CHAPTER - 3
LARKIN AND THE MOVEMENT: A GROUP IDENTITY

Chapter two assessed the early poetry of Larkin written under a bundle of influences, mainly that of the modernist poetry and some modernist poets like Yeats. A very important phase of Larkin’s literary career was his association with an informal group of contemporary writers known as the Movement. The Movement in general, seems to have played an important and significant role in leading English poetry from Modernism to Postmodernism. The present chapter attempts to study the origin and development of the Movement and its major features with Larkin as the central figure of the group; thus, the chapter will also consider Larkin as a Movement poet and his role as a Movement poet as significant with reference to the subject of the present research.

Group identity of literary artists is not a new phenomenon in the history of English literature. Writers of the 1950s are given a group identity – though for a short period of time - as the Movement writers. The University Wits in the 16th century, the Pre - Raphaelites in the 19th century etc. were also literary groups but there was something peculiar, new and unprecedented about the Movement. It connoted the socio - cultural as well as literary identity of the group. Socio - cultural group identity, not necessarily of literary artists, was soon to become a prominent feature of postmodern mass society with plurality of culture.
3.1 THE DEBATE OVER THE EXISTENCE OF THE GROUP:

The Movement, as such, was a ‘loosely connected group’ (King 3) with no official foundation. This group identity of the writers of the 1950s, i.e., Larkin and his contemporaries, has been widely debated. It has often been challenged not only by critics but also by writers themselves. Thus, the readers are left to wonder and decide whether the writers really constituted a group, whether there were common objectives and a common platform for the writers.

Some commentators have dismissed the Movement as a mere journalistic approbation. Anthony Thwaite calls the Movement ‘a complex phenomenon’ and raises a question – “Was it a true literary beginning in the 1950s or an invocation by journalists?” (Thwaite, Poetry 40) Howard Sergeant calls the Movement an ‘extremely well-mannered, not to say well-established, publicity campaign.’ (qtd. in Morrison 3) Christopher Logue also dismissed it as a conspiracy by which fame-seeking poets ‘presented themselves by means of a group name.’ (qtd. in Morrison 3)

The Movement poets themselves often tended to be apprehensive about the identity of their disposition as a group. They were probably not ready to reduce their individuality to a common identity. Thus, many of them rejected their group identity in favour of a recognition as individual literary artists. Larkin, for instance, found ‘no sense at all’ (In Hamilton, ‘Four Conversations’ 69) in belonging to a movement. In an essay written in 1950 Kingsley Amis referred to the Movement as the ‘phantom movement.’ (qtd. in Morrison 4) Playing ignorance about the existence of the Movement and his association with it Thom
Gunn said: “I found I was in before I knew it existed and I have a certain suspicion that it does not exist.” (Gunn 661) D.J. Enright, another eminent Movement poet, also shared the same view when he said: “I don’t think there was a movement back to those days, or, if there was, I don’t know about it.” (qtd. In Morrison 4)

In spite of the attempts to degrade the Movement and to challenge its existence, the present research, with the help of mainly Blake Morrison’s view, will show that the Movement identity of the poets is not as arbitrary as it is often thought to be. In his book *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s* Blake Morrison asserts not only that the Movement existed but that it was a literary group of considerable importance.

In spite of his reluctance to admit a ‘dilution’ (*CP* 117) of individual identity by being considered as one among the group, Larkin too, discernibly exhibits the group identity, though for a limited period of time. P.R. King admits the existence of the Movement but refuses to associate Larkin with it. To quote his own words:

> But it would be a mistake to see Larkin as one of those. Although he had sympathy with many of the attitudes to poetry represented by the Movement, his work is generally more robust and wider - ranging from most of the poetry of *New Lines*.

(King, P. 4)

Ian Hamilton admits the vastness of Larkin’s genius along with the Movement sensibility when he writes:

> At one level it could be said that Philip Larkin’s poems provide a precise model for what the Movement was supposed to be looking. But having noted his lucidity. . . and other such typical attributes, one would still be
left with the different and deeper task of describing the quality of his peculiar genius.

(qtd. in Thwaite, *Poetry* 40)

It is true that the Movement was only a temporary phase for the writers including Larkin. After 1956, though the writers continued to write, they could no longer be grouped as Movement writers. It is also true that Larkin’s talent cannot be restricted to a group identity only. He always had much more to say than the Movement in general yet Larkin’s association with the Movement cannot be denied. Some of his poems do represent the traits of the Movement. Some poems in *The North Ship* and many in *The Less Deceived* as well as *The Whitsun Weddings* can be read as typical Movement poems. For some time, at least, the group identity was Larkin’s own identity as well. To refer to the introduction published online by Academy of American Poets:

> With his second volume of poetry *The Less Deceived* (1955) Larkin became the preeminent poet of his generation and a leading voice of what came to be called the Movement…

(www.todayinliterature.com/biography/philip.larkin.asp-)

*Poetry of the 1950s* edited by D.J. Enright (1856) and *New Lines* edited by Robert Conquest (1960) gave a clear picture of the Movement and of the writers sharing the Movement sensibility. These writers were Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Donald Davie, D.J. Enright, Robert Conquest, Elizabeth Jennings, John Halloway and Thom Gunn.

