CHAPTER - II

THE MAKING OF LARKIN'S POETIC SENSIBILITY

> Nothing once formed in the mind could ever perish, that everything survives in some way or other, and is capable under certain conditions of being brought to light again.
>
> (Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents 15)

I

In the light of the above statement by Freud we shall discuss certain influences which contributed to the formation of Larkin's poetic sensibility. Larkin's statement that "Generally my poems are related to my own personal life" (RW 79) indicates that the man who suffers and the artist who creates are bound together. His personal experiences are transmitted to his poetry. Thus the persons he met, the places he visited and the incidents he encountered contributed greatly to the formation of his poetic self. His early family environment and his stammer also contributed substantially to the course of his poetry. So it is appropriate to study these influences in order to determine how and why Larkin became a special kind of poet.

In order to properly understand Larkin's poetry one needs to go through the biographical details of his career. Though Larkin

was very reticent and secretive about certain details of his private life, his critical speeches provide a considerable information about himself and about his attitude to life. As Trengove-Jones remarks, he has:

> an instinctive tendency to elevate and transform personal quirks and fears into poetic dicta and suggests that his pronouncements are as much accidental as theoretical, as much autobiographical as literary critical. (323)

Larkin was born on August 9, 1922 at Coventry in Warwickshire. His father was the city treasurer and they led a fairly comfortable life. His father was a man of intellectual pursuits and therefore the environment of the family helped in promoting Larkin's literary interests. Larkin has described his family as a solid unit in which "everybody worked. No question about it. It was immoral not to work" (Quoted by Oakes 65). There was nothing remarkable about his childhood which he calls a "forgotten boredom." He was admitted to a local grammar school called King Henry VIII at the age of eight and stayed there until he was eighteen. In school he developed a reading habit and at an early age contributed prose pieces and poems to the school magazine. Remembering his first attempt at writing he says:

> I remember the first poem I ever wrote was set for homework. We had to write one, about anything. We were all absolutely baffled and

> consternation reigned, the poem I turned in was terrible (RW 48-49).

Besides the works that appeared in the school magazine his first significant poem "Ultimatum" was published in the Listener on 18 November 1940 when he was eighteen. This publication in an established journal is an indication that Larkin's poetic talent was recognized. Yet his life in the school was not without disappointments and despair. He wrote in the preface to Colin's privately-published War Memories: "I was not happy at school; admittedly it was an afffair of being more frightened than hurt sometimes, and being frightened was not very pleasant (cited by Hughes 18). In an interview published in Paris Review Larkin made a different statement about his childhood: "My childhood was alright, but I wasn't a happy child (RW. 66). This contradiction may have been due to his melancholic temper which Larkin himself attributed later to his stammer: "I wasn't a happy child I stammered badly" (Quoted by Trengrove-Jones 324). This stammer was by his own admission "a source of deep estrangement, of psychological and emotional scaring" (Trengove-Jones 324). In 1982 Larkin told Robert Philips that "Anyone who has stammered will know what agony it is, especially at school. It means you never take the lead in anything or do anything but try to efface yourself" (RW 65-66). It was during his school, when he was about fourteen, he made two visits to Germany. He describes the harrowing experience of the visits:

> My father liked going to Germany, and took me twice, when I was fourteen or so. I found it

> petrifying, not being able to speak to anyone or read anything, frightening notices that you thought you should understand and couldn't... It's language thing with me, I can't learn foreign languages, I just don't believe in them. As for cultural identities, that sounds a bit pretentious, but I think people do get a bit pallid if they change countries. Look at Auden. But people must suit themselves. (Cited by Trengove-Jones 322)

As it is clear from his account, his estrangement got redoubled by his ignorance of the foreign language and by his stammer. Both prevented him from any communication with the people he met.

In 1940 Larkin joined St.John's College, Oxford. The war had completely affected the life of the people. Many students were called upon to join the army and to leave their studies. Larkin was called into military service but he was exempted as he was disqualified in the physical tests. This disqualification allowed him to concentrate on his studies. He describes the prevailing atmosphere in Britain during the war which was reflected at the university:

> Life in college was austere. Its pre-war pattern had been dispersed, in some instances permanently. Everyone paid the same fees (in our case 12s a day) and ate the same meals.

