experience, but necessary for the true kind of poetry. Suffering not in some abstract sense like the romantics, but the actual suffering of ordinary man is the main concern. And the reason why Hardy appealed to him was because:
Hardy is not a transcendental writer, he is not Yeats, he is not an Eliot; his subjects are men, the life of men, time and the passing of time; love and the fading of love (Press 1977:136).

Larkin not only absorbed Hardy at the level of content but also at the level of form. Like Hardy, Larkin too writes in the straightforward plain style. Richard Hauffpauir has called such a style as "the art of restraint", which is against the impassioned style of Yeats, or excessive expression in Dylan Thomas. Such Yeatsean and Thomsian art leads to formlessness. So Larkin in being traditional in style like Hardy, was in a way against experimentalism in art. Instead, Larkin follows directness, simple and colloquial diction, which are part of England's native tradition and which was out of fashion in the early decades of the Twentieth century. Hardy recommended such a return to the broken tradition, and Larkin joins his master in this. Robert Graves too has written in his autobiography Goodbye to All that (1929), recalling Hardy instructing him "All we can do is to write on the old themes in the old styles, but try to do a little better than those who came before us" (Williams 1987:12). Larkin would not only agree with this statement but in fact he followed this principle in actual practice.

Larkin has described Hardy as "the authority of sadness", which is equally true of him. Larkin's well-known preoccupation with death is almost akin to that of Hardy. And again both are rational non-believers and they accepted the
finality of death. Hardy and Larkin share an anguished view of an unspiritual universe in which good and evil have no meaning outside this small human world. Nature, history, and society move in accordance with a blind or absurd law. If there are any differences in their views, that is due to the different times they belong to. Comparatively Larkin is more negative with a greater awareness of the bleak and dark forces of life. In Hardy’s poetic world man was sustained by the past, as he experienced the continuity between past and present. By Larkin’s time the disillusionment of values was total. The human world in Larkin’s time was cheap, vulgar, fragile and tawdry which is symbolized by commercial commodities displayed in the modern supermarket. Larkin’s world partakes of oblivion, death, and anonymity. The reason why Larkin seems more pessimistic, when compared to Hardy, is because the conflict between the self-assertion and fate or determinism is sharper as both are equally strong. Though fate ultimately conquers, Larkin’s personae do not succumb to the pressures of a dark universe, as they do in Hardy. Larkin’s world is more ordinary, immediate, contemporary and it is more appealing.

The next major influence on Larkin was John Betjeman. Larkin’s treatment of urban scenes and its specific details resemble Betjeman. Larkin’s The Whitsun Weddings, in particular, shows his affinity with Betjeman. Larkin had already learned from Hardy the authenticity of one’s own experience, however ordinary it may be, as a proper subject for poetry. With Betjeman’s influence this was further
confirmed. All these three poets - Hardy, Betjeman, and Larkin - exclusively write about the matters that impress, amuse, excite, attract and annoy them. Once the subject is established in their minds, they never question the authenticity of their interest.

Larkin, like Betjeman, deals with the ordinary human world without the promise of any new or private vision as an intellectual system. Both of them do not speak about the great issues of the contemporary time. This does not mean they are deficient in imagination, or that they are only personal with no political or social commitment, or that they are melancholic because they are nostalgic. What they imply in their art is a different emphasis. They prove that there are other ways of being intelligent, imaginative, and serious in the postwar ethos. To Larkin, Betjeman was an acceptor of our time, whereas Larkin is necessarily an ironist. Larkin is not a sensitive extrovert like Betjeman. Larkin as much talks about his own inner mind as he deals with social details. But Larkin is not as socially committed in his verse as Betjeman. Social observation is the basis of both the poets, but their aims are different. In Larkin social detail is not a mere record, but it makes the poet's alienation more poignant.

Larkin is more like Betjeman, in his later phase, especially as the painter of the particular. The recognizable landscapes and social details are unlike the earlier Larkin. In the early phase Larkin was abstract in dealing with nature
or landscape and perhaps it was due to the influence of Yeats. Larkin and Betjeman are alike in being poets of contemporary English life and localized imagination, which makes them both rather insular. Betjeman is particularly distinguished as a recorder of middle class life and a writer of non-serious verse. There is a unique blending of flippancy and nostalgia in Betjeman. Larkin is also known for his use of vulgar language but such devices arise out of his Philistinism.

Betjeman was practically social in everything; where as Larkin preserved his privacy by refusing to be social. If Betjeman’s major concern was with the continuities between past and present, the individual and the social; then for Larkin the individual is necessarily alienated in the highly industrialized and commercialized society. Betjeman’s Anglican faith was not absolute and yet he was hopeful. Larkin has been quoted earlier showing his absolute lack of faith in religion. Larkin is certainly more disillusioned, hopeless, skeptical and also pessimistic. Larkin sees nature as a realm of obscure forces, change, decay and death. Betjeman is somewhat different as he mostly draws on his vivid memories of Victorian and Edwardian London. Larkin was born, brought up, and lived in the provincial England. If Betjeman portrays the England and the society with sympathy, then Larkin acknowledges the limits and deprivations of the individual as well as the society. Betjeman is more culture specific and his use of language more idiomatic. For a
reader without the knowledge of specific cultural meanings he can be a difficult poet. Larkin is less so, but Larkin's difficulty is due to the complexity of thought and feeling itself.

What were the other significant influences on Larkin? Foremost among them was D.H.Lawrence. Nature in Larkin's poetry is most of the times bleak or gloomy. But on occasions he shows his wonder and appreciation at the beauty of nature, which he perhaps derived from Lawrence. If Hardy mainly taught Larkin to respond to his own innate temperament and Betjeman to social detail, then Lawrence inspired him to respond to the transient beauty of nature and community rituals. Whatever brighter side there is to be found in Larkin seems to come from Lawrence and Betjeman.

One of the subjects that pervades Larkin's poetry is solitude, which he perhaps owes to the influences of Yeats, Hardy, Edward Thomas and A.E.Housman. But occasionally he sees the beauty and pleasure in solitude, which certainly comes from Lawrence. Larkin, like Lawrence, is also concerned with the defeat of the ordinary people in the commercial and materialistic culture. They both seek the sustaining values from the commonplace rituals and customs of ordinary life in the midst of a diminutive culture.

