CHAPTER IV

BEYOND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

"It is much less difficult to be unhappy."

(Freud : Civilization And Its Discontents 28)

It is important to note that Larkin started his career as a poet during one of the gloomiest periods in British history just before the Second World War. The situation is summed up by R.S.Sharma :

> The world is in a state of flux and uncertainty; theories arise and fall like waves on the sea. To champion any ideology, to assume the role of a prophet or reformer, or to dabble in philosophy, religion, mysticism, or science, is simply to expose one's naivete. The basic need is to see the world as it appears to the limited consciousness of man, fluid, disorganised, harsh, unsympathetic. (12-13)

It is, therefore, not surprising that Larkin, after a short period of writing under the influence of the pleasure principle, plunged headlong into a world facing a grave existential crisis as a result of the War and its numerous consequences. As a result, his poetry began to take on a new coloration, which

reflected his mood of dejection and disillusionment which followed the war. One can say that under the impact of the war he moved beyond the pleasure principle towards the reality principle.

Larkin was an empiricist who was not concerned with abstract ideas and theories but was profoundly responsive to the changing world. Like many others of his generation, who believed during the 1950s that another global war might break out soon, he lived and worked under such fear. Yet he did not address these things directly in his poetry. But they are present indirectly through its atmosphere of gloom, depression, melancholy and the fear of death which his characters face. The death instinct makes his characters introspective and inner-directed. Martin Dodsworth's comments on this aspect are worth quoting here :

> ... he [Larkin] writes about sadness, not unhappiness, misery or suffering but sadness.... His poems are moving to the point of desolation because he lavishes such a great skill on saying what we would prefer not to be said at all - that life can overcome us with the sense of futility, that is full of failure. (89)

Larkin himself refers to the sad note which permeates in his poetry in an interview with The Observer :

> But it is unhappiness that provokes a poem. Being happy doesn't provoke a poem. As Montherlant says somewhere, happiness writes white. It is very difficult to write about being happy. (RW 47)

In fact Larkin's unhappiness emerges out of two factors. First, the sense of depression which prevailed after the war made him disillusioned with life and with the themes of pleasure of his early poetry. Secondly, his sense of desolation and reticence came as a result of his inability to communicate fluently with others because of his stammer.

One can argue that under such a situation of fear and dreariness people begin to dream of a better life in future or to hark back to the past as a source of consolation and emotional strength. But to Larkin such dreams of recovery and anticipation are mere escapism. In many of his poems he depicts this dreaming nature in people as a means to escape reality of the present to future or past for solutions of their problems. He calls these people victims 'of fantasies. He criticizes the self-deceiving tendency in people for whom happiness exists only in dreams and imagination. In his view this dreaming tendency does not help man get rid of his troubles caused by the harsh reality but, on the contrary, it rather adds to his miseries. The pleasure in fantasy Larkin depended upon in some of his early poems proves to be deceptive as he matures in his sensibility. But, as we have already suggested, Larkin's development is not a linear one. One can see in some of his early poems occasional moods of

disillusionment at a lower key. For example, in the poem " I see a girl dragged by the wrists" he introduces two contradictory ideas: one stands for the pleasure principle; the other for the reality principle. The speaker is drawn between two impulses, one is sensual and the other comes from the value of the dignity of labour. He tends to be skeptical about the value of sensual pleasure and seems to favour dignity of labour as the source of his pleasure. Thus he abandons the pleasure principle and accepts the reality principle inherent in the value of work for human survival. Through rich visual images of the girl dragged by the wrists across a snow field the poet at first describes the rapturous mood of the girl who seems to be enjoying the atmosphere in which she is placed, but the speaker remains indifferent to such a sight :

I see a girl dragged by the wrists
Across a dazzling field of snow,
And there is nothing in me that resists.
Once it would not be so;
Once I should choke with powerless jealousies;
But now I seem devoid of subtlety,
As simple as things I see,
Being no more no less, than two weak eyes.

The second idea, about the dignity of labour, comes from the image of the two old men "clearing the drifts with shovel and a spade." They stir his sleeping heart and succeed in sweeping out the image of the girl from his mind:

For the first time I'm content to see
What poor mortar and bricks
I have to build with, knowing that I can
Never in seventy years be more a man
Than now - a sack of meal upon two sticks.

(278)

The speaker appreciates the hard-working human beings who struggle for existence through work , which is the secret of man's existence..

Love, sex and marriage which Larkin thought, in his early poems, as sources of pleasure, are now considered deceptive and do not yield the desired fulfilment. Larkin's characters in his so-called love poems do not achieve what they expected from love and sexual pleasure and thus they are disillusioned with their expectations.

Larkin is mostly a poet of disillusionment. His disillusionment comes from his awareness that love cannot provide any satisfaction in a world which is falling apart. Like T.S.Eliot, who is also known as a poet of disillusionment, he sees betrayal and artificiality everywhere. But whereas Eliot's disillusionment comes from his high moralist and puritanic position, Larkin's comes from his close participation in common life. He feels that those who care about the reality of modern life cannot feel enthusiastic about love.

When Larkin deals with love, sex and marriage in his poetry, he always links them up to the contemporary condition of men. But when he talks about love as an emotion or as a force in human life his statement has a positive aspect, because he thinks that love as an emotion, an ideal, will survive. So he is trying to show the difference between the ideal of love which exists in man's imagination and love through the actual behaviour of men and women in reality. He does not want his readers to dream; rather he wants them to dispel that dream and to remove the illusion from their eyes. He wants to draw the attention of his readers to the fact that love and physical union, which are thought of as sources of pleasure and happiness, are in fact sources of deception under the prevailing condition of modern society.

