CHAPTER I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Philip Larkin is one of the major English poets in the post Second World War period who is deeply concerned with the condition of man and his psyche. Of all the poets of the Movement he seems to be the most persistent in his approach to the psychological problems of man. His poetry seems to be particularly written for the English man of the 1950s. Although some of his early poetry revolve around the "Pleasure Principle," his poetry written after the war seems to transcend this principle. Yet Larkin regards the giving of immediate pleasure as the raison d'etre of poetry and feels that the Modernist trend towards complexity takes away pleasure from poetry. "But at the bottom," he says, "poetry, like all arts, is inextricably bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet loses his pleasure seeking audience he has lost the only audience worth having, for which the dutiful mob that signs on every September is no substitute" (Required Writing, hereafter abbreviated as RW, 81-82). However, when one turns to his mature poetry, one repeatedly meets with unpleasant themes of death, gloom, anxiety and loneliness. And yet, despite such themes his poetry is deeply appreciated by most of his readers. In 1965 Christopher Ricks, while reviewing his poetry in the New York Review of Books (28 January), called him the best poet England had at that time. In 1975 Alan Brownjohn

wrote:. "Larkin has produced the most technically brilliant and resonantly beautiful, profoundly disturbing yet appealing and approachable, body of verse of any English poet in the last twenty-five years" (4).

These encomiums can only mean that Larkin's poetry of unpleasure satisfies some deeper needs of human psyche and provides a different kind of satisfaction which perhaps the poetry of "pleasure principle" cannot provide. Indeed when one takes into account the whole body of his verse, one finds him travelling from the "pleasure principle" to the "reality principle" in terms of Freud's theory of metapsychology. Freud himself traversed the same path and also suggested that the whole society, as a result of certain traumatic experiences, may follow the same course.

It may seem interesting therefore to study Larkin's poetry in terms of its emphasis beyond the "pleasure principle" and to discover the deeper instinctual urges whose discharge constitutes the psychological meaning of his verbal artifacts. The discussion is bound to be on a general plane, because Freud himself repeatedly insisted that his metapsychological ideas were tentative and speculative and no rigorous technical analysis was involved in them. But before we analyse Larkin's poetry, we shall do well to examine the social and literary background for his poetry as well as some important factors and events in the poet's personal life (because no psychological approach can ignore these) which are relevant to his poetic development.

By closely examining the history of English poetry one can say that the twentieth century poetry did not begin in 1901, but during and soon after the First World War, when the spirit of modernity began to reflect in literature. The old values of aristocracy and the cultivated middle-class were looked upon by people as not only outmoded but rather dead. Therefore, a new kind of literature which could represent and cope with the new situation after the First World War was needed. Thus the Modernist poetry came into being. So one can argue that the social, intellectual and psychological conditions after the First World War helped shape the complex modern sensibility which the poets had to articulate in appropriate styles and technical devices.

The main exponents of Modernism were Ezra Pound, T.S.Eliot, W.B. Yeats and James Joyce. They showed distrust for the tradition of English poetry and therefore went back to the classics and the French Symbolists for poetic inspiration. Their writings were full of allusions and symbols which require a special kind of training on the part of readers for comprehension.

The 1930s was a decade of severe depression in Britain. Unemployment became rampant and poverty widespread. Oppression and social injustice were the symptoms of the age. Therefore the hedonistic theory of literature which advocates "art for art's sake" was inadequate to cope with the new social and psychological situation. Thus under psychological and social pressures Modernism started to fade out and a new phase in poetry

began to appear. This new phase is represented by poets like W.H.Auden, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice who started to write under the inspiration of Marxism which seemed to have provided solution to the social evil of the time. Thus the theory of "art for art's sake" which was associated with the Modernists was rejected in favour of a kind of literature which could be used as a tool for social change.

Auden and his group, called the "New Country Poets", were also influenced by the works of Freud and his theories of the subconscious. In fact, they tried to achieve a synthesis between Freudianism and Marxism. But later on each member of this group took his own course after being disillusioned with communism, a course which is similar to the one taken by Wordsworth in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Auden himself left for America in early 1939 after his disenchantment with Marxism and acceptance of Christianity.