Edward Thomas may not be a direct influence on Larkin. But the point where the tradition of English poetry was disrupted by the Modern poets like Eliot and Pound, and which Larkin
tried to retrieve would be precisely the Georgian Poetry with which Edward Thomas is associated. With the onslaught of Modernism, Thomas's reputation was eclipsed. Some of the best poetry of Thomas is melancholic, and he writes in an undertone. A felt urgency to convince the reader by means of precision is another point common to both the poets. But the major difference between them is that Larkin does not glorify the country creed, as Larkin is too urban. If there is restlessness and hesitation in Thomas it is only an appearance, for behind it there is always a quiet sense of confidence. Larkin is just the opposite. Larkin, if need be, can make use of violent expression, whereas Thomas is always sober and subdued.

Though Thomas is chronologically a late - Nineteenth century poet, he seems modern in his outlook and sensibility. What brings Hardy, Thomas and Larkin together is their skepticism. Compared to Hardy and Larkin, Thomas seems less skeptical because of his firm sense of time, place and the tradition. But all these three poets generally share a bleak outlook as they resist any temptation to escape into any illusion of perfection.

The other half of Thomas's poetry shows that life was meaningful to him due to a sense of responsibility. His healthier poems sustain on the faith in the traditional continuities, especially of seasonal changes and the rural man's adjustment to it. There is no such sense of responsibility in Larkin and in fact, hard work is compared
to a toad and there is a sense of drudgery and boredom, and man and nature are necessarily delinked, as Larkin says in a poem:

Where has the tree gone
That looked earth to the sky? ("Going")

Nor does Thomas have any illusion about nature as an entity that animates spirituality. His love for England is where the natural order was still believed in. It is neither picturesque, nor a pastoral tapestry, or even a neutral source of imagery. Larkin is bleaker, as he talks more about the discontinuity between man and nature, past and present. On the other hand Thomas shows, like Hardy, a respect for memory and continuity.

What is common to Thomas and Larkin is that they do not offer any timeless revelations. But Thomas's poetry is more about the meaningfulness in time and how the past can sustain the uncertain present. Thomas, like Hardy, never thought that memory brings dullness to one's sensitivity or consciousness. But there is no regressive longing for a lost or primitive innocence.

What seems interesting is that the major part of poetic influences on Larkin came from the poets who were late-Nineteenth or early-Twentieth century, irrespective of whether the influence was major or minor, stylistic or thematic. Influences are not always conscious. Especially in a tradition bound poet like Larkin there are always chances of unconscious or accidental influence leaving their
traces. Sometimes the resemblance may be due to conscious experimentation on the part of the poet, or even deliberate attempts to evoke a particular emotion. In case of Larkin we may trace the influence back to Ben Jonson. Larkin, like Jonson, avoids extended metaphor (a chain of similes) and many other rhetorical devices. Both the poets particularly avoid what is traditionally known as the conceit, both are in a way prosaic in their poetry, and there is at least surface intelligibility in their writing. The organizing principle in their poetry is rational rather than emotional. And lastly, they both tend strongly towards precision or condensation rather than extended expression.

Larkin's dimension of skeptical or disillusioned view of life is comparable to that of Dr. Samuel Johnson. The phrase "analytical poet of bleakness", used for Dr. Johnson may suit even Larkin. Larkin seems to agree with Dr. Johnson that there is essential boredom at the core of existence which men try to overcome by their tendency to fantasize. Such habit of dreaming, which is the part of popular culture in the present day, is the main target of Larkin's satirically pessimistic poems. At the center of Larkin's art there is scepticism that encourages him to satirize, rather than to idealize. Larkin's traditionalism in form has definite affinities with Dr. Johnson and the Augustans. To overcome a sense of boredom and a sense of defeat by means of wit is very much common to both. Their arguments, and analysis of thoughts may not be totally acceptable but they are however,
convincing.

Larkin has been quoted earlier as saying that deprivation was to him what daffodils were to Wordsworth and so it would seem ridiculous to compare him to Wordsworth. And yet some critics have tried to draw attention to this aspect. For instance, Robert Spector, has remarked "Larkin is committed to portraying life in the language of the people, presenting the ordinary in an unusual way" (Kuby 1974:21). This observation is not very far from Wordsworth's poetics as expressed in his preface to the Lyrical Ballads. Again there is another critic who explicitly remarks: "They (Larkin's poems) have a Wordsworthian subject, the ordinary sorrow of man's life" (Kuby 1974:21).

So Larkin and Wordsworth do resemble each other in their commitment to use ordinary life as a subject matter in their poetry. But Larkin's ironic vision is certainly absent in Wordsworth. Similarly, unlike Wordsworth there is no sense of elevation, loftiness, visionary childhood, the grandeur of nature in Larkin. If Wordsworth's poetic world is touched with spirituality, then Larkin is essentially earth-bound, skeptic, and bleak. Larkin has no sense of deriving any consolation from nature which is a major difference between the two poets.

The influence of Alfred Tennyson is much more extended compared to other poets with whom Larkin experimented. Tennyson as an influence, can be noticed through at least the first three volumes of Larkin's poetry. Larkin's The Whitsun
Weddings shows Tennyson's influence in the depiction of contemporary England. Larkin, like Tennyson, also evokes the English landscape - rural as well as urban. Of course, Larkin's wry and sardonic aspects are absent in Tennyson. Such viewpoint separates the two poets immeasurably apart.

The Georgian School was an important literary movement at the beginning of this century. It came into existence with the mission to popularize poetry. These poets reacted mainly against the sentimentality and rhetoric of the late Victorian and Edwardian poetry. They preferred aggressive realism and directness in their expression. Larkin's poetics is not very far from these premises. Like the Georgians, Larkin's approach to poetry is focussed on the reader. It implies a sense of a wide and amateur audience as against the academic - professional one which is always restricted. Larkin's stylistic preference, to write in conventional syntax to make communication easier, is surely Georgian in principle. But as a skeptic Larkin would reject their patriotic idealism and glorification of the countryside. Larkin was convinced that the onslaught of Modernism, the propaganda of the avant-garde, the brutal and desensitizing war, the premature deaths of the brightest young poets in the first World War, a narrow and ill - tempered progressivism minimized the popularity of the Georgians.