Such an attitude is clearly adumbrated in even some of his early poems. These poems, though dominated by the pleasure principle, have, at times, moments of gloom and despair, which come from disappointment in love. The poem "Love, We must part now" deals with this theme. In this poem love is presented without pleasure. Since the lover has come to know that love is useless, he asks his beloved to put their affair to an end, lest it should turn bitter and calamitous :

> Love, we must part now: do not let it be
> Calamitious and bitter - in the past
> There has been too much moonlight and self-pity;
> Let us have done with it: For now at last
> Never has sun more boldly paced the sky,

Never were hearts more eager to be free.

(280)

Love, which usually follows the pleasure principle, seems here guided by reason. The lover has learnt from his experience that it is useless to continue to be in love with his beloved since separation will be their destiny. So he pleads for separation "like two tall ships" as an inevitable end to their affair. The analogy with the two ships indicates that the lover and his mistress should go in two different routes like the two ships sailing for different destinations. He admits that there is regret at their separation, yet they have to accept its reality :

There is regret. Always there is regret.
But it is better that our lives unloose,
As two tall ships, mind-mastered, wet with light
Break from an estuary with their courses set,
And waving part, and waving drop from sight.

(280)

The speaker tries to console himself with the logic that regret is germane to the human condition and one must live with it.

Although Larkin seems to think that love is a futile experience and exists only in man's imagination and derives its pleasure from a state of imagined reality, in the actual affair of life as it goes on in its daily routine love always meets with frustration. In his mature writing Larkin always depicts love in such terms. Though he is an empiricist in his

presentation of life, he accepts the harshness of life with some pain and loss. Therefore, even in his darkest poems there are recollections of his earlier moments of expectations and joy.

It is perhaps appropriate to discuss briefly here Larkin's two novels, Jill and A Girl in Winter, for their handling of the theme of love. Although the subject of our work is his poetry, it is not possible or desirable to separate his poetry from his fiction because there is a thematic continuity of his preoccupation with love throughout his work. An examination of these two novels will show how Larkin's disillusionment about love runs through his fiction as well. The central theme of Jill is the disillusionment of its protagonist John Kemp, the son of a retired policeman. John Kemp is on a scholarship to Oxford in 1940 during the Second World War. He is first introduced in the train going from his town to Oxford. Like Larkin himself, he is reticent and lacks in self-confidence. That is why, in the train he feels shy to eat his sandwiches in front of others. He goes to the bathroom to eat them there and when someone tries the door he throws them out through the window out of nervousness. At Oxford he shares a room with another undergraduate named Christopher Warner, who, along with his circle of friends, makes fun of him and ill-treats him. This ill-treatment intensifies his sense of isolation which he felt after leaving his parents. His failure in relationship with his fellow students makes him feel nothing but humiliation and disgust. His visit to his ruined town during the Second World War suggested to him the possibility of a fresh start in life, but it also reminds him of his inability to make

friends. Thus his faint hope for the possibility of a new beginning is shattered by the pain of his actual experience :

> How should he face Christopher now? And at this thought the last remnant of his illusion collapsed like the last wall of a demolished house. After all, then,' he was on his own; he had failed utterly and ignominiously, failed to weave himself into the lives of these people... and he was alone, again doubly alone. (114)

At the collapse of his relationship with Christopher he invents the character of Jill, a literary-imaginary-fantastic creature whom he calls, first sister, then, a friend, and finally, falls in love with her as a compensation for his failure in his relationship with other students in the real world. Lolette Kuby says that in this character, "As a psychic defensive manuever he invents an alter-ego, which he later unfoundedly transfers to a real girl, Jill" (10). John Kemp wants to create Jill as an imaginative construct which would take away the memories of all the wrongs and sufferings that he has undergone. His attempt to give Jill an existence leads him to recognize Gillian whom he sees at a bookstore. Thinking that Jill can be found in life, he is immediately obsessed by the presence of Gillian as an embodiment of Jill. Initially delighted at being able to separate his fantasy from reality, he comes to rue that separation increasingly. He discovers Gillian's illusive identity when he learns that she is the cousin of Elizabeth, Christopher's

girl friend. With a stroke of irony, the novelist tries to bring together here the world of fantasy and the world of reality. Gillian refuses her part in Kemp's fantasies when she does not allow him to call her Jill. Being a practical woman motivated within the rules of the reality principle she does not want to share Kemp's illusions.

Before his encounter with Gillian, when he has only the imaginary Jill, he persuaded himself that it was innocence which he cherished. His sexual longing remained only at the level of the unconscious, reflected in his shyness. But when Gillian comes, he is plunged into the world of actual desire. His first sexual longing expressed in the image of food now changes radically. It leaves the unconscious and surfaces at the conscious level. Andrew Motion rightly regards this change as a kind of development in John Kemp's character from illusion to self-awareness :

> Jill's preoccupation with food is here changed into a different kind of obsession, but one that is nevertheless also oral. It is an important point because it highlights and concludes Kemp's development throughout the novel from shy "unfocussed" feelings to explicit self-awareness. Although he is still in a dream, he has clarified the nature of his impulses, wishes and desires. He has acquired self-knowledge, and thereby achieved

> the condition to which all Larkin's speakers aspire. (49)

So in his imaginary life with Jill he admits that what he has longed for out of that relation is only a company, but when Gillian appears, the actuality of his feelings is identified. When this has happened, actuality threatening the dream, the tension develops and, as a result, the novel reaches its physical crisis. While trying to kiss Gillian he is knocked down and thrown out into the college fountain by Christopher. He lies sick in the college hospital with bronchial pneumonia. Thus the world of pleasure created through his imaginative constructions as a wishful satisfaction of his erotic fancy comes to an end and a new world of dark reality opens itself out to him. This experience teaches John the lesson that "love dies whether fulfiled or unfulfiled" (Jill 243).