**3.2 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT:**

The ground for the Movement was prepared in Oxford. The Movement took its first breath in Oxford and then in Cambridge in the 1940s when the young
writers came close to one another. They were not mature scholars with serious
concern about life. They were all undergraduate students studying at Oxford or
Cambridge. Their interaction with one another influenced their writing, at least, in
the beginning of their career as literary artists. A number of key friendships were
made among these undergraduate students. The friendship between Larkin and
Amis, bearing each other’s influence, was perhaps the most significant one. Both
shared a sense of humour. At one place Larkin recalls how Amis’ imitations
made him ‘incapable with laughter.’ In Larkin’s first novel Jill the protagonist Jill
meets Patsy who “could make Jill sick with laughing. She could imitate almost
anybody. Together they had formed an alliance against the rest of the
world.” (qtd. in Morrison 11) Larkin and Amis also shared an interest in Jazz. In
his introduction to Jill Larkin says: “I suppose we devoted to some hundred
records that early anatomizing passion, normally reserved for the more
established arts.” (qtd. in Morrison 11) (Larkin in a letter to O’Connor 2 April
1958) In Amis’s Lucky Jim, written and set in the early 1950s, Amis’ projection of
Jim is much influenced by his association with Larkin. There are:
comparisons to be drawn between Dixon’s attitudes, and those expressed
in the poetry of Philip Larkin. Larkin and Amis were friends at university,
and their voluminous correspondence reveals their shared love for Jazz
and beer, and their instinctive suspicion of ‘high culture’, as well as the
flashes of stylistic brilliance which would emerge more fully in their writing
(www.britishfiction.suite101.com/article.cfm/lucky_jim_by_Kingsley_amis-35k-)

Two other contemporaries, John Wain and Montgomery, also absorbed the
influences of Larkin and Amis and influenced them in their turn.
The Movement writers found a common platform to express themselves. *Mandrake*, an Oxford based magazine edited by Wain and Boyars, brought out poems by the Movement writers. The third issue of Mandrake published Larkin’s ‘Plymouth’. It looked forward to anti modernist poetry – one of the most significant bindings of the Movement writers. Towards the end of the poem the poet betrays the romantic influence of Dylan Thomas and of Yeats. He looks forward to poetry, free from modernist influences:

A box of teak, a box of sandalwood,  
A brass-tinged spyglass in a case,  
A coin, lead-thin with many polishings,  
Last kingdom of a gold forgotten face,  
These lie about the room and daily shine  
When new-built ships set out towards the sun.

If they had any roughness, any flow;  
An unfamiliar scent, all this has gone;  
They are no more than ornaments, or eyes,  
No longer knowing what they looked upon,  
Turned sightless rivers of Eden, rivers of blood  
Once blinded them, and were not understood.

The hands that chose them vast upon a stick,  
Let my hands find such symbols, that can be  
Unnoticed in the casual light of day,  
Lying in wait for half a century  
To split chance lives across, that had not dreamed  
Such coasts had echoed, or such sea birds screamed.

( *CP* 307)
The fourth issue of *Mandrake* announced the aim of the periodical ‘to oppose sham and cant…’ (Morrison 20) in poetry.

In 1949 Amis, along with James Machie edited *Oxford Poetry* which promoted the Movement poetry.

The Movement came into limelight through media as well. John Lehman edited a series of radio broadcasts under the title “New Soundings” on the BBC radio between March 1952 and 1953. Poems by several new writers like Davie, Gunn, Halloway, Jennings and Wain reached the masses through this programme. It was an unusual phenomenon. Never before, was media used in this manner. Newspapers and periodicals had promoted many writers in the past. It was for the first time that the radio media gave a platform to contemporary poetry. After Lehman’s “New Soundings”, the BBC Radio broadcasted a similar programme called “First Reading” prepared by a leading Movement writer, John Wain. The programme, as Morrison records: “has been seen as a crucial break through for the Movement writers.” (Morrison 42) Larkin also remarked that “…the Movement, if you want to call it that, really began when John Wain succeeded John Lehman on that BBC programme.” (qtd. in Morrison 42-43) John Wain also noted that “‘First Reading’ was a chance to move a few of the established reputations gently to one side and allow new people their turn….“ (qtd. in Morrison 43)

Anthony Hartley’s reviews of the Movement poetry also popularized the Movement among the reading public. Two of these reviews – “Critics Between the Lines” and “Poets of the Fifties” – are of prime importance.
With all this, by 1950 the Oxford friendships of the early 40s had flourished as mature Movement poetry denoting the socio-cultural and literary group identity of the writers.

In the postwar period, after England became a welfare state, the social revolution changed the image of a poet. The Movement writers constituted a distinct social image. To quote Halloway:

The poetry of the 1930s was upper class. The chief poets learnt at public schools. The recent social revolution, gentle though real, in England has changed this. The typical Movement writer’s childhood background appears to be lower middle class and suburban.