> Because of Ministry of Food Regulations, the town could offer little in the way of luxurious eating and drinking, and college festivities, such as commemoration balls, had been suspended for the duration. Because of petrol rationing, nobody ran a car. Because of clothes rationing, it was difficult to dress stylishly.... National affairs were going so badly, and a victorious peace was clearly so far off, that effort expended on one's post-war prospects could hardly seem anything but ludicrous waste of time. . . events cut us ruthlessly down to size.
>
> (Introduction to Jill, RW 17-18)

Thus the impact of the war was extremely severe on the people, an impact which completely disrupted the rhythm of life everywhere in Britain.

However, Larkin's period at the university was very invaluable for him, both in terms of education and friendship. It was during this time that his poetic sensibility started to take shape. Gavin Bone, his tutor at Oxford influenced him in giving shape to his early ideas about poetry and literature. Bone was an Anglo-Saxon scholar and believed in the "native stock" element in literature. Larkin's Englishness and attitude towards the modernists can be attributed to Bone's influence. But Bone died before he could see the impact of his lectures on his

student. During his days at Oxford Larkin met the novelist Kingsley Amis, the science-fiction writer Edmund Gripsin (Bruce Montgomery), the poet Alan Ross and the politician Edward due Cann. John Wain joined Oxford in 1943 when Larkin was doing his finals. During this period life in the university was bursting with creative energy when young writers mutually influenced each other through dialogue and exchange of ideas. Larkin and Amis became good friends and benefitted from each other's company. Larkin describes this friendship :

> But when we were young, Kingsley Amis and I used to exchange unpublished poems, largely because we never thought they could be published, I suppose. He encouraged me, I encouraged him. Encouragement is very necessary to a young writer. But it's hard to find anyone worth encouraging, there aren't many Kingsley about. (RW 59)

Another undergraduate at Oxford who made a very favourable impression on Larkin was Bruce Montgomery. Montgomery dedicated his third novel, The Moving Toyshop (1946), to Larkin and thanked him in the preface of his Holy Disorders (1945) for giving him valuable suggestions. In his Introduction to Jill Larkin has admitted that in the period from 1943 to 1945 he saw a lot of Montgomery and that his friendship with him was a very "Curious Creative stimulus" (RW 24).

After completing his study at Oxford Larkin left for his home in Coventry where he wrote his novel Jill. He tried twice to get into the Civil Service but was disqualified. This failure was again a major setback for him. In an interview in the Paris Review he says:

> ...and by the time I went to Oxford the war was on and there wasn't anything to be except a serviceman or a teacher or a civil servant. In 1943 when I graduated I knew I couldn't be the first because I'd been graded unfit (I suppose through eyesight), nor the second because I stammered, and then the civil service turned me down twice, and I thought, well, that let me out, and I sat at home writing Jill. But of course in those days the government had powers to send you into the mines or on to the land, or into industry, and they wrote quite politely to ask what in fact I was doing. I looked at the daily paper... and saw that a small town in Shropshire was advertising for a librarian, applied for it and got it and told the government so, which seemed to satisfy them. (RW 60)

Thus it is clear that he became a librarian not by choice, but by accident. His future was affected by unemployment caused by the war and he was deeply wounded by his stammer which determined the

course his life was to take. He says,

> I stammered badly, and this tends to shape your life. You can't become a lecturer or anything that involves talking. By the time you cure yourself - which in my case was quite late, about thirty - all the talking things you might have done are lost." (Quoted by Trengove-Jones 324).

So it can be argued that the trauma caused by stammer was so severe on Larkin that it eventually contributed to his sad and melancholic temper. It deprived him of meaningful communication with others. This linguistic deprivation was to him "What daffodils were for Wordsworth" (RW. 47). This deficiency could account for his attitude towards woman later on. Since he could not communicate well he became shy and thus he could not form any kind of relation with women.