Similarly, Katherine, the protagonist of Larkin's second novel, A Girl in Winter, acquires the same type of disillusionment. Like Kemp she has been alienated from her childhood atmosphere and faces unknown people. But unlike Kemp, she shows from the very beginning traits of strong character and self-esteem. When her boss tries to insult her she counters his insult with a defiant spirit which indicates that she has the power to meet any challenges with confidence.

At the age of sixteen, when she visits Robin, her penfriend, she become a victim of her erotic fancy. Yet her strong character saves her from committing any mistake. During her first

meeting with Robin she finds the latter's image larger than what she had thought. She "felt, as she had felt ever since she had first seen his photograph, that he could, if he wished, say something that would be more important to her than anything she had ever heard" (A Girl in Winter 101). But Robin says nothing of the sort; he is merely well-mannered and considerate to the point at which Katherine suspects that he deliberately misrepresents himself. She is left with "the absurd feeling that the most important person, her real friend, had not yet appeared (A Girl in Winter 90).

But as she is intelligent and self-respectful, she does not give any upper hand either to him or to his sister. This is apparent from the ways she behaves on several occasions: while playing tennis; at boating; at the time of language lessons etc. She does not believe in Jane's assessment of Robin as being an ordinary boy; she would rather prefer to describe him as possessing "barren perfection." She also realises her womanly needs when Robin saves her from lurching into the water :

> She knew she wanted to lie with her head in his lap, to have him comfort her. She knew equally that this was not going to happen partly because he had no interest in her, and because Jane was specifically there to prevent it. She sat blushing. (A Girl in Winter 126)

When after some more observation she is convinced about the indifference of Robin she decides to draw back from any further dreams and regains her self-possession. Moreover, when she discovers that she was invited by Jane, and not by Robin, to stay with the family, her illusions are destroyed :

> She saw how fatally obvious it all was. For two weeks she had exercised her imagination in building up theories based on the fact that Robin had invited her, and trying to hide from herself the dissatisfaction she felt with them. (A Girl in Winter 147)

As the time the parting comes close, she goes to the punt and is joined by Robin who tries to give her a sign of affection by kissing her, but she is now disillusioned with him. Thus she does not give any importance to this occasion and does not even remember it as something worthwhile after leaving England.

When she again comes back to England she is Larkin's version of a girl in winter. The atmosphere of the library where she serves is cold and rough. Psychologically also the winter has set in her mind. She is now basically a realist prepared inwardly for the harshness of life. She has risen beyond all colourful ideas. Even when Robin comes back in his military uniform as a soldier trainee and tries to express his love with kisses she cannot be fooled now by any illusion about the stability of love. These two novels, Jill and A Girl in Winter, written during the late early phase of Larkin's career when there was a subtle shift

occurring in his consciousness, represent the poet's response to his milieu dominated by the dark forces resulting from the war and its several consequences. As Larkin comes to realize his responsibility to his time and world, he becomes increasingly uncertain about his earlier celebration of pleasure through love, marriage and sex. Now, under the impact of the harsh reality impinging on his consciousness from several corners, he is ready to forgive the past and to make a fresh start. The novels written between his early poetry of pleasure and later poetry of unpleasure beautifully capture this transition in Larkin's ways of perception.

The poem "No Road" from his later poetry presents the same line of thought about the uselessness of love in life. In this poem the speaker uses the metaphor of the road which is closed by many barriers to indicate that there are obstacles on the path of love. The image of brick works and trees further suggests rupture in relationship. "Silence, space and strangers" are "time's eroding agents" which work to make love languish :

> Since we agreed to let the road between us
> Fall to disuse,
> And bricked our gates up, planted trees to screen us,
> And turned all time's eroding agents loose,
> Silence, and space and strangers - our neglect
> Has not much effect.

(47)

The poet thinks that with the physical separation of the lovers love comes to an end. Though the memory of their past is still there, it does not do much to revive love. Memory itself is going to come to an end : "A little longer/And time will be the stronger." The poet here presents a dichotomy between love as an abstraction and a sentimental affair and the reality of its futility through separation.

In the poem "Love Song in Age" the protagonist is a widow who had ups and downs in life. Now she is lonely. She looks for something in the shelves and finds records of songs which she used to listen to when she was young. Now she wants to re-live the past. Those songs bring her back to the time of her past through memories. These songs which were kept in a corner suggest that they were preserved in her unconscious and surfaced when they found an outlet. As soon as she listens to those songs she starts imagining herself in relation to her life. Her act of imagination is a kind of day dreaming. By being absorbed in the past she forgets her state of widowhood and starts to feel young:

> Relearning, how each frank submissive chord
> Had ushered in
> Word after sprawling hyphenated word.
> And the unfailing sense of being young
> Spread out like a spring-woken tree-wherein
> That hidden freshness sung,
> That certainly of time laid up in store.
> As when she played them first. But even more. (113)

The unfulfilled dreams of youth get fulfilment through imagination. Thus freshness appears on her face like a tree refreshed by spring. So for some time the reality principle is eclipsed by the pleasure principle. But as soon as she starts sailing on the boat of hope and happiness in the ocean of imagination her dream comes to an abrupt end. She comes to know that to recall the past is a kind of self-deception and must stop. Instead, she thinks that it is worthwhile to live in the present and accept whatever it offers :

> To pile them back, to cry
> Was hard, without lamely admitting how
> It had not done so then, and could not now.
> (113)

The poems which could make her cry in the past have failed to make her so at the present.