(Halloway 593)

On the basis of the social background and also the literary writings of the Movement writers, critics identified a new postwar type. Speakers of Larkin’s ‘Church Going’ and Amis’ Lucky Jim are such postwar types. In Lucky Jim Amis presents the protagonist Jim Dixon as an educated, working class, provincial hero. He is a lecturer in history but gets frustrated with the banality of his job. He thinks too much. He is impatient with other characters like Bertrand. He gets into a hopeless and unwanted relationship with his boss’ daughter. In Larkin’s ‘Church Going’ also the speaker is a thinking being who enters the church only after making sure that ‘nothing is going on.’ (CP 97) Martin Green defines this type as the “decent man – as opposed to the gentleman a grammar school teacher with leather-patched shoes.” (qtd. in Morrison 53) To put in the words of Blake Morrison:
By the middle of the 1950s the image of the typical Movement writer as a provincial, lower middle-class, scholarship-winning, Oxbridge educated university teacher was firmly established…

(Morrison 56)

The Movement writers tended to accept this image. Amis, Davie and Halloway shared a lower middle-class social background. Larkin and Wain had several things in common between them. Both came from industrial towns in the north and from well-placed middle-class families; both came to Oxford, not as scholarship-boys; both failed the army medical test so both were spared from giving services in the English army during the Second World War. Amis, Davie and Enright came from a non-confirmist background. Larkin, Davie, Enright, Wain, Halloway and Jennings studied in local grammar schools. Davie, Enright and Halloway went to the university after winning a scholarship.

Another common feature of the group was age. The writers belonged, more or less, to the same age group. The eldest of the group, Robert Conquest was born in 1917, the youngest, Thom Gunn, in 1929. Larkin, Amis and Davie were born in 1922. Thus, the Movement writers shared not only a social background but also similar experiences due to class and age group. These writers represented a spirit of change in the postwar British society. Commenting on the sociological importance of the Movement, Davie, in a letter to O'Connor, written on 31 December, 1957, remarked:

The Movement’s sociological importance is very great and it consists in this – that for the first time a challenge is thrown down, not by individuals like Lawrence, Arnold, Bennet, Dylan Thomas, but by a more or less coherent group, to the monopoly of British culture sustained for
generations by the London bourgeois. (qtd. in Morrison 58)

Thus, the Movement, as such, never had any official ground yet it was a well-formed group on socio-cultural as well as literary grounds.

3.3 CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOVEMENT LITERATURE:

The following are a few major characteristics of the Movement literature. Some of them appear to bear the mark of Postmodernism.

1. PROVINCIALISM:

In his book, *Rule and Energy*, John Press defines a provincial poet. According to him the term ‘provincial’ describes a poet as one:

... who is primarily concerned with the values of his own cultural society, and who is largely indifferent to what lies beyond the world that he knows first hand. Thus, he cares very little for the poetry and the civilization of the other ages and other countries....

(qtd. in Day, R. 85)

One of the main features of the Movement literature is its provincialism, Englishness. The postwar socio-cultural, political and economic climate in England fostered a prejudice for anything foreign. The Movement writers seemed to consider ‘foreign’ as ‘absurd’. When asked in an interview if he liked foreign poetry, Larkin strongly replied: ‘Foreign poetry? No.’ (In Hamilton, ‘Four Conversations’ 77) In his poem ‘Like the train’s beat’ (*CP* 286) Larkin focuses on the lack of appeal and meaninglessness of the Polish girl’s language to him.

The Movement was preoccupied with postwar, postindustrial England - its landscapes, government, society and culture. To quote Robert Conquest: “The
British culture is part of our experience and for that no one else’s experience, howsoever desirable, can be a substitute.” (Conquest 32)

England’s decline as a world power after the World Wars and the government’s encouragement for everything ‘at home’ gradually led to insularity. Writing for one of his novels Amis remarked: “In Like It Here people thought I was attacking Europe. But I was attacking people who like it.” (qtd. in Morrison 50)

Artistic as well as social prejudice of the Movement writers is noticeable in the following comment by Amis: “Nobody wants, anymore, poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries of mythology or foreign cities. “ (qtd. in Morrison 61) Thus, the Movement is essentially English in spirit as well as in subject and background. Many writers like Larkin and Wain came from provincial background and shared their experiences through their writings.

The Movement’s provincialism does not glamorize provinces. In fact, there is nothing fascinating about the provincial or the suburban towns. In ‘I Remember, I Remember’ of Larkin, for instance, the speaker has to travel by ‘a different line’ (CP 82) to pass through his home - town. He has to recollect that ‘I was born here’; (CP 82) his childhood, ‘a forgotten boredom’ (CP 33) was passed in that town. The speaker describes his dull and uneventful childhood spent, or, rather, ‘unspent’ (CP 81) in the provincial town, Coventry in the poem:

Our garden, first: where I did not invent
Blinding theologies of flowers and fruits,
And wasn’t spoken to by an old hat;
And here we have that splendid family

I never ran to when I got depressed,
The boys all biceps and the girls all chest,
Their comic ford, their farm where I could be
Really myself. I'll show you, come to that;
The bracken where I never trembling sat,

Determined to go through with it; where she
Lay back, and 'all became a burning mist'.
And in those offices my doggerel
Was not set up in blunt ten-point,
Nor read by a distinguished cousin of the mayor ,....

(CP 81-82)

Finally, the speaker concludes by noting the uneventfulness of the place.
‘Nothing, like something happens anywhere’, he says at the end of the poem.
Very often in the Movement texts the provinces are ugly and repulsive. In ‘An English Reverent” Davie writes:

You that went north for geysers or for grouse,
While Pullman sleepers lulled your sleeping head,
You never saw my mutilated house
Flame in the north by Sheffield as you fled.