From 1943 till 1946 Larkin worked in Shropshire library, a period which was very productive in his life. He says, "By then I'd written Jill and The North Ship, and A Girl in Winter. It was probably the intensest time in my life" (RW 60). It was during this period also that his first important poetic appearance took place when William Bell edited an anthology called Poetry from Oxford in Wartime (Fortune Press, 1944) in which ten of Larkin's poems were included. The publisher was so much impressed with Larkin's poems that he expressed his willingness to bring out a collection of his poems. Thus The

North Ship (1945) was published. Recalling the publication of The North Ship Larkin says:

> I was enormously flattered .... The publisher seemed to like them, saying that he could undertake publication early next year and perhaps have the book ready by February. Since this was already the end of November my excitement ran high. (RW 27)

The North Ship did not have much immediate impact when it was published. The poems in this volume were described as juvenilia, "the juvenilia of the best poet are always worth reading" (Timms 22). Larkin himself referred to the light mood of this volume: "I don't think I had anything serious to write about, or at least if I had I couldn't see it" (RW 42). However, though critics dismissed this volume and Larkin was unsure of its merit, it was an important beginning for a poet trying to find his own voice. The move from the pleasure principle towards the reality principle can be traced in some of the poems in this volume. The poems show Larkin's early preoccupation with Thanatos though the volume is written by a pleasure-seeking young man. As Philip Gardener points out, this volume exhibits Larkin's "awareness of sadness at the back of things, of the passing of time and the inevitability of death" (28).

In 1946 Larkin resigned his job in Shropshire Library on his appointment as an assistant librarian at the University College in Leicester. He worked there till 1950. During this period he

published Jill and A Girl in Winter.

Larkin's early interest was more in the novel than in poetry. He thought that a novel was richer, deeper, wider in scope and more interesting than a poem. He tried hard to produce another novel but his faculty seemed to fail him. His failure to produce more novels may be due to his lack of close knowledge about people. He remarks on this aspect :

> I didn't want to write poems at all. I wanted to write novels.... But I could never write a third novel, though I must have spent about five years trying to... it did not happen... very frustrating... I have said somewhere that novels are about other people and poems are about yourself. I think that was the trouble. I didn't know enough about other people. (RW 49)

As Trengove-Jones says, Larkin turned "his personal quirks and fears into poetic dicta" (32).

However, his two novels are important in the sense that they provide a link with his later development as a poet. They point to the way his poetry was going to take. The importance of these novels in a study of Larkin's poetry lies in the fact that there is a thematic continuity between his novels and poetry. Bruce Martin remarks on this: "John Kemp of Jill can be seen as a youthful prototype of the speakers of many of Larkin's later

poems, while A Girl in Winter likewise fastens on many of the concerns in forming his later poetry" (21). In these two novels Larkin anticipates themes such as the conflict between reality and dream, between what man is and what he wishes to be, which recur later in his poetry.

From 1950 till 1955 Larkin served as a librarian at the Queen's University, Belfast, a place where he led a solitary life which gave him more time to write. Larkin refers to the conditions which the place provided: "The best writing conditions I ever had were in Belfast" (RW 58).

His collection of 25 poems titled. In the Grip of Light was rejected by the publishers. But this setback made him select from the volume some poems for inclusion in his subsequent volumes. When his Collected Poems, edited by Anthony Thwaite, appeared in 1988 it became clear that Larkin did not publish many of his poems for fear of rejection by the publishers.

In 1951 he published privately 100 copies of a pamphlet called XX Poems. This pamphlet, like its predecessor, received no attention from the critics to whom copies were sent. In fact Larkin sent copies to editors and leading literary figures, but most of them did not pay any serious attention to the pamphlet. Some even did not bother to acknowledge the receipt of it. Thirteen poems from this pamphlet were republished in his subsequent volume The Less Deceived (1955) and received critical attention. The poems of this pamphlet give the impression that Larkin had started to write a different kind of poetry from that

of The North Ship, poetry which was compatible to the spirit of the "Movement." As Bruce Martin says, "The most striking and most permanent changes in his [Larkin's] writing occurred in the years immediately following World War II. Practically all of the selections in XX Poems reflect these changes" (30).

Larkin also wrote the poems included in The Less Deceived while in Belfast. He failed to convince a Dublin publisher to publish his new volume which he intended to call Various Poems. At the same time he received a letter from George Hartley, the owner of Marvel Press and an admirer of his poetry about his willingness to publish Larkin's second book. Hartley also asked Larkin to change the title from Various Poems into The Less Deceived in order to attract the immediate attention of readers. During this period Larkin moved to Hull to take over the charge of Brynmor Jones Library, where he worked till his death.

The Less Deceived was received enthusiastically by critics who found in the poet rich potential and promise. Brownjohn says:

> .... and the change and improvement since the early book is instantly apparent. One gains an immediate sense, from the first page, of growing technical command and range... of greater substance and of careful, sensitive thoroughness in the working through of ideas (8).