A similar kind of response to the present occurs in the poem "If My Darling." The speaker in this poem expresses his sense of disillusionment with love as a source of pleasure. He thinks that a woman in love always lives in her imagined world of the past without any awareness of the reality of the present. He wants her beloved to erase from her mind any such romantic image and to come to terms with reality. If in such a process she gets disappointed, she should take her disappointment as a part of her life and never feel any sense of loss. He wants her to be reasonable and not to be taken by dream or fantasy. He does not want to cheat her by false beliefs; that is why he implicitly advises her to shake off her illusion of love :

If my darling were once to decide
Not to stop at my eyes,
But to jump, like Alice, with floating skirt
into my head,
She would find no tables and chairs,
No mahagony claw-footed sideboards,
No undisturbed embers;

(41)

The speaker discloses his psychic framework to the beloved whom he finds innocent. He finds her as innocent as Alice in Lewis Carroll's novels. He warns her against her dreams and expectations of love by suggesting that the reality is at variance with her hopes and dreams. In reality, he implies, she will not find the kinds of comforts and luxury which the mythical lovers enjoyed; on the contrary, she will find herself in chaos and dreariness :

She would not find herself looped with the
creep of varying light
Monkey-brown, fish-grey, a string of infected circles
Loitering like bullies, about to coagulate;
Delusions that shrink to the size of woman's glove

Then sicken inclusively outwards. She would also remark
The unwholesome floor, as it might the skin of a grave.

(41)

Thus, as Larkin implies, disillusionment and crumbling faith in the pleasure principle are inescapable realities.

In the poem "Talking in Bed" Larkin's sneering attitude towards marriage is revealed. Larkin believes that even such a physical closeness as sharing a bed fails to bring the couples emotionally close :

> Talking in bed ought to be easiest,
> Lying together there goes back so far,
> An emblem of two people being honest
>
> Yet more and more time passes silently
> Outside, the wind, incomplete unrest
> Builds and disperses clouds about the sky.
>
> (129)

Lying together remains only at the physical level. But even in such a proximity the minimum requirement for the lovers, which is conversation, is not fulfilled. The pun on "lying" is very effective. Lying together is a "lie." Silence in bed increases the gap between the couples at the emotional level. The irony is that the bed, where emotional and physical ties are established and where disputes between lovers are settled, becomes in this poem a place for misunderstanding and emotional suspicion. The lovers are detached from each other by thinking of the grim reality which mars the pleasure of their union. This kind of situation occurs commonly in most of the love poems of Larkin's mature phase. The lovers generally find a lack in the concept of love as a spontaneous overflow of feelings aroused by the lovers at their first meeting. The "unrest" in bed in this poem is

caused not by the sexual urge but by the emotional strangeness even "At this unique distance from isolation." The couple keep quiet because they do not want to utter words "true and unkind." The speaker seems to say that truth is often unkind and that kind words are not always true. To speak words of happiness and pleasure therefore is to lie to the partner, but to tell the truth is to be unkind since the nature of reality is harsh and dreary:

> It becomes still more difficult to find
> Words at once true and unkind,
> Or not nurture and not unkind.
>
> (129)

As we have mentioned earlier, Larkin's inability to communicate properly because of his stammer took deep roots in his psyche and thus played an important role in determining his relation with the other sex. In many of his poems he deals with the themes of failure of communication and meaningful relationship with the other sex. In "Wild Oates" the speaker recalls his meeting with two girls twenty years ago. One of the girls was a "bossomy English rose," a symbol of perfection, beauty and a representative of the pleasure principle. The other girl "in specs" was plain, suggesting thereby that she is an emblem of the real. The speaker chooses the second whom he "could talk to." She is physically defective because of a weak eyesight, a defect which is parallel to Larkin's monoglotism. Although she is an inferior substitute for the beautiful one the

speaker chooses her because he lacks courage to make a proposal to the beautiful woman. To him the beautiful women stands for ideal and pleasure principle. Therefore, however attractive she may look, the poet thinks that he has a better chance with the less attractive one. But the dilemma in him continues. He is not completely satisfied with the real and craves for the ideal which he knows is an unattainable dream. His relation with the plain girl is broken off after seven years during which time considerable correspondence and even the exchange of rings has been done:

> And in seven years after that
> Wrote over four hundred letters.
> Gave a ten-guinea ring
> I got back in the end, and met
> At numerous cathedral cities
> Unknown to the clergy.
>
> (143)

Finally he fails to get either. His plight is that of one who dangles between the "real" and the "ideal" without any proper grasp of either. He fails also because he wants to have both the worlds: pleasure principle and reality principle. By hunting for the ideal which remains always a mirage he loses the real which is at hand.

Larkin believes, as we have remarked earlier, that love and sex do not fulfil one's expectations of pleasure. In fact, man expects happiness and satisfaction in sensual affairs but in real

life he is always frustrated in his expectations. The poem "Deception" gives a good example of the way the act of sexual intercourse becomes a kind of self-deception. This poem is concerned with the drugging and raping of a young innocent girl in London in the nineteenth century. Larkin has borrowed the incident of rape from Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor. The sex maniac, who raped the girl, is misled by an "erotic illusion." He had expected to achieve pleasure by his act, but the pleasure and satisfaction that he had expected never came to him. As Bruce Martin says, "If she was victimized by his sexual brutality, he was the victim of the illusion of total and permanent satisfaction which the attack seemed to promise" (47). Thus the attacker is deceived out of his expectation of pleasure from the rape. So the victimizer himself has become a victim of his uncontrolled desire which drives him to that crime:

> For you would hardly care
> That you were less deceived, out on that bed,
> Than he was, stumbling up the breathless stair
> To burst into fulfilment and desolate attic.
>
> (32)

In the frenzy of unbridled sexual desire the attacker has lost his reason and concern with moral and human values. He acts in the hope of getting fulfilment in life, but his act precipitates his tragedy. The speaker is fully aware of the futility of consolation:. "What can be said/Except the suffering is exact." Being a drugged victim she is unaware of what happened to her till she is awake. Therefore, she thinks that

she does not feel any frustration or disillusionment like the kind felt by the rapist. So there are two kinds of deception in this tragedy: one is the obvious pain of the victim and the other is the desolation felt by the rapist after his sensual gratification turns out to be bitter. In Timms' words, "the fulfilment of the rapist is in reality no fulfilling, but disappointing, a blundering into empty confusion"(59). Therefore the victim is less deceived than her attacker.

In the poem "Dry Point" Larkin presents the life-cycle of man, the process from conception to death, through a metaphoric use of the art of etching. The images in this poem are used on two levels: literal and figurative. At the literal level, the poem seems to describe the process used to limn an etching onto a copper plate; at the figurative level, it presents the process of man's development from his conception, through his birth, middle-age and finally to death. In the first stanza, "time honoured irritant" which is the instrument used for etching, symbolizes the male organ. The "bubble" stands for the seminal fluid emitted by the organ which bursts to indicate that the desire has been satisfied. In the second stanza the process of birth is described powerfully. "The wet spark" signifies the release of the fluid before and during birth. In the third stanza man is born and Eros has achieved his aim for both sexual satisfaction and continuity of life. But after his birth man finds himself surrounded by "ashen hills" and "salted shrunken lakes" which metaphorically represent the difficulties which surround him in his progression. The fourth stanza depicts the

end of life. The theme of this poem is the futility of sexual gratification since the bubble is "soon to burst." The nature of sexual pleasure is temporal and its consequence is futility and deception.

Most of Larkin's poems about marriage and bachelorhood bear a direct connection with his personal life. In his interview with Paris Review he says: "I remained single by choice and shouldn't have liked anything else but of course most people do get married and divorced too" (RW 65). In the poem "Self's the Man" the speaker prefers the life of bachelorhood to the life of marriage and sexual involvement which Arnold, his friend, has chosen. The speaker despises the married life for the inconveniences it creates. He suggests that the life of a celibate is superior to that of a married man. He presents Arnold as a pitiable person who is confined to the inescapable debris of marital wife. The money Arnold earns goes down the drain by the extravagance of his life. He sacrifices his ease, comfort and freedom as well as his money and energy for the sake of his wife:

> And the money he gets for wasting his life in work
> She takes as her perk
> To pay for the kiddies clobber and the drier
> And the electric fire,
> And when he finishes supper
> Planning to have a read at the evening paper
> It's put a screw in this wall -
> He has no time at all.
>
> (117)

In his depiction of Arnold the poet suggests that the so-called pleasure one derives from marital life goes waste in one's struggle to support a family. Arnold sacrifices his freedom to help keep the house tidy and to treat his mother-in-law. Yet in comparison to the speaker's life Arnold's seems less selfish. The speaker has only to look after his own self. But what apparently seems in the case of Arnold is not true. Arnold's care for the family is, in fact, a selfish/erotic act. As Freud says in Civilization And Its Discontents, "The founding of families was in some way connected with the need for genital satisfaction" (65). So Arnold's embroilment with his family is a sort of sexual gratification. But the speaker is completely immersed with himself, with his solitary existence. He does not want to face the worries and anxieties of a family life:

> And if it was such a mistake
> He still did it for his own sake
> Playing his own game
> So he and I are the same.
>
> Only I am a better hand
> At knowing what I can stand
> Without them sending a van-
> Or I suppose I can.
>
> (118)

To him the pleasure found in conjugal life is a kind of confinement and suffering. Therefore, he does not want to be deceived by what seems pleasure derived from sexual satisfaction

or from giving birth to children. He debunks Eros, who stands both for both sexual gratification and life preservation. In expressing such an attitude he thinks he is less deceived than Arnold.

Similarly, in the poem "Dockery and Son" the speaker, who is a single man, is contrasted with his friend Dockery who is married and has a son. The poem is set in a dream framework. The speaker is gripped by the nostalgia for the past. He is taken back to his Oxford days through imagination and day-dreaming. He meets the dean who could stand for the speaker's unconscious. The dean scolds him for his state of bachelorhood and contrasts him with Dockery. Once back in reality from such an excursion into imagination, he begins to compare himself with Dockery. Dockery had followed the rituals of life: he grew up normally, had interest in a woman, got married and had a child. But the speaker's life has not followed a natural course. He is unmarried, old, and has bypassed the process of life's continuity. He wishes to enter the classrooms where his many memories are stored, but the gap of several years has rendered him an outsider to those memories. Therefore he fails to establish any link with his past:

> I try the door of where I used to live:
> Locked. The lawn spreads dazzlingly wide.
> A known bell chimes...
>
> (152)

In this mood he catches a train and starts his journey. The train journey is a metaphor for the journey of life, a journey which is full of sorrow mainly but of some delight. Through his journey he gives an accurate picture of the places the train passed through. This detailed description of the journey indicates that the poet is a keen observer of the real world, not its fictive manifestations in dreams. The two rail lines remind him of the two different ways in life: marriage and bachelorhood. He feels that by choosing one of his liking, he has not done any wrong. To him, giving birth to children cannot guarantee one happiness and pleasure :

> ... Dockery, now:
> Only nineteen, he must have taken stock
> Of what he wanted, and been capable
> Of... No, that is not the difference, rather, how
> Convinced he was he should be added to?
> Why did he think adding meant increase?
> To me it was delusion. (152)

The speaker thinks that a bachelor is less deceived than a married man. Like Francis Bacon, he seems to think that "children are hostages to fortune." The family is only a "palliative remedy" which turns out to be deceptive. He seems to echo Freud's words: "The goal towards which the pleasure principle impels us - of becoming happy is not attainable" (Civilization And Its Discontents 38).