In the late 1930s and early 40s, on the eve of and during the Second World War, a group of poets called the "Apocalyptics" or the "neo-Romantics," emerged under the leadership of Dylan Thomas and George Barker. They produced a kind of poetry which was subjective, imitative, and full of self-deception and self-pity. They reacted against Auden's intellectualism and were also at odds with Pound and Eliot. They looked to D.H.Lawrence as a source for their poetic inspiration. John Williams says that "Lawrence's theories of poetic creation were easily interpreted in Apocalyptic terms, and the self-absorption manifest in his

posthumous novel Apocalypse gave the group an apt title for the late 30s, and a dramatic quotation to follow the title-page of The White Horseman" (61). Yet they were by no means wholly representative of the poetry during the Second World War. There was during the War a mood of disenchantment among people who wanted a different kind of poetry which could cope with the new situation caused by the war.

The Second World War had a more catastrophic impact on Britain than the First World War had. The conflict in this war did not confine itself to the military forces only, but spread over the civilian population as well. It was not only the armed forces which bore heavily the brunt of the war but the cities like London and Coventry (Larkin's birth place) became the major battlefield. And the war horror was increased by the invention of a new destructive weapon as the German robot bomb. This invention in turn increased the number of people suffering from the trauma of war.

The Second World War forms a boundary between the old order and contemporary history. It can be regarded as a turning point in the history of Europe in general and of Britain in particular. Soon after the war was over the British Empire began to collapse and most of its colonies got their independence. Though the war had put an end to the danger of Nazism and Fascism, the victory scored against the Germans by Britain seemed to be hollow. Since the war had led to a rapid exhaustion of national energy and resources, Britain's position as a leading nation in the world seemed to have come to an end. The position of supremacy in the

fields of industry and trade which Britain had enjoyed before was now taken over by the USA and afterwards by Japan and England was relegated to the background. So besides the war trauma which people suffered from, the shock arising out of the collapse of the Empire added to their agony and frustration. Therefore, after the war was over the prevailing mood of exhaustion and anguish over the collapse of hegemony produced in England a climate for profound pessimism. The actual event and the psychological response to that event did not correspond to each other.

The reality after the Second World War, which the literature was called upon to represent, was thus dark and gloomy. The kind of poetry produced before and during the war was not only inadequate to cope with the complex realities of life caused by the war but was rather far-fetched from reality. So a new kind of poetry and a new style of articulation was evidently the need of the hour. Ted Hughes remarks that the poetry produced before the war was unable to deal with the psychological problems of the post-Second World War period :

> Poetry which "had enough... enough rhetoric, enough overweening push of any kind, enough of dark gods, enough of the id, enough of the Angelic powers and the heroic efforts to make new worlds". (Quoted in Perkins 418)

Kingsley Amis, another prominent writer of poetry and novelist in the post-war era writes in a similar vein. He says that "nobody

wants any more poems on the grander themes for a few years, but at the same time nobody wants more poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries or mythology or foreign cities or other poems" (Quoted in Motion 31).

This new trend in poetry produced after the Second World War has become known as "the Movement." It owes its rise to the failure of "the Modernists" and "the Apocalyptics" to represent reality in a simple and colloquial manner, which the readers who were disillusioned by the romantic trends of the pre-war period thought that poetry should try to utilize. So one can say that the war cleared the ground for new initiatives and direction for English poetry.

Thus it can be said that "the Movement" poetry emerged out of the blending of psychological and sociological factors; in other words, it resulted from the psychological crisis in the aftermath of the Second World War. In his book The Movement Mohan Ramanan attributes the emergence of "the Movement" to the spirit of the age. He says:

> The Zeitgeist certainly helped to form the Movement, just as it helped to give the 20s its "high Modernist" character, the 30s its urgency in terms of a political poetry presided over by an "enfant terrible" Auden, the 40s its Celtic Apocalyptic tone dominated by the Dylan Thomas brand of poetry. (161)

The emergence of "the Movement" was not thus a deliberate programme. It was unlike Romanticism and Modernism, movements which were well prepared for in advance. "The Movement" poetry at the very beginning of the 1950s was something amorphous. Its emergence was gradual; many of its literary manifestations indicated the gradual shift in the nature and function of poetry. In his A Map of Modern English Verse John Press mentions some of the events which paved the way for the emergence of the Movement:

