Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Corso di Laurea magistrale

in Scienze del Linguaggio

Tesi di Laurea

Philip Larkin

A Poet in-between the Movement and Modernist Writing and Music

Relatore
Ch. Prof. Marco Fazzini

Correlatore
Ch. Prof. Alessandro Scarsella

Laureanda
Chiara
Negri
877868

Anno Accademico
2019 / 2020

Indice

Introduction

> "I should be happy for you to set any of my poems (well, almost any) that you chose, but I am rather a heretic about such operations, in so far as I believe a poem - or at least a good poem - contains everything it needs, including music, painting, vocalising and so on . . ."[1]

The above-mentioned words are by Philip Larkin himself; he wrote them in a letter to a young Peter Dickinson who wanted to set to music one of his poems. The poet also believed that a good poem contained everything the reader needed to interpret it: "to write a poem was to construct a verbal device that would preserve an experience indefinitely by reproducing it in whoever read the poem".[2] Poetry can also be very personal: what a reader feels when reading it can be a totally different experience from that of another reader. However, in poetry, much more than in novels, we could say that to know the author is often very important: poetry is a very emotional form of art, can disclose something of its creator and therefore to know key points of their life and memories can be crucial to the understanding of it. This is why this dissertation opens with a biographical chapter. Larkin was a very complex man, born between two wars, with a difficult relationship with women and a precise taste for poetry, a topic on which he expressed very clear opinions. Nonetheless, while giving permission to his executors to publish whatever they wanted (meaning unpublished letters and unfinished poetry), he was adamant to his close relationships, mainly Monica Jones, that he did not want to be completely known by his readers: his diaries, that he kept for most of his life, were destroyed following his will. In a sense, Larkin remains an enigma: his public personality, the face he showed to those he loved, his own words in letters and what we see of him in his work can be contradictory. Still, biographies and private letters help us navigate his life and understand some of his choices.

A topic on which he appeared to be very transparent was his hate of Modernism. He, like many authors that he knew at the time, was believed to be part of a group called

---

[1] DICKINSON PETER, *Philip Larkin Remembered*, in *RSA Journal*, April 1989, Vol. 137, No. 5393, p. 309.

[2] LARKIN PHILIP, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982*, Faber and Faber, London, 1983, p. 83.

The Movement. One specific trait of this alleged group was that it was born as a reaction to Modernist works. Larkin, in particular, was very vocal about this: Modernism was too complicated, modernists didn't cater poems for their readers, they travelled very far while he lived in his loathing of abroad, they were upper class while Movement authors were working class, and many more details might be added to the list. However, if we inspect his writings closely, many contradictions arise: Larkin himself wrote in a letter that "the reader does not come [into his poetry] at all"[3]; many Movement authors did not speak as plainly as they wanted the readers to believe, rather choosing to address their peers, people often very educated on the topic of poetry; they claimed to be politically neutral, and they were in their poems, but Larkin admired Margaret Thatcher so much that students at the University of Hull "regarded him distrustfully"[4] and even vandalised a lift with a vulgar writing addressing him. This contrast between Modernism and the Movement is incredibly interesting to analyse, as I have tried to illustrate in the Second chapter of this dissertation.

My last chapter is, once again, based on a contradiction. Larkin loved jazz and was a jazz reviewer for many years. He had many intricate opinions about jazzmen and jazz singers and shared them not only in monthly columns for the *Telegraph* but also in a later publication: *All What Jazz*, a collection of the pieces he had written over the previous ten years with the novelty of an Introduction in which he expressed some very harsh opinions. He admitted that he had been writing, for quite some time at that point, reviews that did not reflect his true opinions. However, this not only sparked rage in those who had opposed views but it also created confusion: did he really tell lies to his readers? And most importantly: why did he do that? Critics are inclined to believe that once again this is the result of his aversion to Modernism. In fact, in the Introduction to *All What Jazz* (1970) he talks about a change in jazz and a point in time when jazz became modernist. But has there ever been a more "modernist" type of music than jazz? Many other interpretations have been given to his words in this specific context and the Third chapter revisits them.

