

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

In this work I have tried to chart Larkin's poetic journey from the pleasure principle to beyond through several detours. This I have tried to establish by a close reading of many of his poems and by exploring the socio-psychological basis from which his poetry springs. This study is made from a specific angle. It is made in the light of Freud's theory of "beyond the pleasure principle" as a tool for literary criticism. The approach is not explicitly psychological; it has taken into account the structural and functional explanations as well. Since Freud's theory of metapsychology is not stated in specific terms, I have not undertaken any rigid psychoanalytical approach.

To understand Larkin's poetic journey beyond the pleasure principle one has to take into account the literary background of the twentieth century poetry right from the First World War till the emergence of "The Movement" in the 1950's with which Larkin's name is associated.

In fact, every decade since the First World War has produced a different kind of poetry from the one of the preceding or succeeding decade. Thus one can see three distinct modes in English poetry since the First World War. They are: the Modernist poetry of the 1920's; the poetry of the Auden

generation of the 1930's; and the poetry of the World War II known as the "Apocalyptic" or the "neo-Romantic." Since all these three types of poetry failed to cope with the new situation caused by the war the need for a different kind of poetry was urgently felt. Thus "The Movement" poetry came into being as an outcome of several interrelated socio-psychological factors. The poets of the Movement reacted against excessive romanticism of the earlier poetry and turned to every-day reality for the poetic material, reality which was both pleasant and harsh. Larkin's perception of the world is derived from his association with the Movement poets.

The poets of the Movement rejected the politically-oriented poetry of the 1930's and the aesthetic and allusive poetry of the Modernists. Their main concern was formal strength and elegance, unwillingness to indulge in large themes and abstract language. They returned to a poetic diction that had an apparent relationship with spoken language. They were tired of personal philosophies and devised no world schemes. These tenets are expressed by Larkin when he presented his own poetic credo in the following words:

As a guiding principle I believe that every poem must be its own sole freshly-created universe and therefore have no belief in 'tradition' or common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets.

(Quoted in Enright 78)

Larkin's poetic sensibility was shaped by many literary influences. At the beginning of his career he was influenced by Auden who seemed the only "alternative to old-fashioned poetry" and by Yeats for his love of music. He was also influenced by Betjamen for his depiction of the life and emotions of the English people. He soon got over the influence of Yeats and accepted Hardy as his model. This shift marks the commencement of his journey beyond the pleasure principle.

In his earliest writings Larkin, in fact, began as a poet of the pleasure principle. Though this span of his career was too short, a good number of his poems written between 1938 and 1946, and even shortly after indicate that the young poet was indeed a pleasure seeker. He derived pleasure from the formal perfection of a poem even when he was dealing with grim natural scenes. He also got pleasure from his treatment of love which was a major theme of his early poetry. Yet it must be noted that into many of his early poems the unpleasant stuff of contemporary world tends to intrude. This intrusion, in fact, paves the way for him to move beyond the pleasure principle in later poems.

The most dominant theme of Larkin's poetry is suffering, with a few exceptions where a balance has been maintained. Most of his major poems are coloured by his temperamental gloom or sadness. Either he seems to mourn the painful plight of man in contemporary world or the loss of old values. This is not unexpected in a poet who grew up in the midst of socio-psychological miseries and hard conditions which his nation was

passing through after the Second World War. For one who wanted to be a "less deceived" poet pleasure derived from the world of fantasy and dreams is a kind of self-deception. Love and sexual gratification, which Larkin considered in his early poems as sources of pleasure, are treated in the poems of maturity as deceptive. Similarly, the pleasure derived from the beauty of nature in earlier poems no longer sustains him. Moreover, form which was the focal point in the early poems, is subdued and subordinated to content in his later poetry.

The theme of the flux of time occupies a significant space in his poetry. Time and death represent the ultimate reality of man from which no one can escape. In his treatment of time and death Larkin is quite different from that of any earlier poet. He does not entertain any kind of illusion about them. To him concepts like immortality and soul are mere abstractions, divorced from reality. He sees that everything in the world changes, decays and perishes in the great flow of time.

He considers that life from the beginning is a "slow dying," a journey "down cemetery road." He remarks very clearly about his preoccupation with death:

It's very difficult to write about being happy. Very easy to write about being miserable. And I think writing about unhappiness is probably the source of my popularity, if I have any--after all most people are unhappy, don't you think.

(RW 47)

But Larkin is not desperate in the face of death. He is trying to advise his readers to face the fact of the flux of time and death and not to harbor any illusion about them. It must be pointed out also that his poetry is not as intensely dark as Hardy's. Even among the poems written in his last phase are poems in which the characters are trying to strike a balance between gloom and joy. One can cite such poems as "Mr. Bleany" and "Aubade" as excellent examples of his mixed response to life.

Larkin is remembered most for his emphasis on work. To him work is not merely a means to avoid monotony and to shun the fear of death, but is a source of pleasure when it is done faithfully and willingly. Though Larkin does not have faith in the traditional concept of God and religions, he does not deny the importance of faith and the church in the life of people; For him the church does a social function. It is a place where people from all walks of life meet and establish a community of interests.

Eventually it could be said that Larkin's depiction of the darker side of life is an attempt to prepare the human psyche for facing reality. Thus his poems of "beyond the pleasure principle" can be regarded as a kind of defence mechanism against mental breakdown. According to Terry Whalen, "In Larkin's poetry the sharp recognition of failure and death is not a signal of despair, even if the poet quite often comes close to such a form of fatigue" (28). Whalen's statement neatly summarises Larkin's ambivalent modes of discourse which recognize the mutual complementarity of opposing tendencies.

#### WORKS CITED

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