> Oscar Mellor's Fantasy Press books and pamphlets, John Wain series of readings on the Third Programme, a few volumes printed by the Reading School of Art, and the anthology Springtime, edited by G.S.Fraser and Iain Fletcher (1953), were among the early manifestations of this new spirit. Then came the launching of a periodical called Listen. . . and various articles appeared in The Spectator and The Times Literary Supplement, suggesting that a new literary movement was under way. (251)

Anthony Hartley is the first who perceived the existence of this new group of young writers when he remarked in the Spectator that "for better or worse, we are in the presence of the only considerable movement in English poetry since Thirties" (260). Six weeks later an anonymous article (later on attributed to J.D.Scott, the literary editor of The Spectator) entitled "In The Movement" appeared in the same magazine on October 1, 1954,

declaring the emergence of a group of writers who were set to move in new directions hostile to the old established order. The editor wrote:

> It is bored by the despair of the Forties, not much interested in suffering, and extremely impatient of poetic sensibility, about `the writer and society'. So it is goodbye to all those rather sad little discussions about `how the writer ought to live,' and it's goodbye to the Little Magazine and `Experimental Writing'. The Movement as well as being anti-phoney, is anti wet; sceptical robust, ironic, prepared to be as comfortable as possible in a wicked commercial, threatened world which doesn't look, anyway, as if its going to be changed much by a couple of handfuls of young English writers. (400)

The phrase "the Movement" coined by Scott earned later critical acceptability.

The works of "the Movement" poets were initially published in The Spectator and other pamphlets. But the first presentation of the Movement poets as a group was made by D.J.Enright in his anthology The Poets of 1950s which was published in 1955. It contained works by Kingsley Amis, Donald Davie, Elizabeth Jennings, John Wain, John Holloway, Robert Conquest, D.J.Enright

himself and Philip Larkin. The following year (1956) Robert Conquest edited an anthology entitled New Lines in which the same poets of Enright's anthology and in addition Thom Gunn appeared.

The poets who appeared in these two anthologies shared a common cultural and social background. They studied English and graduated either from Oxford or Cambridge. They were working either as librarians or university lecturers except Conquest who worked as a member of the Foreign Office, Dublin. All of them came from the lower middle class thus representing a distinct departure from the social background of the earlier generations of English writers who were drawn mostly from the upper middle class. They also shared similar attitudes to religion in their scepticism. This cohesion in attitudes, as noted by Blake Morrison, "forms the nucleus of this intelligentsia and though they were not or always conscious of the fact, the poetry which they wrote was deeply influenced by a sense of belonging to it" (116). However, it is not merely the similarities of their social and cultural background which united them, but, as we have mentioned earlier, their poetry was the product of the socio-psychological conditions after the Second World War. David Lodge wrote: "Their originality was largely a matter of tone and attitude and subject matter, reflecting changes in English culture and society brought about by the convulsion of World War II" (213). That is why, even the poets appearing in the 1957 anthology Mavericks edited by Danie Abse and Howard Sargeant as a reaction against the Movement reflected similar tendencies as those expressed by the poets of the Movement, suggesting thereby

that both groups were the products of the same milieu.

Critics commonly agree that the Movement poets are united, as Robert Conquest puts it in the introduction to his anthology, by "a negative determination to avoid bad principles" (XI). Twenty seven years later, in Larkin at Sixty edited by Anthony Thwaite, Conquest modified his earlier approach. "To be fair to myself," he said, "I did say in that introduction that all we had in common was no more than a wish to avoid certain bad principles. As Thom Gunn put it later, "all we shared was what had been the practice of all English poets from Chaucer to Hardy" (33). In fact what linked them was not something negative but positive; it was the triumph of the reality principle over the pleasure principle that they emphasized. They were also united by their grounding in the native tradition which is a sort of a commonsense return to a more traditional form of writing. They rejected the various experimental techniques practiced by Pound, Eliot, Sitwell, and Joyce, the leaders of "the Poetic Revolution." As "poets of reality," they took an anti-modernist and anti-experimental stance in their quest for clarity. They attempted clear communication by avoiding unnecessary confusion and ambiguity. Thus they were unwilling to use allusions and gestures in their writings; they returned to a poetic diction which was closely related to the spoken language.