Larkin, in an interview with the Observer, once said: "Deprivation is for me what daffodils were for Wordsworth".[5] It was true, but so much more came into play when he

---

[3] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1993, p. 72.

[4] Ivi, p. 483.

[5] LARKIN PHILIP, *Required Writing,* p. 47.

was writing his poetry. My aim with this dissertation was to explore how multifaceted Larkin really was, how the timeframe in which he operated influenced him and how his passion for jazz was as fundamental in his life as was poetry.

Chapter 1 - Philip Larkin (1922 - 1985)

George Bernard Shaw once said the he was “not at all interesting biographically. I have never killed anybody. Nothing very unusual has ever happened to me”.[1] Larkin really saw himself in that statement, repeating often how his childhood in particular was all a state of “forgotten boredom”. Nonetheless I believe it’s importante to take a look at his formative years, before going about the rest of his life, to understand his character.

1. 1 Childhood

Philip Arthur Larkin was born to Sidney and Eva Larkin on August 9, 1922 in Coventry. He already had a sister, Catherine (Kitty), who was ten years older than him and helped raising him.

Sidney met Eva in 1906, during a holiday, and they became engaged after only three days of knowing each other. They eventually married in 1911 and so began a sort of routine: Sidney would work, Eva would govern the house that he had set up as he wanted it. Eventually they had their daughter, Catherine, and Sidney decided they would not have other children until he obtained a promotion. Then they had Philip, to which all of Sydney’s attentions were devoted to.

The atmosphere at home was not pleasant for him: he was a weak child (bad eyesight, had a stammer) and his parents seemed always on the verge of arguing (“Bickering stupidly at home/my fault, their fault”[2]). He recalled: “I think they were not very sociable. My mother because she was too simple […]. My father because he was somewhat anti-social”.[3] For these reasons Larkin spent part of his childhood alone.

Sidney Larkin wanted his whole family to be educated, he brought them all to readings and shows, he bought them books. On a political point of view he shifted to the right in the Twenties and particularly praised the rise of Hitler, he even kept Nazi regalia

---

[1] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1993, Introduction XVIII.

[2] Ivi, p. 9.

[3] Ivi, p. 10.

in his office during 1939 until he was asked to remove it.[4] His father's strong beliefs "had the lifelong effect of neutralising Larkin's political instincts".[5] Eva Larkin became more and more stressed with time, probably depressed, and one day expressed the thought of killing herself at the dinner table. This certainly strongly shaped Larkin's views on the matter of family. In fact in a piece of his autobiography he wrote: "Certainly the marriage [of his parents] left me with two convictions: that human beings should not live together, and that children should be taken from their parents at an early age".[6] Jim Sutton, one of his closest friends, wrote: "At his home things were always rather frightening".[7]

Philip Larkin attended a boys-only grammar school, King Henry VIII School, from 1930 to 1939. The first years there were happy for him: school helped him escape from his parents and he made his first friends there (Colin Gunner and Jim Sutton). He started painting, became more confident and also started listening to jazz music, which soon became an obsession for him. Sydney Larkin supported this passion: paid for a subscription to the *Down Beat* and bought him an elementary set of drums.

Only in senior school, after 1933, he started to develop a passion for writing. His first few pieces where "banal", as Motion describes them in his biography. Larkin himself was very critical of them, but never stopped writing.

It was in 1936 that his father decided to take him on two trips to Germany. The trips are particularly interesting for us. Not only they created what Larkin referred to as his "loathing of abroad", but they explain the reason behind this concept. He was travelling in Germany during the rise of Hitler and he was doing so with his father, who endorsed nazism. He didn't write about his feelings during these trips, other that he felt uncomfortable not knowing the language. However we can assume that he felt ashamed, both because of his father and also because of his attempts to align with his father's beliefs in order to not cross him.