With the first World War and Modernism the chances for the older kind of poetry had no chance of survival. The harsher realities of the war proved Georgianism as too simplistic and
also optimistic. The post-first-war disillusionment kindled the Modernist's experiments in the poetic form. Irony and cynicism were an inevitable part of the Modernist sensibility. The "Zeitgeist" was in favour of Modernism. T.S. Eliot in his two attacks on the Georgians, published in the Egotist in 1917 and 1918, commented that the specifically English concerns - patriotic and moral - were damaging to poetry. Eliot also attacked their country creed, smugness, their love and concern for the local and the native; in short their in-bred or insular tendency. A look at Larkin's life, poetics and poetry would show the he and his art is a form of improved Georgianism, as Larkin overcomes their defects and continues with their basic poetic principles. Larkin's well-known anti-modern stance is, in a way, directed towards the continuity with the Georgians, which was disrupted by Modernism.

4.

The Movement was a literary phenomenon in England during the 1950s with which Larkin is normally associated. There are eight poets besides Larkin such as Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Robert Conquest, John Holloway, Elizabeth Jennings (all from Oxford) and Donald Davie, D.J. Enright, and Thom Gunn (Cambridge). They were more or less contemporary undergraduates at Cambridge or Oxford during the 1940s. So it was necessarily a generation that grew under the shadow of war. From 1939 to 1945 the world had witnessed unparalleled atrocity, and most of the assumptions about human nature were
questioned or doubted. Disillusionment or skepticism was the
general mood. The Movement Literature - poetry, fiction and
non-fiction - reflects such a mood and sensibility that was
shaped by the situation. The whole spirit of the Movement was
low-profile, as a result of disenchantment due to the
situation created by the war. John Wain, one of the Movement
Writers, explains the state of mind of this generation:

The world had been drugged by two decades of meaningless peace and then suddenly
battered nearly to death by global war. Worse, that war had ended with the
fearful savagery of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; at last man's fingers had
closed round the lever that, once pulled, would bring universal destruction. At
such a time, when exhaustion and boredom in the foreground are balanced by guilt
and fear in the background, it is natural that a poet should feel the impulse to
build. Writing in regular and disciplined Verse-forms is building in a
simple and obvious sense, like brick laying. We were all young and were doing
the best we could to make something amid the ruins (Morrison 1976:29).

So this generation held for some time at least certain common
attitudes which can be distinctly identified as the Movement
sensibility, though they developed individually in different
directions afterwards.

In the early 1950s the radio programs on the BBC known as
"Third Programme" and "First Readings", the poetry anthology
Spring time edited by G.S. Fraser in 1953, the periodicals
like the Encounter, the Listener, the New Statesman, the
Times Literary Supplement had published writings of these
young writers and tentative references were made to their new
tendencies. The Movement as a term was first used by J.D.
Scott in his article in the *Spectator* dated 1 Oct. 1954. Retrospectively he said that he used the name only half-jokingly as no other appropriate name occurred to him when he wrote the article. Somehow the name became popular and got itself established as a literary label. 1956 happens to be the crucial year for the Movement because Robert Conquest edited his anthology *New Lines*, which is considered to be the most authentic representative anthology of Movement poetry. So on the whole the origin of the Movement owes to journalistic and radio propaganda.

Central to the Movement poetics is their anti-modern attitude. By denying Modernism, by which they meant the first-half of the Twentieth century dominated by Pound, Eliot, Auden and Dylan Thomas; the Movement poets tried to restore the native tradition of English poetry which was disrupted by Pound and Eliot at the beginning of this century. To the Movement poets Modernism was a foreign intrusion and a continental impact. What they mainly objected to was experiment in the poetic style of the Modernists. The poetics of the Movement was inspired mainly by a desire to communicate, rational thought, introspective honesty, plain and ordered syntax; which was against ellipsis, discontinuity, fragmentation, irrationality, chaos, disruption of syntax in the style of Modernists. If the Modernists were experimental the Movement was conventional in style.

With the war came disillusionment, and with disillusionment
came anti-romanticism. The Movement believed that Modernism was an extension of Romanticism. So in denying one it was denying the other. The Movement felt the rejection of romanticism as immediate. The 1930s, that is Auden and his generation, had produced political romanticism by being Leftist; and the 1940s produced a private Id - romanticism. The Movement offers restraint and skepticism instead of excess of feeling, rhetoric, and idealism. The Movement's ordered syntax meant control over emotion. If, the Movement's anti-modern stance was directed against Pound, Eliot and Auden; then their anti-romantic attitude was directed against Dylan Thomas and the Apocalyptics. The Apocalypsis in English Poetry was a version of the French Surrealism. The 1940s then was called as the neo-romantic period, when Freud and the subconscious, images of sex, violence, and nostalgia for childhood were given loud preference.

The Movement poetry recorded the drab facts and emotions of ordinary life. For them sex was unpleasant after all, revolt against injustice futile, contemporary England was tawdry and spiritless, failure did not really matter. They debunked everything, including the self. All these attitudes were no doubt honest but sceptical. The content was ordinary, and the style too was plain to match the content. An English poet is more conscious of his reader due to the poetic tradition and the sociology of the country, which makes him restrain his oddities. The Movement style in being plain and ordinary holds in check the eccentricities of a poet. Robert Conquest,
in his introduction to his anthology New Lines, stated "All we had in common was no more than a wish to avoid certain bad principles" (Thwaite 1982:33). Here "bad principles" meant the wild experiments with style and excessive emotions mentioned previously regarding the Modernism.