(qtd. in Morrison 62)

Commenting on provincialism in Larkin’s poetry Robert Conquest writes:

This insularity is one of the strengths of Larkin’s poetry, signifying to resolve to base himself firmly upon the experience, the language, the culture which have formed him, in which he is rooted.

(Conquest 32)

Considering provincialism in Larkin’s poetry, it can safely be maintained that his poetry has traits of the Movement as well as of Postmodernism. In his book
Donald Davie shows an interest in Larkin as a representative figure in poswar English poetry. He recognized him as a poet of ‘wholly urbanized and industrialized society.’ (Davie 71) Larkin’s landscapes are essentially post-war postindustrial landscapes. Bruce Martin writes:

For one thing the Larkin world is a recognizably postwar British world. Larkin chooses to specify a demonstrably British and demonstratably contemporary background for his poems. His settings are usually those of large town or city, heavily trafficked streets, urban parks filled with mothers and playing children, the hospital in the midst of a business district making much of the British suburbia.

(Martin B 31-32)

Roger Day reiterates the same thing when he says:

Many of Larkin’s poems have an urban setting. Larkin writes about places and situations which are familiar to most people.... He writes of English towns, high-street stores and sights familiar to all.

(Day, R. 11)

Larkin is completely at home in urban setting. It has produced him and he celebrates it. Urbanization and industrial landscapes are found in Modernist poetry also. Eliot’s ‘The Preludes’, *The Waste Land*, for instance, describe urban landscapes and the industrial, the advanced world. What makes Larkin’s depiction different from that of his predecessors and much like his successors is that he does not sadly complain about or lament over the loss of the rural world of ‘unfenced existence’. (*CP* 137)

In one of Larkin’s major poems ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ the speaker, during his journey to London, records some pictures as the train passes by different sights:
We ran
Behind the backs of houses, crossed street
Of blinding wind screens ,…. 

(\textit{CP 114})

‘Blinding wind screens’ indicates the sound - proof, locked doors and windows of offices. The pictures in the poem describe the mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century England. The series of pictures continues:

\begin{quote}
A hothouse flashed uniquely; hedges dipped
And rose: and now and then a smell of grass
Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth.
\end{quote}

(\textit{CP 114})

There is a mixing, here, of the rural and the urban images. It seems that the rural world is struggling to preserve itself; the smell of grass struggles to ‘displace the reek of buttoned carriage - cloth’ but succeeds only ‘now and then’. The imagery refers to the fading out of the rural world. The tone of the poem, however, seems neutral, not condemnatory and only occasionally nostalgic.

At the very outset, the poem ‘Here’ makes it clear that the landscape belongs to the ‘rich industrial shadows’. (\textit{CP 136}) What the poet describes about the industrial world is a shadow, but a rich shadow. The man – made world has a mark of its own and the speaker doesn’t appear to be dissatisfied with this world.

‘Here’ describes an urban landscape. The urban town is sandwiched between two non - urban settings. The imagery seems to develop out of a more or less, unbiased and balanced mind.

An industrial town is described in the poem. The first stanza gives out its surprises:
... fields, ...
...skies and scarecrows',
haystacks hares and pheasants,
And the widening river's slow presence,
The piled gold clouds the shining gull-marked mud.

(CP 136)

These are the remains of the rural world which have become surprises in an industrial town. There are fields but ‘too thistled and thin to be called meadows’. There is a river but it has only a ‘slow presence’. There is mud but it is ‘gull-marked. The second stanza describes the actual town:

Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster
Beside grain scattered streets barge crowded - water....

(CP 136)

The ‘unfenced existence of the rural world towards which the speaker seems to be desiring to move is unattainable, ‘out of reach’. However, the speaker, rather than lamenting its unattainability, seems to accept and even, at times, celebrates the reality in ‘Here’.

Apart from landscapes Larkin describes the people living in provincial towns. Having described the urban landscape in the first and the second stanzas in ‘Here’, the speaker, then, describes the people living in the town and their life style. They are ‘residents from raw estates’. (CP 136) In this industrial town there doesn’t seem to be an isolated, individualistic existence. Such ‘unfenced existence / Facing the sun’ is ‘unattainable’, ‘out of reach’. (CP 137) The people are ‘a cut - price crowd’. The phrase implies the continuity of social classes. The crowd is dependent on technology - ‘Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers.’.
It is a world which hardly spares time for leisure, a world in which man must work monotonously – work like a ‘toad’ for ‘six days of the week…out of proportion’. (CP 89)

In ‘Aubade’ also the speaker who gets drunk at night works ‘all day’. (CP 208) Every morning:

…telephones crouch, getting ready to ring
In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring
Intricate rented world begins to rouse….
Work has to be done.