With the publication of The Less Deceived Larkin's reputation as a leading poet in the post-war England was established. The review in The Times Literary supplement (16 December 1955) described The Less Deceived "as a selection from the ten years work, should establish Mr. Philip Larkin as a poet of quite exceptional importance, has a mature vision and the power to render it variously, precisely and mockingly." Alun R. Jones called The Less Deceived as "one of the most important volumes of verses to have been published since the war" (148).

The poems in this volume demonstrate change in Larkin's poetic sensibility and the enthusiastic response from readers indicates that a shift has taken place in the attitude of people after their disappointment during the war. The title of the volume is also suggestive. The word "Less" stands for a degree of deception but does not negate completely the existence of deception. Deception, as the title implies, can be reduced but cannot be completely obliterated. But Larkin warns his readers against deception by dreams and wishes but asks them to try to go beyond them to get a sense of reality. Thus in this volume, the poet has already moved beyond the "pleasure principle."

His third volume of poems, The Whitsun Weddings, published in 1964, confirmed his reputation. Larkin received the prestigious Queen's Gold Medal for this collection. Though nine years separate the publication of The Less Deceived from that of The Whitsun Weddings, one could see a close connection between the two volumes. The themes of the previous volume recur with

enlarged scope in The Whitsun Weddings. Bruce Martin comments on the connection:

> In many ways the poems in The Whitsun Weddings represent the full flowering of Larkin's poetic talent, the final casting off of his youthful misdirection. It was almost as if he had written a group of poems fully in line with his best writing in The Less Deceived (132).

However, The Whitsun Weddings contains poems which are more sombre than those in The Less Deceived. Larkin introduces in this volume more real characters and settings than those in The Less Deceived. He shows interest in and compassion for people quite different from his solipsism in his earlier volume. He exploits the urban scene in order to suggest the futility of illusions. He employs images from common life for their stark materiality and tangibility.

In 1974 Larkin published his last volume of verse, High Windows, for which he earned the reputation of the best-selling poet. It sold 6,000 copies in three weeks. This volume represents an extension of his achievement in the previous volumes. He uses here contemporary events and allusions. Details of everyday life and the events that took place in Britain at that time become his subject matter.

Alan Brownjohn says that in the publication of High Windows Larkin became a multi-dimensional poet:

> ..... alongside poems of the most intense gloom and alarm, Larkin develops the affirmative features of his talent. The exquisiteness of creative solitude is sharpened, the value of certain sorts of ritual observance is more strongly stressed and the sense of hope to be found somewhere.... But the themes of how to live, of loneliness, age and death are also treated in High Windows pregnantly and alarmingly, in poems which have no humour at all. (18-19)

The blending of gloom and tragedy with affirmation and hope in these poems indicates that Larkin represents life in full. This also suggests that Larkin's grasp of reality has become deeper and stronger. To him, reality is a curious mixture of despair and hope, pleasure and pain.

On December 2, 1985 at the age of sixty-three Larkin died in Nuffield Hospital in Hull. He has left four slim volumes of poetry, two novels and two collections of essays and many unpublished poems, some of which are incomplete. His four volumes of poetry and all the unpublished poems were edited by Anthony Thwaite and published as Philip Larkin, Collected Poems in 1988.

Larkin's importance was felt after his death far beyond the immediate impact of his published works. A.N. Wilson, the English novelist and literary editor of The Spectator says that the best way to judge poets is by "how many lines of their poetry you can remember." Then he adds that "Not only can I remember a lot of Larkin, I find it has sunk very deep, and become part of my private language" (24). Larkin's importance after his death can be attributed to the role he has played in the tradition of English poetry which sustained him throughout his career.

II

Through his early habit of reading and his study of English literature at Oxford Larkin got acquainted with the literary traditiion of his nation. Moreover, by being a librarian he got himself familiar with the customs and manners of people of different parts of his country. His job also required him to have access to various kinds of books. His readings and meetings with people had a tremendous bearing on the growth of his poetic sensibility. Larkin told the representative of Paris Review about this experience:

> Of course I had read a great many novels, and knew the mannerism of most modern writers, but looking back I can't say I ever imitated anyone. Now don't think I mind imitation in a young writer. It's just the way of learning the job. Really, my novels

> were more original than my poems at the time.
> (RW 64)

So to Larkin reading and imitating the works of others are essential for a new poet.