Experimentalism for the Modernists was an exercise in being difficult and esoteric, and making demand on the learned audience. Highly wrought style, density of symbolism, overlapping myths and allusions required both expertise and deep knowledge to understand the Modern poets. The Movement poets avoided all this. They simply hoped to reach a larger and common audience. Movement poetry then is neither disorientating, nor grand, nor revolutionary, nor experimental, nor idealistic. The poets avoided pretentiousness in style as well as feeling. They were down to earth and rooted in common experience. They did not pretend to be visionaries or prophets, but men speaking to men in a manner in which they could be understood about matters human and rational. Their experience and reaction was common place, common men speaking of common-things to other common men. So literary taste had begun to move in a new direction, and the Movement was its manifestation.

The Movement writers not only have a distinct literary identity but also have a distinct social identity. Their social background was lower-middle class, geographically they came from the provinces and they were mostly non-conformists.
They were identified as the "coming" class, and they had a spirit of change in the post-war British society, and they were considered to be the representatives of shift in power and social structure. To them social revolution meant the emergence of a lower-middle-class in the newly created Welfare State. They had won the way to the ancient universities by competitive examination, and not as the members of privileged class as in case of Auden and his generation.

The Movement writers were considered as "the young dons in the provincial universities". By coming to Oxford and Cambridge they had succeeded in joining the old order or the Establishment, which they in fact resented. These universities seemed to them still snobbish and class-prejudiced. At the same time in joining these universities first as "the Welfare State Scholarship boys" and then go there as teachers, they saw in their success evidence of the basic justice and fairness of British society. So the Movement writers were caught up in a dilemma: on the one hand they were opposed to the old-order, and on the other indebted to and respectful towards it. The Movement writers ultimately realized that the new values such as "Angst" and hatred of the young generation against the old encouraged inaction, irresponsibility and anti-authoritarianism; whereas the old order stood for authority, responsibility and hard-work. This also accounts for their traditionalism towards society and its institutions. They attack the old
mainly for their snobbery, but they are also distrustful of the new ideals. On the whole they show marked reluctance towards radicalism. They emphasize stability, continuity, and order; rather than sudden change and disorder. They had sympathy for the new, but they remained susceptible to the old. The Movement writers were rightly called as "the no-nonsense generation", as they saw the limitations of both, the old and the new, also of the Right and the Left. Hence they tried to be rational, reasonable, moderate, adjustable and compromising.

In the post-second-World-War period the loss of power had led to "the loss of nerve" mood. It has been the central concern that has preoccupied Britain. Most of the political events give evidence to this fact, and tell the story of Britain's decline as a world power. The Movement generation has accepted this as a fact, bringing with it unconscious frustrations. "The Loss of nerve" is a common symptom reflected in the Movement sensibility. Their withdrawal from engaging into current events must be looked upon as a reaction to remain neutral after a period of expansion and excess which had culminated into the recent World War. Ironically such a loss of nerve was a reaction to the colossal nerve which in the first instance brought about the war. Instead they preferred a low-profile democracy. That no one can afford to be daring any more was their conviction.

The Movement writers have deliberately avoided dealing directly with recent history and especially about the
horrors of the war. They must have thought that speaking it out loudly would diminish its horror. They argued that they would be acting more usefully if they looked forward, rather than look backwards. To write about the war and its effects would necessitate departure from order and coherence. In short it would have gone against the Movement writing which reflects a tendency towards reconstruction rather than destruction.

The reason the Movement writers avoided writing about contemporary or recent history was that they thought that poetry can no more operate in a historical dimension. The Modern poets had proved that to be relevant with the contemporary history was to reach to the point of failure in communication, as in the case of Surrealists or the Apocalyptics. This style represented a reflection of chaos. So for the Movement writers history was no more to be placed or understood in terms of poetry. Unlike the Movement writers the Modernists had sympathy for Fascism, Marxism, or the Left. The Movement ethos was more humane, rational and democratic. Notions of decency and common sense dominated the Movement sensibility. Political enthusiasm, which led to war, was over. A new era of liberal and humane values had arrived. To be politically astute in the 1950s was to be politically inactive, neutral, or uncommitted.

The Movement generation took an unanimous stand against the dangers of Soviet Totalitarianism. This is one of the main reasons why they became conservative. They preferred to be
Pro-American rather than support the brutality and injustice of Soviet Communism. They justified their Pro-American stance in thinking that America was at least the only power in the West to confront the Soviet Rule. On the whole, the fear of the Left was a dominant feature in their ideology which was explicitly expressed by all these writers.

The Movement poets are academic in the sense they show the kind of intellectual wit traditionally associated with universities. In fact the Movement generation was also called as "the New University Wits". As a reaction - the non-academic fraternity were complaining and they warned that the contemporary poetry was becoming a special interest for a small university educated group. They thought that these poets were far from being humanized by their liberal education. Part of the Movement Philistinism is against this academic snobbery, the other being against cultural snobbery. What the anti-academic group among the Movement writers, especially Larkin, Enright and Conquest disapprove of is the wrong kind of intellectual achievement. The academic/anti-academic split among the Movement writers perhaps owes its existence to the influences of F.R. Leavis and George Orwell respectively. It is mainly due to the concern of the non-academic group of Movement writers for a common audience that their style is plain, direct, and colloquial. They brought a distinctive status to the ordinary style and language in poetry.

There are book-length studies and innumerable articles
endlessly debating about the validity and even the existence of the Movement. Not only the critics but even the Movement writers themselves have both asserted as well as doubted its existence. There are comments like "The group had never been officially formed, nor was it ever officially dissolved" (Morrison 1980:238). As the time progressed there were socio-political changes which affected the group identity that was established with Conquest's anthology New Lines (1956). Those factors which had brought about the development of the group ceased to operate. The Movement writers began to move in new directions. Only Donald Davie seems to have spoken about the definite existence of the Movement. At a later stage of their career the Movement poets found its premises limited. For the existence of a literary school there has to be a definite membership, regular meetings, place of meetings, manifesto, etc. Nothing of this kind happened in case of the Movement.