The Movement poets were also hostile to the norms of the poetry of the 1940s which was called neo-Romantic. The broad definition of the Movement is to call it exactly "what Dylan

Thomas is not" (Kuby 28), for Thomas was the frequent target of the Movement poets. Thomas's works were believed to be wilfully obscure, overladen with symbolism and too reliant upon alliteration and assonance, whereas the Movement poetry was never visionary, emotional or wordy but contained that strain of British poetry which emphasized thoughtfulness, plain language, moral consciousness and reason (Jennings 10).

Contrary to the "New Country Poets" (Auden and his group), the Movement poets tried to avoid direct treatment of political issues. John Press notes in his article "English Verse since 1945" the deliberate avoidance of topicality in the Movement writers:

> One of the most marked features of the verse written during this period is the way in which it has refrained from direct comment upon political and social conditions either in England or the world beyond. There has been no equivalent of Poems for Spain, an anthology compiled as tribute to the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War, nor there has been literary magazine or an anthology of verse infused with the Political Partisanship. (144)

The Movement poets remained politically indifferent since the climate which caused the indignation of Auden and his group had considerably changed by then. Masses of men out of work, hunger

marches and the like ceased to be prominent features of social life any more. Amis says that "when we do shop around for an outlet we find there is nothing in the stock, no Spain, no Fascism, no mass unemployment" (7). So it is clear that the Movement poets had no political axe to grind like the Auden-generation had . They were disillusioned by both the Left and the Right alike.

To sum up, the Movement poetry is characterized by its psychological response to reality. The poets of this group expressed their dissatisfaction with the pleasure principle and groped towards an understanding of the reality principle. They revived "neo-classicism" which is related to the Reality Principle. Yeats, Eliot, Auden and Dylan Thomas followed the pleasure principle in theme, tone and style. Yeats sought salvation by turning his soul into the eternal beauty of an object of art; Eliot and Auden finally found consolation in Christian mysticism; Thomas, relying on a single cosmic force, sought to unite life and death. By employing such devices as symbolism, displacement, condensation and ambiguity, they created a language of dreams, a language which is a means for a wish fulfilment.

Although Larkin himself denies his allegiance to the Movement, his poetry suggests a close affinity to it. His affiliation with the Movement poetry is based on his sharing certain common characteristics with it. All the members in the Movement share certain stylistic similarity. They prefer plain and colloquial language. They rejected the neo-Romantics. They

wanted to follow the conventional norms of versification.

Even though he shares certain basic characteristics with these poets, Larkin differs from them all. Amis can match with his humour but cannot rub his shoulder with him in exposing human weaknesses of dreaming. Similarly, Donald Davie's poems may match with his poetry in poetic diction but Larkin's range of tone and feeling, wit as well as sympathy far surpasses Davie's. Larkin also deplores Modernism whether in 'Jazz' or in painting, yet unlike Donald Davie, his poetry did not change radically.

Of all the Movement poets, Larkin alone undauntedly steers his course beyond the pleasure principle by representing the stark realities of life, and through his art inoculates himself and his readers against death, disease and lonelines, like the great tragic poets of ancient Greece. Instead of creating the illusion of immortality, he seems to be delivering the message: these are the facts of life, be cautious and avoid disappointment and mental pain.

The psycho-sociological climate in England, which had given birth to the Movement in the early 1950s changed in the early 1960s with the slow disappearance of the trauma of the loss of the Empire. Thus every member in the Movement changed in his own way, except Larkin who remained sincere to the poetic principle which characterized his poetry. The Movement disintegrated after a short span. The Times Literary Supplement's review (15 April 1960) announced that the new collction by Hughes and Redgrove "could be taken to mark the dropping of the Movement."

However, though the Movement has been a short-lived phenomenon in the history of English poetry, it is significant that it marked the turning of the literary mind to the "reality principle."