Larkin's move from the "pleasure principle" towards the "reality principle" can be attributed to the different influences - cultural, social and psychological - on him. In his introduction to the second edition of The North Ship (1966) Larkin says:

> Looking back, I find in the poems not one abandoned self but several - the ex-schoolboy, for whom Auden was the only alternative to "old-fashioned" poetry; the undergraduate, whose work a friend affably characterized as `Dylan Thomas, but you have a sentimentality that's all your own', and the immediately post-Oxford self, isolated in Shropshire with a complete Yeats stolen from the local girl's school.

So, by Larkin's admittance, his early poems (1938-45) including the poems of The North Ship were constituted by several influences. Important among these influences was W. H. Auden who was the most influential and powerful poet at that time. Geoffrey Thurly comments on Auden's influence on Larkin:

> For all the importance of the Hardy influence, Larkin can really only be said to have found himself when he had mastered the precise social annotation and self-deprecating tone of W. H. Auden. (142)

Anthony Thwaite, Larkin's friend and one of his literary executors also mentions in his introduction to Philip Larkin: Collected Poems (1988, (hereafter referred to in the text in page numbers before the quoted passages) such influence. He says:

> From the beginning of 1940, a few months after his [Larkin's] birthday, the stamp of W. H. Auden is plain.... Poems, beginning here with "Nothing Significant was Really Said" (p.235), and including "Ultimatum"... are indeed consummately Audenesque. This domination seems to last about three years, during most of Larkin's time at Oxford (XIX).

Auden's influence can be demonstrated with reference to some poems by both the poets. Larkin's poem "Conscript" is similar to Auden's "In the Time of War" not only in its treatment of the theme of war but also in its employment of metaphors. Auden also gave Larkin his social orientation. He also imparted him a jaunty tone of mockery which Larkin continued to exploit throughout his career.

But the influence of Auden was "abruptly replaced by that of Yeats, mediated to some extent by Vernon Watkins and Watkin's own hieratic Yeatsian style" (Thwaite XIX). Yeats's influence is clearly discernible in the poems in The North Ship. It was Vernon Watkins, stationed at an airforce camp near Oxford in 1943, who created in Larkin an interest in Yeats. Watkins used to pay regular visits to the English club and to lecture to its members. Larkin happened to be one of them. Through his lecture on Yeats he drew Larkin to the music and lyricism of Yeats's poetry. Larkin acknowledges his debt to Watkins in his introduction to The North Ship:

> .... impassioned and imperative, he swamped us with Yeats until, despite the fact that he had not nearly come to the end of his typescript, the chairman had forcibly to apply the closure. As a final gesture Vernon distributed the volumes he had been quoting from among those of us who were nearest to him.... I had been tremendously impressed by the evening and in the following weeks made it my business to collect his books up again. (RW 29)

So strong was the influence that Larkin continued to write like Yeats for some years. John Bayley thus comments on Larkin's Yeatsian phase : "In Larkin's first collection of poems, The North Ship, there is a high degree of competence and of effective Yeatsian usage, but no Larkin at all" (177).

The influence of Yeats made Larkin a poet of the "pleasure principle." Most of the poems in The North Ship are addressed to the heart. For example, the following lines clearly show Larkin's concern:

> To pull the curtain back
> And see the clouds flying
> How strange it is
> For the heart to be loveless. (284)

These lines are reminiscent of Yeats's poem "Never Give All the Heart."

The romantic tone of The North Ship is an evidence of Yeats's influence. One can mark similarities between Larkin's poem "XXIV" and Yeats's "O Do Not Love Too Long" in their direct address to love and in their final message that love cannot be fulfilled in this world. But perhaps the most sustaining impact of Yeats on Larkin was the latter's love of music which permeates through the entire The North Ship. Larkin mentions this in his introduction to The North Ship :

> I spent the next three years trying to write like Yeats, not because I liked his personality or understood his ideas but out of infatuation with his music. (RW)

David Timms also remarks on this impact: "Yeats had given the young poet a verbal model, a distinctive tone of voice to imitate" (55). Even a random selection of some lines from The

North Ship will illustrate the power of music on his poetry. Despite the fact that Larkin finally gave up the Yeatsian "Celtic ferver" the power of music coming out of the vestigial influence of Yeats can be seen clearly even in such a gloomy poem as "Mr.Bleany." One can perceive in the slow cadence of music in "Mr.Bleany" the unmistakable influence of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium." In the use of imagery too similarities between the two poems are obvious. Larkin's definition of an old man as a "sack of meal upon two sticks" is close to Yeats's definition, "A tattered coat upon a stick."