By 1960 the Movement as a label became a burden for those who had outgrown its initial preoccupations. The poetry of Gunn and Davie underwent considerable change, and even Larkin and Amis suggested that their work be judged on individual merit, rather than on the defunct principles of the Movement. The Movement was attacked with comments like "The Movement is no longer in motion; its members have moved out, moved on, moved away" (Morrison 1980:283). The following comment on the Movement, in The New Statesman on 23rd April 1971, can almost be taken as its obituary, "Any comment on the poet whose
contribution to *New Lines* seem to me to have any lasting potency" (Kuby 1976:9).

With the growing prosperity of Britain, the values of the Movement were undermined and soon it came to be called an era of gloomy dullness. Retrospectively the Movement has met with rather negative criticism from the next generation of critics and poets. It was mainly dismissed as a journalistic invention, and an extremely well-organized, but not well sustained publicity campaign. It was looked upon as a conspiracy of fame-hungry poets who promoted each other by means of a group-name. Ian Hamilton bitterly criticized it as "Spectator's P.R. Job securing for a number of minor versifiers a quite unmerited reputation" (Morrison 1980:3). Even Donald Davie, the most theoretical supporter of the Movement, criticized it on its limitations when Charles Tomlinson was excluded from the *New Lines* anthology by Robert Conquest, by reacting "There are indeed whole areas of poetry undreamed of in the philosophy of the Movement. Charles Tomlinson is a case in Point" (Morrison 1980:269.) In the same article Davie was bitter about the British literary Establishment for the neglect of Tomlinson and considered it a national disgrace.

In the early 1960s some of the Movement poets were working in the provincial universities and they also originally came from the provinces for which reason they were called as "Provincial". But later Amis, Gunn, Enright, Wain, Conquest and Davie not only left the provinces but also went abroad.
So the Movement feature labeled as "Provincial" proved not to be entirely true. There also occurred a change in their hostile attitude toward the corrupt metropolitan culture of London. For instance, Amis remarked at a later stage that "The London world had, in the event proved benign" (Morrison 1980:283).

Even in their socio-political attitude they changed from anti-establishment posture to a definite pro-establishment one. The British literary intelligentsia in the 1950s was dominated by F.R. Leavis and William Empson. They were influential in shaping the Movement sensibility. But in the late-1950s both were under attack, especially by Amis and Conquest. So the homogeneous literary culture was dissolved. In the 1960s and 1970s British literary world looked abroad for meaningful literary influences. The insular and the traditional attitudes broke down. Particularly John Wain moved away from Empson and was drawn towards Dylan Thomas. He and Donald Davie had a good deal of praise for Pound. Thomas and Pound, who were once under heavy attack, found some respectable literary allegiance.

One of the major problems in the assessment of the Movement is due to the contradictory opinions of its poets about their own relation with the Movement. They have supported as well as questioned its validity. In 1960 Amis called it "a Phantom movement" (Morrison 1976 :26), where as Gunn remarked "I found I was in it before I knew it existed.... I have a certain suspicion that it does not exist" (Morrison
1976: 26). Enright too has more or less remarked in the same way "I don't think there was a movement back in those days, or if there was I don't know about it" (Morrison 1976: 26). Elizabeth Jennings said that the Movement was the creation of Journalists, and not the poets who made it. Ironically, even Robert Conquest, the editor of New Lines which is supposed to be the most authentic and representative anthology of the Movement, remarked later on that in editing the anthology he was not trying to assemble a movement. Except Davie nobody has spoken positively about the Movement, but at a later stage even he was aware of its limitations, and remarked about it in an uncertain way.

The identification of the Movement with the Labour Movement in the post-war England has come to be accepted. The Labour Movement was a wide class-struggle. This association brought a quick reputation to the Movement. It gave them the advantage of representing a new class and it helped them to define themselves in opposition to the bourgeois generation of the 1930s. Naturally that generation which was now in their mid-life, reacted to the emergence of the Movement as a threat to them. Stephen Spender labeled them as "lower-middle-brows", Evelyn Waugh looked at them as the beneficiaries of the 1944 Butler Education Act, and Somerset Maugham described them as "scum". The aesthetic strategies of the Movement came under severe attack as wasteful, servile and patronizing; and this poetic credo sounded empty and meaningless according to the next generation. Another
important dispute between Davie and Tomlinson shows the temperamental difference between the Movement and those who were outside it. If Davie and the Movement poets thought that the use of A-bomb shows an excess of feeling and concern, then Tomlinson said it was not excess of feeling but lack of feeling and the death of the faculty of imagination among political leaders. If the Movement stood for order and restraint in style and feeling, then Tomlinson proposes a continued need for the poetry of feeling and imagination. Tomlinson also criticized the Movement for their limited aspirations. And interestingly Davie agreed later on with Tomlinson on many points regarding the limitations of the Movement.

Another important evidence that showed the limitations of the Movement was when Robert Conquest published his second Movement anthology New Lines in 1963. He had included all the Movement poets in his earlier anthology of 1956, but this time, in the second anthology, he included new poets like Ted Hughes and Thomas Blackburn. So this shows that there was something more taking place in the 1950s other than the Movement. There were poets different and better than the Movement ones writing at the same time. Again Dannie Abse's anthology called Mavericks (1957) is supposed to be an anthology counter to the Movement. Abse recommends a Dionysian revival in poetry in the introduction to that anthology.

Again since 1960 other ventures in English poetry show a
departure from the Movement principles. For instance Philip Haushbaum and Lucie - Smith's "The Group", Ian Hamilton's the "Review School", and Michael Horovitz's "Children of Albion", all these continue in the romantic vein and remain unaffected by the Movement. If we consider Ted Hughes, who was a poet contemporary to the Movement but who resembles earlier poets such as Hopkins, D.H. Lawrence and Dylan Thomas, then this shift in focus reveals that it was not the Romantic vein but the Movement itself that seems out of place. The seeming continuity between Dylan Thomas, Dannie Abse and Ted Hughes might lead to the conclusion that the Movement was an anomaly. About the Movement, Ted Hughes thought:

One of the things those poets had in common, I think, was the post war mood of having had enough rhetoric, enough overweening push of any kind, enough of the dark Gods, enough of the 'id', enough of the Angelic powers and the heroic effort to make new worlds (Morrison 1980:244).