II

In spite of Larkin's taciturnity and avoidance of public notice, and in spite of his attack on the reader who reads his poetry "because he has been told to and told what to think about it", (RW 56) there is no dearth of critical comments on his poetry. His poetic career stretches over a period of four decades. In his introduction to The Collected Poems of Philip Larkin Anthony Thwaite informs us that the first poem "Winter Nocturne" was written in December 1938 and the last poem "Party Politics" in January 1984, two years before his death. But his reputation as a major poet of the post-war era in England was secured in 1955 with the publication of his mature work The Less Deceived. Since then his work has been receiving considerable attention from critics and reviewers.

The first book-length critical work, Philip Larkin, by David Timms was published in 1973. Timms gives an excellent account of Larkin's link with the Movement but exonerates Larkin from the shortcomings of the Movement. Larkin's ability to develop a direct relationship between reality and the audience makes Timms regard him as the best English poet in the second half of the twentieth century. Concerning the question of Larkin's

development as a poet Timms argues, while discussing the poems in The Whitsun Weddings, that "Mr. Larkin was consistent to the point of being static... there has been no radical development " (93). He also believes that Larkin has extended the scope of language through his techniques but his poetic vision has witnessed no change.

By slightly shifting the focus of her argument in her book An Uncommon Poet for the Common Man, published in 1974, Lolette Kuby argues that the spirit of the post-war era in England finds its complete expression in Larkin's poetry. She thinks that Larkin's poetry is not visionary, subjective, emotional or wordy, but he takes his subjects directly from ordinary experiences whether the experiences are his own or of others. She suggests that the influence of Hardy on Larkin is profound. According to her Larkin learned from Hardy colloquialism and restrained lyricism as well as his view of life. Both seem to believe that man cannot avoid his fate and the condition in which he is placed. But Larkin is different from Hardy in his intertwining of the tragic vision with the comic, i.e. serious issues like fate and death are treated in a comic way, while Hardy's way is purely tragic. Hardy's characters struggle desperately against their fate while Larkin's characters give up and accept their fate. Therefore, Kuby suggests, Larkin's characters do not develop through suffering, yet the conflict remains the essence of Larkin's vision.

One of the most important issues which Kuby discusses in Larkin's poetry is dualism . It is the coexistence of the real and the ideal which constitutes his poetic vision. So, accoring to her, Larkin is uncommon by his ability to expose the most philosophical issues of the twentieth century through the personal experience of the ordinary man. And it is the experience itself which Larkin tries to preserve in his poems. Though his poetry deals with "humdrum" events, these events are always serious. The world in his poetry is not a created one; it is not an "impersonal world of art" but a real world transposed onto the poetic.

In his book Philip Larkin, published in 1978, Bruce K.Martin extends Kuby's thesis by laying emphasis on Larkin's realism. He shows in this book how certain events in Larkin's personal life influenced his career as a poet. Like Timms Martin believes that Larkin's reputation rests mainly on his two volumes: The Less Deceived and The Whitsun Weddings. Though the poems in the High Windows, published later, show a slight difference with the poems of the 1950s and 1960s, they do not substantially change the image of Larkin evidenced in his earlier two volumes.

Martin emphasizes the importance of the settings, which are usually large towns and cities, in Larkin's poetry. The outdoor settings in a few poems, according to him, cannot be taken to suggest that Larkin was a poet of rural life. Most of Larkin's poems are lyrics where there is only a single isolated speaker who is "puzzled, honest and sincere .... can be bothered by many things besides thought of old age and death (Martin 42).

Larkin, Martin says, looks at time, "which is our element," from the perspective of personal experience. To him future is an illusion and past is to be recalled with nostalgia or regret, while the present is an "empty street, because neither memory nor imagination can operate on it." If "life means time, Time means the almost constant alteration of illusion and disillusionment" (47).

In his discussion of the structure and order of Larkin's poems Martin suggests that every poem indicates a sense of order and form which links Larkin to the 18th century poetic tradition. Some of his poems are linked either by action or emotional quality, by argument or by rhetorical statements.

In his book The Art of Philip Larkin, published in 1981, Simon Petch has paid more attention than Martin has done to Larkin's style and poetic techniques. According to him, his masterly use of visual images adds to the clarity of the meaning of his poetry. Petch also discusses Larkin's attitude toward the Modernists in the poet's aversion to the use of mythical allusions in poetry. He also examines the academic nature of modernism and points out how Larkin's conception of poetry as communication between the poet and his audience is strikingly opposed to the intellectualism of Modernist literature.