The atmosphere of gloom following the Second World War and Larkin's inner depression due to his inability to communicate easily with others were responsible for his attraction to Hardy. When he saw in Hardy's works a similar atmosphere of darkness he found an outlet for purging off his depression. Thus he derived from Hardy's work a secret pleasure tantamount to emotional cleansing. As he says, "When I came to Hardy it was with the sense of relief" (RW 175).

Larkin started to write under the influence of Hardy with the collapse of the British Empire after the Second World War. One can perhaps link up the prevailing mood of loss with the decline of the empire with Larkin's source of pleasure in the dark writings of Hardy. His psychological maladjustment with others combined with his stammer may have contributed to his attraction to Hardy's alienated characters.

In an interview published in The Observer he says, "I see life more as an affair of solitude diversified by a company than an affair of company diversified by solitude" (RW 54). This statement appropriately sums up Larkin's penchant for private reflection and preference for the seamy aspects of life, a preference which Hardy also made at the expense of the bright side of life. As Larkin says, "I have come, I think, to admire him even more than I did then. Curiously enough, what I like about Hardy is what most people dislike" (RW 176). This admiration can also be attributed to Larkin's poetic affinity with sorrow and suffering. His poems such as "Myxomatosis," "Wires," "Deception" depict such an affinity. Larkin, like Hardy, is also attracted to the concept of the "immanent will" as the blind power of the universe. Although he feels that choice is a possibility for man it hardly brings the desired result.

But Larkin's tragic vision of life is not as intense as Hardy's. Although his characters feel pain and suffer, they show the capacity for rebellion in their challenge of the imposing power of Thanatos. Larkin perceives the gloomy side of life, but at the same time is aware of the existence of its goodness and beauty. His characters at least try to strike a balance between Eros and Thanatos, although balance cannot be achieved and Eros is subsumed under the ubiquitousness of Thanatos.

To Larkin dualism is the root of the human condition. Kuby believes that Larkin's blending of the comic with the tragic is a departure from Hardy: "Larkin's point of departure from Hardy is

marked by the intertwining of comic and tragic vision. In Larkin's poems tragic theme occurs in comic situation and uses the language of comedy" (51). Although her observation is apt and generally correct, Kuby fails to mark how Larkin's characters avoid tension by producing pleasure according to Freud's notion of the "pleasure principle." Another aspect of the Larkin-Hardy relationship concerns their use of the English landscape. Although both appear to be provincial in their handling of setting, one can observe in their writings a movement from the specific to the universal.

Another important poet with whom Larkin was associated was John Betjamen whom he highly admired. Larkin's dislike of Modernism corresponds to Betjamen's. It was Betjamen who made a case for direct communication between the poet and his reading public, an idea which Larkin liked very much. The Modernists, in their elitist approach to literature, had discouraged such direct communication.

Larkin resembles Betjamen not only in his advocacy of direct relationship between the poet and his reader but in his depiction of the minute details of the English landscape. Like Betjamen, he begins with a particular incident, like visiting his old college, and then goes on to address general and universal issues concerning mankind. Both poets also reviewed each other's work. Larkin reviewed Betjamen's Collected Poems and Betjamen reviewed The Whitsun Weddings in turn.

Apart from Larkin's direct relationship with Yeats, Hardy and Betjamen, one can also discern in his poetry echoes from older poets of England. For example, in his use of classical structure and economy of expression, Larkin is similar to Ben Jonson. Both Larkin and Jonson are moralists without being didactic. But despite his classical temper, Larkin is not an anti-romantic poet. On the contrary, his poetry is steeped in latent romanticism. As David Lodge observes, "Larkin, indeed, has many affinities with Wordsworth (in spite of having a `forgotten boredom of childhood) and seems to share Wordsworth's `spontanenous overflow' theory of poetic creation" (214). Larkin believes that a poet should write about those things in life that move him most deeply; if he does not feel deeply, he should not write. He said to a Time correspondent in 1964: "One should write poetry when one wants to and has to" (XIII 16). This attitude brings him near to Wordsworth. In his choice of subject matter for poetry and language of expression he echoes Wordsworth's poetic theory underlined in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads." He believes that academic jargon in poetry creates unnecessary barrier between the poet and the reader. A well-known publisher asked him how he "punctuated poetry" and looked "flabbergasted" when he said, "the same as prose ... using words and syntax in the normal to describe recognizable experiences as memorably as possible" (RW 75).