Back home, in 1938, he was granted full access to his father's library and later on discovered the public library, borrowing books everyday. From these years are his first attempts at poetry, in which we can clearly see influences from other poets, especially

---

[4] Ivi, p. 12.

[5] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014, p. 25.

[6] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 15.

[7] Ivi, p. 20.

John Keats and Aldous Huxley[8], who he later on started to mock. It was common for him, as states Booth in his biography of Larkin: "He admired, absorbed, parodied and derided writing of all periods, learning lessons for his own work".[9]

Side-stepping, fluttering, quick flicking,
Dropping like dots under the blue sky,
Skipping white under the sultry pall
Of green summer trees…
Darling, when in the evening
I am alone in the land,
When the low sweep of the sun-warmed country
Returns to me like a forgotten dream,
I could wish that we had been here as they.

- "Butterflies", Philip Larkin
(*Collected Poems*, 2012)

[…] I almost wish we were butterflies, and lived but three summer days - three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common year could ever contain […]

-John Keats in a letter to Fanny Brawne
July 3, 1819
(*Bright Star: complete poems and selected letters*, 2010)

In 1939 the war broke out. It did not affect him directly but his time at school became foreign to him and he knew he could be drafted later on in his college years. He kept on writing poems during 1939 and spring 1940. Before the summer of 1940 was over he liked some of his poems enough to submit them to the *Listener* for publication. One of those poems was eventually published in November of the same year.

1. 2 College and WWII

Larkin was off to College in 1940, on one of the two "closed scholarships"[10] offered by his school. His Oxford years, at St. John's College, were heavily influenced by two main things: new and variegated friendships and, most importantly, the war.

When he arrived there he easily became part of a group of friends who mainly bonded over jazz, listening to records in each other's rooms.

---

[8] Ivi, p. 31.

[9] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 32.

[10] Ivi, p. 28.

He also became part of what was called the English Club, a group of students and people from the university which invited famous writers to read their work. This second group particularly influenced Larkin and his writing: at this point he had abandoned the Romantics and focused on Auden, but through the Club he found the poetry of Dylan Thomas (whom he met and found "difficult to connect the man and his poetry"[11]) and W. B. Yeats which he deemed quite interesting. Both their influences changed his own style of writing.

He kept on writing, both poems and prose, and wrote personal diaries. He kept some of his writings private and others he showed to his friend Kingsley Amis (they met at college and became lifelong friends), a dozen were even published during his undergraduate years. He also started writing under a pen name, Brunette Coleman, in 1942. As her he produced two novels, a collection of poems and a fragment of autobiography, which he never completed.[12] As a matter of fact in that year he started writing more about homosexuality and lesbianism, many of his stories were in fact of a soft porn genre (later in his life Larkin would also develop a liking for pornography in the form of photos, which Booth believe "retain little power to shock"[13] nowadays) and even though frivolous they became a sort of self-revelation. He had always had problems interacting with girls and during college he seemed to have started doubting his own sexuality and started to feel depressed. This new genre, and most of all the freedom he found in writing as Brunette, seemed to help him in figuring himself out.

Many of the themes that we can find in his short stories are also present in later published works: *Jill*, for example, one of his only two published novels, is heavily influenced by his early writings.

Even though he never stopped writing, he had a fear of not being successful as an author after school: the idea that he would be "pushed out into the world, a complete man, in exactly one years' time filled him with terror".[14]

He did not only fear that, but he also feared war. He was completely positive that he would be drafted and so he would only attend one year of college. However he was not drafted, because of his poor eyesight. Even if it was good news he panicked: certain of

---

[11] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 42.

[12] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 86.

[13] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 10.