This topic about the anti-modernist stance in Larkin is taken up more critically in Andrew Motion's book Philip Larkin, published in 1982, where Motion argues that though Larkin has publicly declared his disapproval of Modernism, he in fact has

adopted many strategies from the Modernists and the French Symbolists. For Motion Larkin's poetry has bridged the two opposed traditions which were dominant in English literature for the last sixty years, Modernism and Symbolism. Motion also argues that Larkin's lack of faith in the inherited religion misled the critics who thought that Larkin's work was pessimistic. But Larkin has many affirmative poems and there is much delight in his poetry, aspects which could be attributed to the hidden influence of Yeats on him.

Alan Brownjohn's pamphlet, Philip Larkin (1975), examines Larkin's poetry as the product of the post-1950s British poetry. Brownjohn thinks that Larkin achieved his maturity and high reputation with the publication of The Less Deceived, a maturity which had its full flowering in The Whitsun Weddings. The poems of The North Ship are the product of a recluse. Although they are different from the ones in the other volumes, there are hints in these poems of the continuity of the spirit of the first volume. Therefore it is perhaps a mistake, as Brownjohn suggests, to divide The North Ship from Larkin's later poems. Commenting on the thematic aspects of Larkin's poetry Brownjohn indicates that Larkin was a poet who chose "such things as the gap between human hope and cold reality, the illusory nature of choice; frustration with one's lot in a present which is dismal and in face of future which brings only age and death" (3). But he also says that despite the melancholy tone which prevails in Larkin's poetry there is a faint kind of affirmation in The Less Deceived and The Whitsun Weddings, while in the High Windows seriousness is

approached through comedy.

In his book, Philip Larkin and English Poetry, published in 1986, after the death of the poet, Terry Whalen wants tc correct some. misunderstandings that had developed about the poet. One such misunderstanding is concerned with the limited range of his themes and with his gloomy vision. But Whalen argues that Larkin's pbetry is more complex than what it apparently indicates. He says that he is neither a dreary poet nor a poet of despair only, but there is an undercurrent of joy and appreciation of the beauty in life in his poetry. Whalen also believes that Larkin is influenced by two diametrically opposed poets such as Dr.Johnson and D.H.Lawrence representing two contradictory modes of thought, classical and romantic, respectively. Therefore, he feels that there is a tension betweeen the real and the ideal in his poetry.

Larkin is a poet of the social scene and his poetry indicates a close observation of things. In his minute observation of nature he is similar to Thomas Hardy. In his chapter "Landscapes of Larkin" from his book Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, published in 1972, Donald Davie argues that although Larkin is Hardysque in his vision he does not possess the latter's range. But his narrower range of interest gives his poetry depth and intensity not easily found in many of his contemporaries.

There are, however, some critics, antipathetic to the Movement, who have found Larkin's poetry deficient in many ways.

A.Alvarez, who was friendly with the poets of the Movement at the beginning, later considers the Movement poetry including Larkin's as "an example of the negative feedback of gentility, the English withdrawal from the profound forces of disintegration in twentieth century Europe" (19). M.L.Rosenthal strikes a similar note : "Philip Larkin is a representative of younger group of self-snubbers and self-loathers to whom nevertheless it has never occurred to put down their wretched mirror" (22). Colin Falck, who argues that Larkin captures the feel of life for many ordinary people, insists that he has done this only at the expense of deeper issues of humanity (108). He also argues that Larkin was desperately trying right from The North Ship till the last volume to get rid of the romantic illusion, especially in his attempt to accept ordinariness of things as they are.

The most strident criticism comes from Charles Tomlinson who attacks the Movement Poets on the ground that their poetic range is very limited and their sensibility extremely shallow. He says that the Movement poetry is journalistic and that the Movement poets deal only with familier subjects written for the average reader. Concerning Larkin's poetry he says, "I cannot escape from the feeling of its intense parochialism. Moreover, the tenderly nursed sense of defeat, the self-knitting go hand in hand with an inability to place his malaise and an evident willingness to persist in it" (214).