Ted Hughes, as is well-known, represented an elan that was somewhat opposite to that of the Movement. Hughes poetry is full of vitality, energy, egoism, will to dominate, as against "the loss of nerve" facade of the Movement.

Donald Davie, who once upon a time was perhaps the critic who most strongly supported the Movement, changed radically at a later stage. His later criticism and poetry show the limitations of the Movement. According to him the Movement attitude of ordinariness, which sounds impressive, can also coarsen one's sensibility. He also pointed out that the Modern poet is distinguished from his predecessors by virtue
of the freedom granted to him by technology. Now all art and cultures and ages are at his disposal which he should make use of, which means poetry should be pluralistic, in time as well as place. This goes against the Movement poetics to make use of "Little England" of the contemporary time. Davie also came to agree that the Movement was antimodern, retrogressive, provincial, and marginal in its achievement and importance. Davie now preferred to stay in America and was busy translating Russian poetry!

The critic-poets, of the next to Movement generation, like Dannie Abse, A. Alvarez and Ian Hamilton not only criticized the Movement for its limitations but asserted that there was no coherence among these poets even at the stage when New Lines was published. Despite their strong antiromantic stance, many poets in the anthology wrote in a veiled romantic vein. Poets like Gunn and Enright wrote poetry which was so unlike the Movement poetry. Gunn especially is so much at odds with the ideas of moderation and ordinariness. Enright frequently wrote in free verse or even employed a loose style. Jennings is different as she is too varied in her matter and manner.

So on the whole then, the Movement in its search for order and technical excellence ran the risk of being merely precise and rather dull. Naturally the non-Movement contemporaries and others thought that the quick disposal of the Movement was inevitable. The post-Movement poetry shows signs of a romantic revival and influences borrowed from America, and it
heralds the decline of the Movement.

.5.

The two previous sections have already clarified some major attitudes which are part of Larkin's poetics. This section focuses on Larkin's opinions about the Movement which show his similarities and dissimilarities with it. As is expected, his attitude, as in most other matters, is somewhat ambivalent. For instance, in an interview, he has gone to the extent of stating that he: "Had no sense at all, at the time, of belonging, to a group with any definite aims, to the Movement" (Hamilton 1964:72). But he also gives credit to the Movement as it helped in popularizing them as a young generation with a new sensibility.

In fact a discussion of the Movement poetics would cover some major premises of Larkin's own poetics. Larkin, like the other Movement poets, was certainly anti-romantic in attitude which is reflected in his poetry. Larkin's statement quoted earlier that deprivation was for him what daffodils were for Wordsworth, surely confirm such an attitude. Larkin avoids an excess of feeling and prefers rationality and moderation in feeling and expression. He deliberately avoids lofty themes and heightened diction as they do not suit his purpose.

Initially all the Movement poets agreed to be antiromantic, but later some of them reconsidered their stance and came to think that not all the elements of romanticism were
pernicious. Especially the post-1960 period has been pro-romantic. Larkin always wrote from his disenchanted or anti-romantic and pessimistic point of view. He did not swing like others from an anti-romantic to a romantic vision. There are poems by Larkin that only show the romantic alternative painfully attractive but unreachable, hence he writes mainly about deprivation or missed opportunities.

One romantic principle the Movement always resisted was that poetry and madness are inseparable. The poetry in the 1960s written by American poets such as Robert Lowell, John Berryman and Sylvia Plath; and Ted Hughes from England was mainly about the mental breakdown, suicide, sadism and violence. Gunn, amongst the Movement was closet to them. Alvarez was also writing about pain and violence or psychic disturbance. Davie has commented on the whole situation by saying "Poets now-a-days know that it helps their reputations and sales if they manage a spell in the psychiatric ward" (Morrison 1980:278). Larkin's remark that "Poetry is an affair of sanity, of seeing things as they are" seems apt in view of his own anti-romantic attitude.

A pronounced anti-modern stance is the key-point to the poetics of the Movement and Larkin. Such a stance also shows the drawbacks and limitations of Modernism, which was an epoch-making phenomenon in literature. Larkin has particularly mocked the pretensions, sophistication and esoteric knowledge that form the Modernist poetics. He never took the exalted view of either a poet or poetry. Larkin
believed that art should primarily give pleasure to the reader rather than communicate any ultimate idea or truth. Larkin has openly derided the masters of Modernist poetry like Yeats, Pound and Eliot in particular. Larkin's most explicit anti-modern statement is expressed in his book on Jazz. Though he is mainly talking about his objection to Jazz or art in general, it can also be applied to his general view of poetry:

"No, I dislike such things not because they are new, but because they are irresponsible exploitations of technique in contradiction of human life as we know it. This is my essential criticism of Modernism, whether perpetrated by Parker, Pound or Picasso: it helps neither to enjoy nor endure (Bergonzi 1977:354)."

Larkin's many other statements regarding the origin, nature and function of poetry go against Eliot, and so in an implied way against Modernism. Larkin suggested that "separating the man who suffers from the man who creates is alright, but the dependence of the second on the first is complete" (Haffenden 1980:89). Larkin's major poetic principle, the autobiographical element in art, is reiterated so as to convince of his honesty with oneself and with one's own experience "The life and work should make sense together, since they both relate to the same person. Eliot would say they don't, but I think Eliot was wrong" (Haffenden 1980:84). Certainly it needed great courage and confidence to refute a man like Eliot who had enormous prestige in those days. Many of Larkin's statements can be quoted that show his radical differences with Eliot: "Poems don't come from other poems,
they come from being oneself, in life" (Haffenden 1980:84). This statement goes against Eliot who had said that every poem is born out of previous poems. As against Eliot's theory of impersonality in art, Larkin has said "Poems are about yourself ... we want the life and the work to make sense together" (Larkin 1983:49). Larkin considered that the burden of the past makes a poet's sensibility dull and that a poet ceases to be original. And if Eliot suggests that "poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult", then Larkin reacted by saying "When you have read a poem, that is it, it's all quite clear what it means" (Watson 1990:35). Here Larkin evidently was criticizing the highly allusive poetry of Eliot and Pound. Larkin thought that Eliot and Pound were concerned with culture in the abstract sense, and poetry became mechanical in their hands. In denying the modernist dictum that every poem must include all previous poems, he was rejecting the evolutionary view of poetry. According to Larkin then "You only think of other poems to assure yourself that you are not repeating" (Hamilton 1964:74). As opposed to Pound and Eliot who were cosmopolitan, Larkin was conservative, provincial, and monolingual. Monoglottism for Larkin had an indispensable creative importance "A writer can have only one language, if language is going to mean anything to him" (Larkin 1983:69). Larkin is not experimental in style or form. So Larkin's wish to communicate implies a sense of common audience for which experiment in art is irrelevant. The moment a poet is experimental he creates a barrier between himself and the
reader. In this sense Larkin is again anti-modern and his sense of audience connects him with the Movement.