The postindustrial world of ‘Here’ can be, in a small way, described as, to use Frederic Jameson’s explanation of Postmodernism, late phase of capitalism. (The title of Jameson’s book – Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism) After the Second World War, England became a welfare state but the ‘cut-price crowd’ of the urban, industrial set-up is still confined to ‘raw estates’ and it pushes through ‘plate-glass wing doors’ to buy ‘Cheap suits, red kitchen ware, sharp shoes and lollies….’ (CP 136) However, as Jameson says, most of the times Postmodernism is innocent of any devious satirical impulse and is devoid of such historical memory as must generate bitterness. (Jameson 373-383) There is no cynicism or bitter satire in the poem against the bourgeois culture. The Victorian and even the modernist tendency of criticizing the bourgeois culture and generating a painful sympathy for the working class presented as down trodden, exploited, poor, and unprivileged is generally not to be found in Postmodernism. In ‘Here’ and even in ‘The Whitsun Weddings’, with
all awareness and understanding of class, there doesn’t seem to be the strong Marxist provocation with contraries like the exploiters and the exploited. Unlike characters in Dickens’ novels, presented as pathetic victims of industrialization, the people in the postindustrial, postwar world of Larkin (living in provincial towns) are busy as in Here’, happy even in ‘jewellery substitutes’ and ‘nylon gloves’ (CP 115) as in ‘The Whitsun Weddings’. They are common figures like:

The fathers with broad belts under their suits
And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;
An uncle shouting smut; ....

(CP 115)

who are overwhelmed by their success (which the speaker finds purely ‘farcical’) in getting their children married. Further, the speaker says that ‘The women shared the success like a happy funeral’. (CP 115) Here the use of the phrase ‘happy funeral’ balances the feelings of joy and sadness, achievement or success and loss.

Here, Larkin differs a bit from his Movement contemporaries in his attitude to bourgeois culture, especially in his poetry. Although, as Morrison points out, the Movement writers have ‘tried to discourage critics from thinking of their work as class - conscious and responsive to social change’, (Morrison 68/) the Movement texts often appear critical of the South, of the upper middle class. To quote Morrison: “The Movement is provincial not because it idealizes the North but because it resents the South, London especially” (Morrison 62)

It should, however, be noted that this feature seems more evident in novels than in poetry. In Amis’ first novel Lucky Jim the protagonist Dixon and
other students are prejudiced against the teacher’s son Bertrand because he has not only a French name but also a flat in London. London is responsible for his overdressing and for his suggestion that he has come home to find out whether “the touch of culture is still in a state of combustion in the provinces.” (qtd. in Morrison 63)

In spite of the criticism of the Movement writers of London and of the London types, ‘the protagonists of the Movement texts often tend to measure their success ‘in terms of gradation to the capital.’ (Morrison 64) Many Movement texts like ‘The Whitsun Weddings’, Lucky Jim, and Hurry On Down depict a movement towards and into London, not away from it. In ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ the speaker catches the train to London and gets off the train at the final destination with the newly wedded couples from the provinces. He celebrates the flourishing of the relationship of those newly wedded couples in London when he says:

I thought of London spread out in the sun,
Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat;

(CP 116)

Upward social mobility is a typical theme of the Movement texts. It often determines the narrative structure in the Movement novels. The plots of Larkin’s Jill, Amis’ Lucky Jim and Wain’s Hurry On Down are concerned with the struggle of a male protagonist to adjust to the values of another class. In each novel the protagonist gets exposed to the class, higher than his. There he meets an attractive woman, desires her but is initially prevented from having her. At a social gathering, he plainly declares his feelings in a state of drunkenness. The
action reaches a climax where the hero finally attains the woman as in *Lucky Jim* or withdraws, after a brief encounter, as in *Jill*. At the end, the successful protagonists get better jobs with good prospects and the unsuccessful ones revert to their original social status.

Larkin is little different here in the sense that there doesn’t seem to be a bitter resentment or prejudice towards the South in most part of his poetry. In the introduction to *Jill* he says:

> In 1940 our impulse was still to minimize social differences rather than to encourage them. My hero’s background, though an integral part of the story, was not what the story was all about.

(qtd. in Morrison 68)

Apart from a few exceptions like ‘Money’, in which the poet describes a provincial town seen through ‘long French windows’ (*CP* 198) and feels sad about what he sees, there seems to be, generally speaking, little bitterness, cynicism or negativism towards the South in his poetry.

2. **ANTI MODERNISM:**

As discussed in the first, introductory chapter of the present study, Postmodernism grows from Modernism - rejecting as well as continuing or improving upon it. In this sense the Movement writers’ rejection of Modernism can be analysed as a Postmodern feature too. All the Movement writers agreed on the rejection and condemnation of Modernism and of the modernist poetry of the 30s, and of the 40s in general and poetry of Eliot and Pound in particular. They considered poets of the 1930s as remote historical figures and of the 1940s, as those without a poetic taste.
The anthology of the Movement poetry *New Lines*, edited by Robert Conquest (1956), as Rosenthral says: ‘was offered to counter the poetics of modernism.’ (Rosenthral 1005)

At an initial stage of his career, Larkin, as discussed at length in the previous chapter, was influenced by modernist poets like Yeats, Auden and Dylan Thomas. But giving up the early influences he finally chose Hardy as his source of inspiration. Appreciating Hardy’s poetry in *The Listener*, Larkin wrote:

What I like about him is his temperament and the way he sees life. He is not a transcendental writer; he is not a Yeats, not an Eliot; his subjects are the men, the life of men, time and the passing of time, love and the failing of love.