It is clear from the review of the important critical books and monographs on Philip Larkin's poetry that the critics,

whether they favour his poetry or attack it, have not been able to discern the subtle shift of his poetic vision from the "pleasure principle" to the "reality principle." Terry Whalen marks in his poetry the coexistence of the two opposite tendencies of the English poetic tradition, namely the neo-classical and the Romantic; Andrew Motion looks at his poetry as a marriage between the symbolist tradition associated with Yeats and empirical attitude associated with Hardy. He also marks a tension in his poetry between regularity and irregularity and between subtlety and scrapness. Lolette Kuby sees in it the blending of the real with the ideal. These contradictory elements which coexist in Larkin's poetry, marked by the critics, are due to the presence of the combination of the "pleasure principle" and the "reality principle." The opposition between man's tendency to dream a better life and his presence at the harshness of reality constitutes the perennial human condition. Therefore Larkin's apparent joy at life is suffused with despair and his tragic vision is tempered with comic hope.

Similarly, the critics who attacked Larkin could not see the passage of his poetry from "the pleasure principle" to the "reality principle." Falck's observation that Larkin's attempt to get rid of romantic elements is in fact a movement towards "reality principle." One can even explain the sense of defeat and ordinariness, which Tomlinson marked in Larkin's poetry, in terms of the triumph of the "reality principle" over "the pleasure principle." What was ordinary and commonplace before the Second World War was considered as symptoms of the new reality.

III

As one can see from this review of the important critical works on Larkin that no critic has adequately investigated the movement of Larkin's poetry from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. What I am going to do in this work is to study Larkin's poetry in the light of Freud's theory of "beyond the pleasure principle." For this purpose it seems desirable to provide an account of Freud's ideas on the subject.

In his book Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis Freud identifies two groups of instincts in the mind, sexual instincts and ego instincts and finds that "our entire psychical activity is bent upon procuring pleasure and avoiding pain, that it is automatically regulated by the PLEASURE-PRINCIPLE" (298-99). He defines pleasure as a feeling resulting from a reduction in "the amount of stimulation present in the mental apparatus" and pain a heightening of stimulation (Ibid 299). The primary object of the sexual instinct is the attainment of pleasure and of ego instincts of self-preservation. At first, ego instincts are also after pleasure but "under the influence of necessity, their mistress, they soon learn to replace the pleasure principle by a modification of it." In the course of confrontation with outside objects the ego learns to forgo immediate satisfaction and even to renounce certain sources of pleasure. It is important to note that Freud regards the transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle as a very important advance in the

development of the ego. It is also significant in Freud that the operation of the reality principle is not devoid of satisfaction; the pleasure gained from the "reality principle" is of a different quality. In the face of the hard facts of life the "ego becomes `reasonable', is no longer controlled by the pleasure-principle, but follows the REALITY-PRINCIPLE, which at bottom also seeks pleasure although a delayed and diminished pleasure, and which is assured by its realisation of fact, its relation to reality" (Ibid 299).

In his Formulation on the TWO Principles of Mental Functioning Freud's main theme is the distinction between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. These twin principles are regarded as the governing principles of man's mental life and dominate the primary and secondary mental processes repectively. The passage from the pleasure principle to the reality principle is regarded as a developmental process. Initially, the striving of a child is towards pleasure through fantasy or hallucination. As Freud remarks :

> It was only the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, the disappointment experienced, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination. Instead of it, the psychical apparatus had to decide to form a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavour to make a real

> alteration in them. A new principle of mental functioning was then introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable. This setting-up of the reality principle proved to be a momentous step. (36-37)

With the introduction of the reality principle a chunk of the thought activity is separated and continues to adhere to the pleasure principle through fantasy and day-dreaming. This means that although there is a transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle, the former does not cease to operate altogether when the latter takes hold of the stage of development. As a result of further development, sexual instincts get connected to fantasy and ego instincts to conscious activity. In his later works, Freud comes to see the mental apparatus composed of two major motions, life instinct or Eros which "comprises not merely the uninhibited sexual instinct proper and the instinctual impulses of an aim-inhabited or sublimated nature derived from it, but also the self-preservative instinct, which must be assigned to the egó," and death instinct or Thanatos "the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state." (Beyond the Pleasure Principle 380)

Equally relevant to our purpose are Freud's conclusions based on his experience with the patients of neurosis arising from war traumas and with the children's favourite game of "lost and found." The surprising thing noted in the case of traumatic

neurosis caused by war is that the patient feels a compulsion to repeat the dangerous situation which was manifestly associated with unpleasure. Similarly, the child in one kind of play repeats the situation in which the desired object-mother or toy is lost: he cries "gone" and evidently enjoys the game.