The appeal of Fascism for Yeats and Pound is by now established, and after the war Pound's support for Mussolini became a literary scandal. Yeats's nationalism with all its longing for an organic community located in the rural past, shows signs of an aristocratic heritage. Yeats always remained an elitist, though he moved away from his earlier Romanticism. Larkin, as an anti-modernist, accepts the poet as an ordinary citizen, and not as an authority. There is no romantic nationalism, nor any other abstract idealism in Larkin as he is essentially a skeptic. Larkin denies religion, mythology, universal ideals, classical and biblical allusions; and instead writes about ordinary man's problems in contemporary England. Larkin's concern is limited because it is specifically personal, ordinary, local and contemporary.

W.H. Auden recognized Left-wing politics as a potential force for the good of society. His emphasis was not on the withdrawal of the poet but on the role of the poet as one deeply involved in society. Larkin never had sympathy for the Left-wing, nor was he socially involved. He was always a conservative, and social commitment to him involved honest hard work. Auden was the first poet in English to feel at home in the twentieth century. He employed in his poetry all the disordered conditions of his time. Auden differed from his modernist predecessors like Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and
Lawrence who turned nostalgically away from a flawed present to some lost illusory Eden where life was unified and secure, and the grand style a natural medium. Auden rejected all this and his subject was contemporary world expressed in the native poetic form. Larkin would agree with Auden on these premises.

Unlike the Modernists, Larkin writes poetry which communicates to the mind, not the intellectual mind, but to the intuitive and understanding mind that understands ideas in experience. To do so requires a language that is derived from thought rather than from dream or from the Freudian or Jungian "unconscious". Larkin’s traditionalism in style, and clarity in expression, result in communicative poetry. Larkin has no moral to preach and so he is least didactic. The point of Modernist’s experimentalism in style is that in their search for the prophetic or mystical or sub-conscious tapping of words, the word which was to support and harmonize or reintegrate cultural disintegration, gets intensified. Modern art even represents the groping in the poet’s mind for the right word so that he can arrive at the essence or whatness of the experience. In Larkin such a search goes on in the author’s mind, but it is not part of the poem. A poem is for him a finished product of the most appropriate words in the appropriate order.

As already pointed out, Larkin heavily draws on the personal element in his poetry, yet he is far from being narcissistic or romantically egoistic. Such an art was practiced by
Joyce, Pound and Yeats under the name of experimentation in modern art. Their inventiveness of language and imagery was so private that it needed either a highly informed audience or it required the poet's own explanation. To Larkin and the Movement, a poem should be self-sufficient. Joyce and Yeats oftentimes use private mythology. Larkin avoids this as his poetry is universalized because it is written in the Vernacular. Larkin's ordinariness and traditionalism at the level of form and content in his poetry is a return to the tradition by rejecting Modernism.

Larkin's view on the relationship between poetry and the audience is clearly mentioned in his article "The Pleasure Principle" written for the Listen Magazine. Larkin argues that the principal function of poetry is to give pleasure to the reader. This article also gives a clear warning of the dangers of writing for an academic audience.

It is not sufficient to say that poetry has lost its audience, and so no longer need to consider it: lots of people still read and buy poetry. More accurately, poetry has lost its old audience, and gained a new one. This has been caused by the consequences of a cunning merger between poet, literary critic, and academic critic (three classes now notoriously indistinguishable): it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the poet has gained the happy position wherein he can praise his own poetry in the press and explain it in the classroom.... In short, the modern poetic audience, when it is not taking in its own washing, is an audience, pure and simple. At first sight this may not seem a bad thing... But at bottom poetry, like all art, is intricately bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet looses his pleasure-seeking audience he
has lost the only audience worth having (Morrison 1980:127).

This section focuses on Larkin's opinions about the origin, nature, and function of poetry; and also the role of a poet. These are his opinions explicitly expressed through his criticism, interviews, letters etc. One thing that is clear through Larkin's statements is that he never elevated his beliefs about poetry into a system. His beliefs are expressed only incidentally, and not deliberately. His opinions come out of experience rather than from writing poetry out of preconceived notion of how to write. His opinions expressed on various occasions do show some consistency and coherence, though he denied any theory as such behind his art.

About the origin of a poem Larkin remarked that every poem:

Starts out as either true or beautiful. Then you try to make the true one seem beautiful, and the beautiful one true. When I say beautiful, I mean the original idea seemed beautiful. When I say true, I mean something was grinding its knuckles in my neck and I thought: God, I have got to say this somehow. I have to find words and I will make it as beautiful as possible (Haffenden 1980:84).

But this alone is not sufficient. Perhaps, even before fulfilling this wish to make it true and beautiful, one has to face a conflict:

Poetry is born of the tension between what the poet non-verbally feels and what can be got over in common word-usage to someone who hasn't had his experience
(Larkin 1983:84).

One of the most useful statements from Larkin, as to why he wrote poetry or what was his inner compulsion, is expressed sharply thus:

I write poems to preserve things I have seen/thought/felt both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake. Why I should do this I have no idea, but I think the impulse to preserve lies at the bottom of all art (King 1979:2).