In the poem "Reasons for Attendance" the poet through his persona draws a contrast between the wild and boisterous sexual activity of the youth and the spectatorial enjoyment of the scene by a non-initiated. The speaker is invited by some young couples to an orgy of licentious activities. But he seems indifferent to them. He thinks that any such indulgence is a kind of self-deception or a temporal escape from reality. That is why, he prefers to remain as an observer from outside, watching the party through a glass window:

> The trumpet's voice, loud and authoritative
> Draw me a moment to the lighted glass
> To watch the dancers - all under twenty-five.
> Shifting intently, face to flushed face,
> Solemnly on the beat of happiness.
>
> (80)

He is fascinated by the pompous show of the party and the sound of music. As a lover of music, his attention is drawn more to music than to "the wonderful feel of girls."

> Or so I fancy, sensing the smoke and sweat,
> The wonderful feel of girls. Why be out here?
> But then, why be in there? Sex, yes, but what
> Is sex? Surely to think the lion's share
> Of happiness is found by couples....
>
> (80)

So while sex is the most motivating force for the young couples and the centre of their activity, for the speaker the music is the most satisfying experience. As Freud would have it, the "experience that sexual (genital) love afforded them their greatest gratification, so that it became a prototype of all happiness to them" (Civilization and Its Discontents 69). The speaker, by abjuring sex, becomes the critic of the Freudian pleasure-principle.

It becomes difficult for the speaker to adjust with the young since their kind of joy is instant and is bound to weaken with the passage of time. His sense of joy depends upon the displacement of pleasure from its immediate sensory source to its sublimated sphere. Therefore he is not drawn by sexual impulse but by the fascination of music, especially the jazz. The transference of his interest from sex to art, in Freud's terms, is a kind of "sublimation of the instincts ... when a man knows how to heighten sufficiently his capacity for obtaining pleasure from mental and intellectual work" (Civilization and Its Discontents 33).

In this poem Larkin's celebration of celibacy seems to be a vindication of his single life. Traditionally, celibacy is associated with deeply religious people who abstain from sex to achieve their higher goal in the spiritual union with God. But Larkin's concept of celibacy is different. He thinks, as we have seen in "Dry Point" and other poems, that the very act of sex is deceptive. Therefore, for him abstention from sex is a desired mode of existence.

In one of his famous poems, "High Windows," Larkin carries forward the concept of the desired mode of existence with greater reflection on sex. He is deeply worried by the decay of human values caused by sexual licentiousness in contemporary society. He attacks the rampant use of contraceptives which gives the young men and women excessive freedom to indulge in sexual activity without any inhibition or moral scruples:

> When I see a couple of kids
> And guess he is fucking her and she's
> Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm
> I know this is paradise.
>
> (165)

By using the term "paradise" in an ironical sense he seems to be saying that the young have displaced the actual paradise from its original location to its earthly perversion. Therefore he becomes sceptical about the future of humanity and its moral values. He is concerned that such sexual freedom will lead to anomie in society. His moral sense cannot permit such licentious activities. His anger and indignation at the state of affairs in contemporary society becomes highly pronounced in this poem.

Like the pursuit of sexual pleasure, another source of pleasure for the contemporary man is money. Larkin thinks that the problem of contemporary life is mostly the product of crass materialism. In the poem "Money" Larkin draws distinction between the austere life of the speaker and the extravagant lives of others. In an age of moral degradation and materialistic

pursuits people use money for all kinds of pleasure. The poet thinks that when pleasure is bought by money it loses its natural effect and becomes a commodity:

> Quarterly, is it, money reproaches me:
> 'Why do you let me lie here wastefully?
> I am all you never had of goods and sex.
> You could get them still by writing a few cheques.'
>
> (198)

As a contrast to those who have plenty of money to buy pleasure with, there are people who have hardly enough for the support of their families and for food or medical treatment. By reflecting upon this inequality in the distribution of wealth, Larkin comes to grapple with the source of moral degeneration and loss of human values in the modern age. Every source of pleasure including woman has become a marketable commodity. It is money which has spawned all forms of debasement in society:

> I listen to money singing. It's like looking down
> From long French windows at a provincial town,
> The slums, the canal, the churches ornate and mad
> In the evening sun. It is intensely sad.
>
> (198)

As a consequence of the materialist pursuit of man, sexual pleasure is reduced to a mere machanical exercise. In the poem "Sunny Prestatyn" the poet disdains the use of woman as an object of a seductive advertisement. The beautiful girl is

depicted in her alluring profile advertising the pleasure of a seaside resort named Prestatyn, which is shown as a dreamland of perfection. The speaker who seems to be a keen observer of things in life gives us a vivid description of the girl in the poster. All the images given about her in the advertisement are sexual and provocative. She is dressed in such a way that she instantly catches the attention of any passer-by who happens to look at her. She is shown kneeling before a clump of palm trees on the sand. The use of continuous verb "kneeling" suggests that her temptation is an ongoing one. The hotel which is meant to be a place of pleasure is seen expanded through her thighs to indicate that the happiness of mankind is caught between her thighs:

> Come to Sunny Prestatyn
> Laughed the girl on the poster,
> Kneeling up on the sand
> In tautened white satin.
> Behind her, a hunk of coast, a
> Hotel with palms
> Seemed to expand from her thighs and
> Spread breast-lifting arms.
>
> (149)

The language used in the poem is so frank that it suggests Larkin's resentment against the debasement of love and beauty in the mad commercialism of contemporary culture. The beauty of this poster girl who "was too good for this life" could not last long, for she was assaulted after two weeks by someone called

Titch Thomas who disfigured her beauty and left his autograph on the poster. Thomas might have been a sex-maniac whose attack on the poster could be taken as an act of violation of the woman's sex, or he might be a realist who in his attack seems to demonstrate that it is futile to be tempted to such cheap advertisements as surrogates of pleasure:

> She was slapped up one day in March
> A couple of weeks, and her face
> Was snaggle-toothed and boss-eyed;
> Huge tits and a fissured crotch
> Were scored well in, and the space
> Between her legs held scrawls
> That set her fairly astide
> A tuberous cock and balls.
> Autographed Titch Thomas, while
> Someone had used a knife
> Or something to stab through
> The moustached lips of her smile.
>
> (149)

Lolette Kuby's comments on this incident are worth quoting:

> His brutal impulse to degrade and destroy the beautiful "girl on the poster" is also an assault in defense of truth. Upon the ideality of the poster "the universal symbol of happiness," as Larkin calls Madison Avenue's use of the pretty girl, and the new

> Eden of the resort hotel, Titch Thomas draws in reality. Like Gulliver in Brobdingnag Land, Titch sees the hairs of the lip. As an artist of realism he puts the girl through an ageing process, removes the seductiveness of craftily designed minimal clothing, and does not permit the pretense of "natureless ecstasies." (130)

Kuby adds to the complex symbolism of the incident by suggesting that Titch's disfigurement of the poster is an act in commensurate with his assault on the ideal and defence of the real.

The poster which stood for illusion is replaced by another carrying the slogan, "Fight Cancer." This second poster symbolizes the grim reality which threatens every one :

> Very soon, a great transverse tear
> Left only a hand and some blue
> Now Fight Cancer is there.
>
> (149)

In thus replacing one poster with another Larkin substitutes the pleasure principle with the reality principle.

The same concern with the hollowness of commercialism visibly apparent in garish hoardings continues in "Essential Beauty," a poem about promised pleasure. Instead of happiness which he expects to get from holiday resorts, the speaker finds

only an illusory comfort. He gives us a picture of sad dualism of man who is lured by the glittering promises of pleasure from the world of fantasy while he is pulled by the drab aspect of reality. Various advertisement images depict the sense of the unreal pervading the real world:

> ... High above the gutter
> A silver knife sink into golden butter,
> A glass of milk stands in a meadow, and
> Well-balanced families, in fine
> Midsummer weather, owe their smiles, their cars
> Even their youth, to that small cube
> Stretches towards. These and the deep armchairs
> Aligned to cups at bedtime.....
>
> (144)

These images of luxury and opulence are only figures of fantasy of a dream which promise a prospective life against the reality of what it is in its drabness. Larkin himself, on his phonograph record, calls these billboards which promise a life of Eden as "infinitely debased forms of the Platonic Essence" (Quoted by Kuby 129). According to him, these billboards are used only to obscure reality and to hide its dark side by false promises. Thus the human situation becomes extremely painful when man is arrested by such false and seductive charms of the resorts. Therefore, Larkin feels, man deserves sympathy for his condition:

And the boy pucking his heart out in the Gents
Just missed them, as the pensioner paid,
A half penny more for Granny Graved Clothes' tea
To taste old age, and dying smoker sense
Walking towards them through some dappled park.

(144)

Within the scope of beyond the pleasure principle Larkin addresses such themes as the distortion of nature by scientific progress and the diminishing role of Britain as a leading power in the world. He choses "MCMXIV" as the title for his poem about 1914. It is the year of the breaking out of the First World War and also the year of the advent of modernity in literature. Larkin detests both the events. He becomes nostalgic for the rooted culture of the past and regrets the loss of innocence characteristic of the Edwardian and Georgian England. He yearns for the country life which was simple and pastoral before the onslaught of urbanity:

And the countryside not caring.
The place-names all hazed over
With flowering grasses, and fields
Shadowing Doomsday lines
Under wheat's restless silence,
The differently-dressed servants
With tiny room in huge houses,
The dust behind limousines;

(127)

He is struck by these images of transformation and realizes that the idyllic pictures of the past are irretrievable:

> Never such innocence,
> Never before or since,
> As changed itself to past
> Without a word - the man
> Leaving the gardens tidy,
> The thousands of marriages
> Lasting a little while longer;
> Never such innocence again.
>
> (127 - 28)

The repetition of the word "never" in the last stanza indicates the explosive anguish of the poet. While thinking of the absence of the values prevailed before the First World War from contemporary England, he becomes terribly anxious about the future of English tradition and culture.

Similarly, in the poem "Going Going" he laments the diminished role of Britain in the world community through the symbolic use of the denuded landscape. He is concerned about the fate of the people of England and tries to convince his readers about the importance of England through his emphasis on the useful function of the landscape in building a national character:

> And that will be England gone,
> The meadows, the lanes,
> The guildhalls; but all that remains

For us will be concrete and tyres.

(190)

In this poem he envisions England becoming the smallest country in Europe due to the rapid growth of the other European countries. He fears that it will become

> First slum of Europe: a role
> It won't be so hard to win,
> With a cast of crooks and tarts.
> And that will be England gone,
>
> (190)

Grevel Lindop rightly remarks that "Going Going" appears as one of a group of poems about the English past whose loss Larkin fears" (48).