(*The Listener* 11)

The Movement writers rejected the grand themes of modernist poetry. They were not concerned with remote life of trenches; nor were they preoccupied with meditating over the fate of civilization. They were concerned with day – to – day experiences like working in an office, journeying by a train, visiting college years after graduating and playing cards. There are very few works like ‘A Song about Major Eatherley’ directly concerned with war. Voicing the prejudice of the Movement writers against modernist poetry, in the preface to his contribution in *Poets of the 1950s*, Amis writes:

Nobody wants any more poems on the greater themes for a few years, but at the same time, nobody wants any more poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries or mythology or foreign cities or other poems. At least, I hope nobody wants them.

(qtd. in Hassan 157)
Commenting on the poetry of Larkin in this context Roger Day writes:

“Larkin writes about places and situations which are familiar to most people.”

(Day, R. 11)

Modern poetry, especially that of Eliot and Yeats, was full of allusions from classical culture, mythology, Bible etc. An Eliot poem cannot be understood without understanding these allusions. ‘Journey of the Magi’ for instance, is based on the Christian myth of the three wise men going to Bethlehem, guided by a star to see the Masiha –Christ. Many of Eliot's poems begin with epigrams. ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, for instance, begins with an epigram taken from Dante’s Inferno:

If I thought my answer were to one who never could return to the world, this flame would shake no more, but since none ever did return alive from this depth, if what I hear be true, without fear of infancy I answer thee.

(Trans. Jain 43-44)

Poems like The Waste Land, Ash Wednesday, ‘Byzantium’ are full of allusions which often make poems obscure. Revolting against modernist poetry Larkin remarked:

What I do feel a bit rebellious about is that poetry seems to have got into the hands of critical industry, which is concerned with culture in abstract and this I do rather lay at the door of Eliot and Pound...to me...the whole of classical mythology means very little, and I think that using them today not only fills poem full of dead spots but dodges the writer's duty to be original.

(RW)

Movement poetry is quite free from scholarly, metaphysical, Biblical or classical allusions. Occasional allusions are used in such a way that inferring, at
least, the literal meaning of a poem is not hindered even without understanding them. Understanding of such allusions only adds to the interpretation of a poem; at the same time, it is not obligatory for the readers to understand the allusions to enjoy a Movement poem. Larkin’s ‘MCMIXIV’ is a good example of the Movement poetry with allusions which, even though not understood, neither obstruct the meaning nor lessen the charm of the poem:

Those long uneven lines
Standing as patiently
As if they were stretched outside
The Oval or Villa Park,
The crowns of hats, the sun
On moustached archaic faces
Grinning as if it were all
An August Bank Holiday lark;

And the shut shops, the bleached
Established names on the sunblinds,
The farthings and sovereigns,
And dark-clothed children at play
Called after Kings and Queens
The tin advertisements
For cocoa and twist, and the pubs
Wide open all day;

And the countryside not caring;
The place names all hazed over
With flowering grasses, and fields
Shadowing Domesday lines
Under what’s restless silence;
The differently-dressed servants
With tiny rooms in huge houses;
The dust behind limousines;

Never such innocence, never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word – the men
Leaving the gardens tidy,
The thousands of marriages
Lasting a little while longer:
Never such innocence again

(CP 127-128)

The poem distinguishes between life in England before 1914 and after it. The year 1914 is seen as a turning point. The Movement poets considered the year 1914 as a striking point for modernist poetry. Thus, 1914 is a turning point in literary as well as social history of England. With this understanding, yearning for stability in the poem – ‘established names’, ‘tidy gardens’ – is more than nostalgia for a secure social order. It is nostalgia for ‘established’, ‘tidy’ forms of the pre-modernist English poetry as well. The long, unseen lines’ are not just those of enlisting soldiers; they are ‘long, unseen lines’ of Eliot’s and Pound’s poems. Readers familiar with the Movement background, its rejection of modernist poetry can follow the allusions. However, with no familiarity with the Movement background a common reader can still enjoy the poem.

3. ANTI ROMANTICISM:

The typical Movement poetry is anti-romantic. The poets consciously attacked Romanticism and the Romantics. Recalling his Oxford days Amis wrote:
“We paid special attention to the Romantics. Each was brought up and dismissed in two lines in “Revaluation”.(Amis 6)

As Blake Morrison points out, the term ‘Romantic’ was used very liberally by the Movement writers. To continue in his own words:

At times it was applied dismissively, to some postures and attitudes – among them, idealism, rebelliousness, nature – worship and mysticism – which the group detected in life as well as in literature. At other times, the term was used in a literary – historical sense, having reference to the Romantic period of the latter eighteenth century and after.

(Morrison 154)

In their too conscious efforts to reject Romanticism and romantic poetry, Larkin and Amis frequently show influence of the Romantics in their early poems in *The North Ship and Bright November*, though it may be there to reject it. Both, for instance, tend to address and personify heart like romantics but unlike romantic poetry, in their poems heart is ‘loveless’, ‘cold’:

To wake and hear a cock
Out of the distance crying
To pull the curtain back
And see the birds flying-
How strange it is
For the heart to be loveless and as cold as these.

(The N.S 15)

The heart in its own endless silence kneeling….

(The N.S 21)

If hands could free you heart,
Where would you fly?