Though there are apparent dissimilarities between Larkin and Browning, some resemblances between the two poets can be seen, particularly in their method of expression. Larkin shares with

Browning his moral seriousness revealed through his dramatic monologue. Larkin's link with the Georgian poets is also self-evident. The Georgians had kept away from the European poetic influences which produced modernity. In Larkin's poetry such an antipathy to European influence is also discernible. But there is a great deal of difference between Larkin and the Georgians so far as their treatment of the setting is concerned. Whereas the Georgians avoided industrial settings, Larkin exploited them for their realism. Writers as diverse as Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, D.H. Lawrence, Edward Thomas and William Empson had some influence on Larkin. Empson influenced him in his metrical competence and metaphorical adroitness; Graves's tone of disillusionment was similar to Larkin's tone; Lawrence's anti-intellectualism was close to Larkin's naivety and poetic simplicity.

Since Larkin's main concern is the actual experience of life itself, the poet's task is to "recreate the familiar, he is not committed to introduing the unfamiliar" (RW 55). Hence there is no room for excess of imagination in his poetry. For him, excess of imagination leads to self-betrayal. He does not accept the romantic idea of imagination as a source from which all values can spring, the kind of imagination which Coleridge emphasizes as a source of creativity. For Larkin excess of imagination takes us far away from reality and thus it turns to be deceptive. In his distrust of excessive imagination Larkin also suspects the validity of symbolism which originates in imagination. He thinks that a symbol displaces truth from its original location and

distorts the value-system and complicates the meaning of a poem. Symbolism is an offshoot of romanticism and acts as a barrier in poetic discourse. He therefore prefers concrete images which outstrip symbols and allusions.

In his article "The Pleasure Principle" which is the cornerstone of his literary theory Larkin divides the process of writing a poem into three stages. In the first stage, the poet should be emotionally obsessed with his subject. This subjectivity is a kind of Freudian spontaneity established between the poet and his world. In the second stage, the emotional involvement between the poet and his subject should take an aesthetic manifestation when the poet articulates verbally his emotions towards his subject. In the third stage, Larkin says that the poem cannot develop unless the audience is kept in mind. Thus the perception of the role of the audience, who, in fact, is a pleasure seeking audience, is important in the process of writing. Thus we can argue that the three stages, i.e., the emotional involvement, the aesthetic manifestation of these emotions, and the audience-role are developed out of the pleasure principle. Yet, the process is not only emotional but has a social function, since the audience shifts the poem from itself into the larger outside world. Thus the act of writing poetry, which is created out of the pleasure principle, turns finally to be an act within the reality principle. So Larkin moves in his poetry, which is an act of pleasure by itself, toward the reality principle.

Larkin absorbed and assimilated these influences which helped him shape his poetic sensibility and his literary theory. In his critical articles on the works of poets like Hardy, Auden and Betjamen, for example, he does not propound any systematic critical theory. However, some critical notions emerge from these articles about the function, nature and subject matter of poetry and the process of writing itself.

Larkin believes that the main task of poetry falls within the process of "economic principle" manifested in the act of preservation. He writes about this in his introduction to Enright's anthology, Poet of the 1950s :

> I write poems to preserve things I have seen/thought/felt (if I may so indicate a composite and complex experience) both for my self and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake. Why I should do this, I have no idea, but I think the impulse to preserve lies at the bottom of all art.

He believes that what the poet has to preserve is the actual experience in life which he should directly depend upon for his subject matter.

Larkin believes that both form and content are equally important for poetry; he says, "At any level that matters, form

and content are indivisible. What I mean by content is the experience the poem preserves, what it passes on" (RW : 69). He praises Betjamen for using meter and rhyme as a means of enhancing the emotion of a poem and for trying to communicate the meaning directly. Thus he emphasizes the inextricable relationship between form and content. Thus the balance is maintained in the process of writing a poem which emerges out of the pleasure principle and ends as a social discourse.

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