Freud seeks to explain the phenomenon of the child-game and the purpose behind it by using the analogy of a living organism "in its most simplified possible form as an undifferentiated vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation" (Ibid 297). The organism cannot bear the unmodified stimuli which assist it on all sides from the external world. To face the situation the organism develops a hard outer layer which can sift and moderate the external stimuli to the desirable limit. Embryology supports this view by showing that the central nervous system "originates from the ectoderm; the gray matter of the cortax remains a derivative of the primitive superficial layer of the organism" (Ibid 297). The mind too, Freud speculates, has a similar structure. It has a protective shield against excessive or undesirable excitation from outside and inside. Even inner stimulation, when it is out of proportion, is seen by the mind as coming from outside through the process known as projection.

Now in the traumatic experience, obviously, the force of the stimuli is of such a gigantic magnitude that it breaks through the protection barrier of the mind and attacks consciousness with an unsettling impact, leading to neurosis. But the mental appartus does possess a device to defend itself, which it has

acquired in the course of its development. It steels itself against the disaster by repeatedly enacting the tragic situation or by harping on its theme under the guidance of the reality principle. In Freud's own words :

> We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure. At the same time the pleasure principle is for the moment put out of action. There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead - the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can then be disposed of. (Ibid 301)

At this point, it ought to be re-emphasized that the rehearsal of painful experience or thought does not exclude the element of pleasure specially in play and creative writing.

Freud's following observation is significant :

> Finally, a reminder may be added that the artistic play and artistic imitation carried out by adults, which, unlike children's, are aimed at an audience, do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experience and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable. (Ibid 287)

In Civilization and Its Discontents (1930) Freud develops his theory of instinct by perceiving two major drives in human life: life instinct or Eros and death instinct. But here he explores the complex interpenetrative relationship between the two and shows how the death instinct can take the form of aggression and destructiveness. More important, he considers the roles of the pleasure principle and of the reality principle in the context of culture and says that many cultural achievements have been facilitated by the operation of the latter in preference to the former. According to Lionel Trilling, "the idea of the reality principle and the idea of the death instinct form the crown of Freud's broader speculation on the life of man. Their quality of grim poetry is characteristic of Freud's system and the ideas it generates for him" (67).

Now it would not be unreasonable to assume that Freud's thinking underwent transformation in terms of the reality principle: his formulations on death instinct, aggression and destructiveness under the pressure of the harsh facts of modern

life, specially the war. His prophetic pronouncements came to have greater validity during and after the Second World War. Contemporary English poetry is mostly characterised by its adherence to the reality principle. Two of its prominent poets, Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes, wrote about unpleasure in their individual ways. After a brief apprenticeship under W.B.Yeats and Auden during which period he may have followed the pleasure principle, Larkin moved on to the phase of the reality principle. At this stage he eschewed every form of illusion and sought to harden himself against the frightening aspect of contemporary life by facing the facts of death and disappointment without alleviating fantasy. As we shall see in the next chapter, the circumstances in his life prepared him for this attitude.

It has been argued that Larkin is starkly pessimistic. But I shall argue during this work that he is tragic, not pessimistic. Larkin's poetry is tragic in the sense of the ancient Greek tragedies which indicate human endurance against facile sources of pleasure. Trilling's statement about the connection between Aristotle and Freud is worth quoting :

> At any rate, the Aristotelian theory does not deny another function for tragedy (and for comedy, too) which is suggested by Freud's theory of traumatic neurosis what might be called the Methridatic function, by which tragedy is used as the homeopathic administration of pain to immune ourselves to

> the greater pain which life will force upon us (67).

However to be fair to both the Greek masters and to Larkin, one must admit that Larkin's tragic imagination operates at a much lower level than that of the ancients. But in our unheroic age, perhaps no writer can aspire to that grand creative performance, which has never been repeated in the history of world literature. At least, Larkin tried to reach that height in his own way.

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