(The N.S 36)
Heart’s injury will not forget us so
Heart’s wealth slide off to zero-

(qtd. in Morrison 29)

The personifying of heart can be related to Yeats.

Poem XVI in *The North Ship* reminds us of the soundless river ‘Which ran
/ Through caverns measureless of man’ in Coleridge’s *Kublakhan*:

And I am sick for want of sleep;
So sick that I can half – believe
The soundless river passing from the cave
Is neither strong nor deep;

(The N.S 18)

There is, again, a clear rejection of romanticism in the following poem in *The North Ship*:

The moon is calm tonight
And burns the eyes.
It is so definite and bright,
What if it has drawn up
All quietness and certitude of worth
Wherewith to fill its cup,
Or mint a second moon a paradise? –
For they are gone from earth.

(The N.S 14.)

In poem XVII the poet says:

There have been too much moonlight and self-pity,
Let us have done with it.

(The N.S. 29)
The affinity with the Romantics, even though to reject them, found in the early poetry of Larkin and Amis, is no longer strongly evident in their mature verse. As against Wordsworth’s romanticizing of childhood, (‘The child is the father of the man’) Larkin recalls his childhood as a ‘forgotten boredom’. (CP 33) Larkin once said somewhere that deprivation was to him as daffodils were to Wordsworth. In ‘I Remember, I Remember’ the speaker recalls his uneventful life spent in his native town and says: ‘Nothing like something happens anywhere.’ (CP 82)

Another poem ‘Going’ describes an evening:

There is an evening coming in  
Across the fields; one never seen before,  
That lights no lamps.

Silken it seems at a distance, yet  
When it is drawn up over the knees and breast  
It brings no comfort.

Where has the tree gone, that locked  
Earth to the sky? What is under my hands,  
That it cannot feel?

What leads my hands down?  

(CP 3)

It seems the evening ‘never seen before’ is the expression of a romantic poet who is now about to describe the beauty of that evening, the beauty of nature. But very soon the self – deprived poet’s anti – romantic stand is revealed when the rare evening is further described as one that ‘lights no lamps.’ (CP 4) The darkness seems ‘silken’ only ‘at a distance’; the evening, as it approaches, brings
no comfort’. The poem ‘Absences’ (CP 49) also describes nature anti-romantically:

Rain patters on a sea that tilts and sighs,
Fast-running floors, collapsing into hollows,
Tower suddenly, spray-haired. Contrariwise,
A wave drops like a wall, another follows,
Wilting and scrambling, timelessly at play
Where there are no ships and no shadows.

Above the sea, the yet more shoreless day,
Riddled by wind, trails lit-up galleries;
They shift to giant ribbing, silt away;

Such attics cleared of me! Such absences!

(CP 49)

Like a Shelley poem, the poem does bring out the force and power of nature. The first six lines of the poem describe the sea, full of tide, receiving the rainfall. The next three lines mention the human world with the phrase, ‘lit-up galleries’ as against nature. It is the last line that strikes the climax where the poet sadly brings out the nothingness of man against nature. The title ‘Absences’ is well justified in the last line which also takes away romantic implications of the description.

Larkin takes a realistic stand. He claims and is often claimed by the critics to be a realistic writer:

A major poet of the post–World War II period, Larkin attempted to capture ordinary experience in realistic and rational terms. Larkin’s poetry,
both, avoids romanticizing experience and moves away from the abstract, experimental language of Eliot and the modernists.

(www.Enotes.com/poetry_criticism/larkin_philip_arthur)

Many Movement poets were cynical of nature poetry. Amis’ ‘Here is Where’ begins with a parody of how a nature poem begins:

Here, where the rugged water
Is twilled and spun over
Pebbles backed like beetles….

(qtd. in Morrison 166)

Soon the poet says that such descriptions, now – a - days are there only to rouse sentimentalities of people living in towns:

The country, to townies
Is hardly more than nice,
A window –box, pretty
Only when the afternoon is empty.

(qtd. in Morrison 166)

Amis’ ‘Here is Where’, Davie’s ‘Oak Openings’, Enright’s ‘Nature poetry’ and ‘Changing the Subject’, Conquest’s ‘Antheor – all these poems ‘bring out the difficulty of writing a nature poem.’ (Morrison 67) It must, however, be noted that in the earliest phase of his career, Larkin wrote wonderful nature poems on seasons, day and night etc. In the most mature phase of his career he again seems to have returned to nature. There are poems in High Windows related to nature. (eg. ‘To the Sea’, ‘Livings’, ‘Show Saturday’) These phases, especially, the last one, do not show the features of the Movement.
4. A SENSE OF AUDIENCE:

The Movement poets had a sense of audience in the process of writing. There is a concern among the poets to be agreeable to their readers. Larkin once said: ‘I write to preserve things I have seen, thought, felt both, for myself and for others.’ (RW 77)

Amis also claimed that before composing a poem “I ask myself, is this idea likely to interest anyone besides me? And try no longer about it if the answer seems to be NO.” (qtd. in Morrison 108) This desire to be agreeable made the poets create an image of themselves as ‘modest, friendly, well – mannered and, above all, fair - minded.’ (Morrison 108) For this image the poets often used expressions which Davie calls ‘social adaptiveness’. (qtd. in Morrison 139) These are expressions like ‘I suppose’, ‘I’m afraid’, ‘surely’, ‘it seems’ and ‘well’. The following are some illustrations of such expressions in Movement poetry:

Only I’ve a better hand
In knowing what I can stand
Without them sending a van –
Or I suppose I can.