This apparently hesitant but firm implication is typical of Larkin. A brief view of Larkin's life discussed earlier shows that his life was not altogether happy, and in addition the life-style he chose shows that he did nothing spectacular. Empirical as his poetry is, which contains strong personal elements, his poems are tinged with sadness as they are closely related to his own life. He always avoided the false relation between art and life, which largely accounts for his honesty. So when some critics accuse him of exaggerating the pessimism in his poetry Larkin remarked "My miseries are not overdone" (Hamilton 1964:75). Larkin has already been quoted as saying that "unhappiness" is the right kind of subject for poetry, because "happiness" does not sustain a poem. So an honest expression of one's own unhappiness is the right kind of poetic premise for Larkin:

The object of writing is to show life as it is, and if you don't see it like that you are in trouble, not life ... Poetry is a way of being honest, it is the
record of the poet's recovery of his authentic response to experience. Poetry in an act of preservation, a way of defeating time (Haffenden 1980:87).

This statement gives insights into Larkin's notion of the true nature and function of poetry. But it is not sufficient to be merely emotional about one's suffering, because a poem is not a chronicle of an individual's emotion alone. What is important is "when you write a poem you put everything into it that is needed: the reader should hear it just as clearly as if you were in the room saying it to him" (Larkin 1983:64). So a poet not only talks about his unhappiness in a poem, but he has to see that he is successful in communicating it to his reader his experience, which requires a formal or stylistic effort. Therefore, content and form are of equal importance. Only then can a poet be successful in communicating his experience. For Larkin, the poetic process involves not only the poet's own experience, his felt honesty but also the process of communication. Idiosyncratic experimentation has no scope, whatsoever. Clarity and precision are hence the hallmarks of his style, at once necessary if communication with the reader is the end. For such a kind of poetry the traditional rules of syntax are necessary. Larkin has said that he wouldn't operate without the conventional or traditional poetic forms and metres.

Suffering is an inevitable part of human life and is reflected in all aspects of his poetry. If his art was "an art of desolation which lacked comfort" as one critic remarked, then for Larkin it means "a poet shouldn't be
himself, he should be somebody else. A poet only says what he feels" (Haffenden 1980:87). And again he reiterates the same point in the same interview:

But I didn't invent old age and death, and I didn't see why I shouldn't write about them if they seem writeable about, you write a poem because it is something you've got to get done, not because it's a philosophy of life (Haffenden 1980:89).

Larkin's poetics then appear ambivalent, giving preference sometimes to form and at other times to content.

Larkin feels that a poet does his best in writing a poem. And to judge a poet by his poetry is futile. Elsewhere, he suggests: "Don't judge me by them (poems). Some are better than me" (Haffenden 1980:96). When he was asked how he would characterize his development, Larkin remarked:

I suppose I am less likely to write a really bad poem now, but possibly equally less likely to write a really good one. If that is development, then I have developed. I don't think I want to change; just to become better at what I am (Larkin 1983:77).

His remarks about Yeats illustrate his belief that poetic expression ought to be spontaneous in order to be effective:

Being full-time poet forces one too much to play the role of a poet. Even as great a poet as Yeats ran this risk ... there is quite a lot of his work where one feels he is deliberately hunting round for something to write a poem about (Timms 1973:3).

This accounts for Larkin writing poetry less frequently. The chronology of his works shows that he published his poetry almost sparsely over a period of time. He never wrote casually, as is obvious from his statements. He took his job
as a poet seriously and worked hard and honestly.

Larkin is not as narrow in range as some critics accuse him of. Despite his own comment that he would like to be better at what he was, he had a notion of variety instead of repetitiveness and monotony in art:

What I should like to do is to write different kinds of poems that might be by different people. The great thing is not to be different from other people, but to be different from yourself (Timms 1973:121).

He refused to follow drastic changes in life or in his art. This may be due to a skeptical attitude towards anything new. One of the reasons why Larkin refuses any kind of theorizing about the art of poetry may be because preoccupation with the theories, one’s own or others, inhibits writing in the best and most characteristic fashion. This wish for originality is obvious when he remarked:

It is fatal to decide intellectually, what good poetry is because you are then in honour bound to try to write it, instead of the poems that only you can write (Martin 1978:24).

Such statement seems ambivalent because it communicates more than one meaning. But what it implies is his uncertainty about the spontaneity and deliberateness in the act of writing. Good poems do not come simply by the desire to write a good poem. It has to come naturally.

In spite of all the ambivalence in his statements about poetry and apparent lack of any theoretical frame-work, the fact that Larkin looked at the act of creating poetry in a
positive way though the contents may seem, somewhat negative. Regarding this Larkin has remarked:

The impulse for producing a poem is never negative; the most negative poem in the world is a very positive thing to have done (Motion 1982:59).

Such optimism is very rare in Larkin, who is normally negative or skeptical about most of the aspects of human life. A further example of the way Larkin considered the art of poetry as of supreme concern for him is obvious when he remarked:

In a humanist society, art—and especially modern or current art—assumes great importance, and to lose touch with it is parallel to losing one's faith in a religious art (Larkin 1970:10).

Like Christianity art also offered to man individuality, personal worth, and preservation after death. What Larkin implies then is that true poetry has a direct relation with life which makes it an inevitable part of life, and not something separate from it. Poetry should look to life for its subject-matter. Larkin has reiterated that a poet should write about those things which actually move him deeply, if he does not feel deeply about anything he better not write: "One should write poetry only when one wants to and one has to. Writing is not an act of will" (Timms 1973:61). This does not mean sentimentality nor spontaneity, but only honesty and an empirical attitude.

Larkin's remark that "Form holds little interest for me. Content is everything" (Timms 1973:61) does not mean that Larkin totally dislikes form. Originality for Larkin
consists not in experimenting with the medium of communication but in communicating something different. Larkin is a traditionally careful craftsman rather than an experimentalist. Larkin's honesty to one's own experience does not lead him towards idiosyncrasy because of his strong urge to communicate with the audience: "If there is no successful reading, the poem can hardly be said to exist in a practical sense at all" (Larkin 1983:80). Successful reading is possible only when writing is not experimental but located in the authentic domain of felt experience.