Larkin believes that the harshness of reality turns people to superstitions. They run after any glimpse of hope which might take away their discomfort and give them some relief and pleasure. The poem "Faith Healing," as its title implies, suggests that human psyche needs healing. One may like to go to a psychiatrist or a spiritual healer at the moment of crisis.

In Larkin's scheme of things psychology has taken over the function of a faith healer. The women, in this poem, who have come to the healer for relief are in their middle ages and thus have accumulated frustration and sadness. They are suffering because their desires have not been fulfilled. The poet has given the minute details of the appearance of the healer and his

dress. His dress is black except for the collar which is white. This blackness may suggest a reality which is dark; the white implies that there is a ray of hope in the midst of gloom. The combination of the black and white suggests the inextricability of pleasure and pain. The evangelist is the only speaker, while the women are in silence. All were so much deprived of kindness and love that when the healer starts to console them they suddenly start to cry. All their accumulated desires suddenly find an outlet for expression and through their tears they articulate their repressed feelings:

> With deep hoarse tears, as if a kind of dumb
> And idiot child within them still survives
> To re-awake at kindness, thinking a voice
> At last calls them alone, that hands have come
> To lift and lighten; and such joy arrives
> Their thick tongues blort, their eyes squeeze
> grief, a crowd
> Of huge unheard answers jam and rejoice-
> (126)

Larkin sees in the appeal of the faith healer and the tearful joy of the women a reflection of the human condition. As Bruce Martin observes, "the healing which occurs is only momentary, creating an illusion of beneficent order which reality almost immediately begins to dispel" (83). Thus the poem is about the conflict between a wishful expectation of purgation of fear and the reality of the futility of such a wish. The

temporary relief which the healer has provided turns out to be bitter at the end.

The economic stringencies in a world ruled by materialistic values, Larkin seems to think, only make life a horrifying business. These stringencies are significant factors which determine the nature of life of an individual or of society. This is the theme of the poem "Mr. Bleany." The name Bleany seems to be a portmanteau combination of two words, "bleak" and "gloomy." The protagonist Bleany shares with the poet the state of bachelorhood and aloofness. So the poem can be read as a kind of self-watching by the poet. It is set in a form of an inner monologue in which the speaker who is going to occupy the same room Bleany had occupied before expresses his fears and anxieties. He is well aware that he is going to lead a similar deplorable life as Bleany led. Bleany's life is presented through the speech of the landlady who is absent in the poem. The speaker narrates what she had narrated to him: Bleany was economically distressed and his life was dark and miserable. Bleany's condition is suggested by the description of his room:

> ....Flowered curtains thin and frayed,
> Fall within five inches of the sill,
> Whose window shows a strip of building land
> Tussoky, littered....
> . . . . . .
> Bed, upright chair, sixty watt bulb, no hook
> Behind the door, no room for books or bags.
>
> (102)

The curtains are used as a device to divide Bleany's inner world from his outer world. But as they are torn and short the division between his two worlds has not been properly effected. The inner world intermingles with the outer world and both are dark, filthy and gloomy. There is only one window which is not enough to make the room bright. The 60-watt bulb provides only dim yellow light, the yellow is associated with sadness and sickness. The locality comprising poor people living in miserable conditions corresponds to Bleany's misery. That is why, the new tenant, who is also poor, agrees to take the room:

> I'll take it. So it happens that I lie
> Where Mr.Bleany lay, and stub my fags
> On the same saucer-souvenir,....
>
> (102)

The destiny of Bleany is the destiny of all poor people who work and yet are unable to achieve anything in life.

Larkin wants to tell his readers that one must live within the boundaries of the reality principle and not to try to cross them, since it is futile to try to do so. This is the theme of the poem "Wires." The poem works through the metaphor of cattle enclosed in a pasture having an electric fence. The cattle comprise both young and old. The old have acquired maturity through suffering. When they were young they tried to cross the fence. The young are pleasure-seekers who try adventures and to cross over to alien territories. The electric fence symbolizes the boundary between the pleasure principle and the reality

principle. The poet seems to suggest through this symbolism that it is dangerous to cross over from one territory to another:

> The wildest prairies have electric fences,
> For though old cattle know they must not stray
> Young steers are always scenting purer water
> Not here but anywhere. Beyond the wires
>
> Leads them to blunder up against the wires
> Whose muscle-shredding violence gives no quarter.
> Young steers become old cattle from that day,
> Electric limits to their widest senses.
>
> (48)

Lolette Kuby's comments are significant: "Electric wires, one remembers, are not only an actual enclosure for cattle (in the poem a metaphor for the Reality Principle), but also an actual enclosure, in the twentieth century, for human beings" (139).

The twentieth century witnessed the decline of human values in every field of life, in love, and in man-woman relationship, in the breach of the sacred ties of marriage and family bonds. This was caused by the dominance of material values as the criterion in life. Man's awareness of the transience of life and its values added to his fears and anxieties in an age which also witnessed the decline of faith in religion and divine values. What one eagerly seeks is unity and happiness, but in reality he gets only the opposite of what he looks for. Larkin's mature poetry becomes a meditation on this existential state of man.

Although man, as he seems to think, wants to cross over to another territory and to begin a new life based upon the pleasure principle which seems to promise some happiness, he is perpetually caught in the mire of the present like the cattle in the poem "Wires" and like Sisyphus must derive happiness from his state. One cannot therefore leave his world even if he wishes to. He is inextricably tied to his fate.

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