(CP 117)

One question, though it’s right, to ask
Or, at least, not witfully.

(qtd. in Morrison 99)

Along with modesty, some of these expressions suggest uncertainty, non-commitment which seems to be a feature of postmodern literature. These hesitations and self – justifying expressions also reflect the poet’s conflict to convince himself and others that he is right and, thereby, to find a solution to the
uncertainty. To put in the words of Morrison: these expressions reflect “the poet’s struggle to find a way out of uncertainty and to persuade himself that something is the case.” (Morrison 106) In ‘Reasons for Attendance’, for instance, the speaker tries to convince himself regarding his choice not to join the world inside the hall. Expressions like ‘surely’, ‘so far as I’m concerned’, and ‘if you like’ in the poem record the process by which the poet tries to convince himself.

The Movement poets probably had two types of readership in their mind. – 1. the general mass and 2. the intellectual elites. Along with the impulse to reach out to the general mass by dealing with day – to - day experiences of life, often in conversational language with little use of obscure allusions, Movement poetry is also marked by intellectual wit, making the Movement ‘academic’. (Morrison 118) The comic title ‘Toads’ used to describe the boredom, monotony and drudgery of the routine office work is witty. When asked in an interview how he thought of the ‘toad’ image, Larkin answered: ‘Sheer genius, you know.’ (In Hamilton, ‘Four Conversations’ 75)

The frequent use of ‘we’ implies a sense of belonging to the small group of intellectual audience. In ‘Whatever Happened’ the speaker says:

At once whatever happened starts receding.

Panting, and back on board, we line the rail
With trousers ripped, light wallets, and lips bleeding . . . .

(Ch 74)

Generally speaking, this is how the intellectuals like the speaker tend to reconcile with whatever happens. In ‘Poetry of Departures’ the speaker says:

We all hate home
And having to be there:

Here also, the speaker seems to identify himself with a small group.

In ‘The Old Fools’, after reflecting on the pathetic condition of the old fools, naturally seeing no solution of their condition, at the end of the poem the speaker uses the pronoun ‘we’, perhaps to confirm with the intellectual group his conclusion to the rhetorical questions:

Can they never tell
What is dragging them back, and how it will end?
Not at night?
...
Well,

We shall find out.

Here, with a distinct difference between ‘they’ and ‘we’, the speaker joins, neither the mass nor the ‘old fools’ but the smaller group of intellectuals who too, like him, would hopelessly end the matter with such a vague answer.

3.4 DISPERSAL OF THE GROUP:

After the publication of New Lines in 1954 the group affinity began to dissolve. New Lines was the climax. Then after, the lines diverged. The socio-political climate, the personal circumstances of the writers, the literary environment – all these together caused a dispersal of the group. The Movement was never an official group so the exact date of its dispersal as well as inception cannot be found. A turning point for the Movement came in 1956. Friendships and collaborations continued, but after 1956 it was no longer possible to think of
the Movement writers as being united in a common cause. In 1957 John Wain wrote: “The revolt is now over. Its work is done.” (Wain, ‘English poetry” 339)

The Movement was directly connected with the universities. It originated and flourished on the university campus. After 1956 not all the Movement poets were associated with universities. John Wain and Amis gave up teaching. Larkin and Jennings served as librarians so they too, could not be called academic.

The Movement ceased to be provincial. Apart from Larkin who maintained the image of a provincial recluse, other Movement writers migrated either abroad or to metropolis other than London.

The literary scene in England also changed. Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath struck a different note in poetry. The publication of Hughes’ first volume of poems The Hawk in the Rain in 1957 was a remarkable shift from the Movement. The poems in The Hawk in the Rain are marked by ruggedness and are full of romantic energy which the Movement rejected. Against New Lines A Alvarez published an anthology called The New Poetry which had several poems by Ted Hughes. In the introduction to this anthology Alvarez indirectly attacked the polite urbanity of the Movement poetry. He argued that in the postwar England lives were:

Influenced profoundly by forces which have nothing to do with gentility, decency or politeness...They are forces of disintegration which destroy old standards of civilization. The public faces are those of two world wars and the threat of nuclear war.

(Alvarez 26)
Thus, after 1956 it was difficult to associate even the Movement writers with the Movement. The writers who initially, at universities as undergraduates shared views, then after seemed to differ from one another in their attitude to poetry (to literature). Davie, for instance, insisted on taking poetry seriously as a profession. Larkin, on the other hand, rejected Davie’s stand; for him it was a hobby. He argued that poetry should be a spare time activity; he has to manage poetry writing along with other spare time activities like social life, reading, letter writing and mending socks.

The Movement gradually lost its recognition. Its associates won fame as individual literary artists. However, the fact remains that the Movement played a very important role in the making of these writers. It is a significant phase in the history of English poetry as well.

The Movement poetry, with Larkin within it, is relevant to the present study in that its departure from modernist themes and techniques is perhaps the starting point of a shift towards Postmodernism. It was an indication that the transition had begun.