[14] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 78.

his future in the Army he had thrown away all his school material, so he had to re-buy and study everything in a short amount of time in order to not fail the semester. The war still affected him in other ways. On November 14, 1940, Coventry, his hometown, was bombed and he did not receive any news from his family. He travelled to Coventry to search for them but did not find them. Worried, he returned to Oxford and found a telegram from his father saying that they were safe. To be cautious, his family decided to move outside of Coventry, to Warwick. The horrors of the war never left Larkin and memories of the raids can be seen in may of his poems ('A stone church damaged by a bomb', 'The explosion').

During his college years two main fears are recurring in Larkin correspondence and works: the fear of being drafted and the fear of failing as an author. Neither became true. We have already seen how he did not have to go to war, next we will see his fortune as a writer.

1. 3 Life after Oxford

Larkin was very concerned with his final exams at Oxford. When they were coming up he started to tell his parents that he was not good at all, he might get a Second or even a Third. In the end he got a First and "felt like a millionaire".[15]

In 1943 he finally decided to apply for Civil Service, to become a temporary assistant principal, but was rejected. This gave him more time to work on *Jill*, what would be his first published novel: fresh out of Oxford he decided to write about "a very poor young man who goes to Oxford who is exceptionally nervous and rather feminine"[16] which certainly sounds familiar to us. He was writing about himself, partially. His hero, John Kemp, did not acquire the friends and social skills that Larkin eventually developed over time, but was very similar to him in other ways.

Nonetheless he had to find a job and, after an interview, on December 1, 1943, he became a librarian in Wellington. He did not really aspire to be a librarian, but "the orderliness of these procedures suited [him]".[17] "A librarian […] can be just a nice chap

[15] Ivi, p. 105.

[16] Ivi, p. 107.

[17] Ivi, p. 110.

to have around which is the role I vaguely thought I filled"[18] Larkin recalled, and this was confirmed by those who knew him as a librarian. He was praised by both male and female, his conflict with women and his misogyny from early years showing only in letters: "I hate women when it comes to choosing books"[19], he wrote. Two of his biographers disagree on this topic: Motion believed his letters, in which he expressed hatred towards women, while Booth gave more credit to his actions, memories of people who have met him and also bits of information that he let slip through his letters, less direct than the one just quoted, which depicted a much kinder man.

He found lodgings, a little private room with kitchen, bathroom and sitting room to share with two other men. He had never been independent up until this point: he didn't know how to cook or to wash his clothes, so "the idea of getting a flat for myself was, you know, beyond my imagination".[20]

During his time in Wellington something new happened to him: he fell in love. The girl was called Ruth Bowman and was sixteen when they met in 1944. They bonded over the fact that she wanted to study English, as he had done, and by 1945 they were an established couple. After Larkin's death Ruth wrote about her memories from the time she spent with him and described him as a loving man but with moments in which he was deeply depressed and had to retire in himself and shut her off.

The hopes of publishing *Jill* soon after he finished writing it (9.10, on Sunday May 14, 1944) faded quickly but he was contacted by the owner of The Fortune Press. In the end he published ten of his poems. He also asked him if he had enough material to publish as a whole book of poems. Reluctantly, after thinking about it for a while, he sent 21 poems under the name of *The North Ship* that The Fortune Press was to publish in early 1945. The collection of poems bore no trace of Larkin's personality: he concealed himself behind a so-called "Yeatsian style".[21] Ruth was present in his works, but she was transformed into a fantasy: this helped Larkin feel the freedom that is usually found in solitude but also to treat her like a Muse, she was "an unreal girl in an unreal place".[22]

---

[18] Ivi, p. 113.

[19] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 83.

[20] Ivi, p. 82.

[21] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 130.

[22] Ivi, p. 133.

After arrangements for publications were made he started writing a new novel which would eventually be published. At the same time The Fortune Press accepted to publish *Jill*, without reading it.

When he finished *The Kingdom of Winter*, which would later be renamed *A Girl in Winter*, he showed it to his friends and Ruth and while they deeply appreciated his maturity and his perfect style, the plot did not really make them care. This thrust Larkin into depression, once again, and he was, once again, saved by literature. If his Oxford days had been brightened by Dylan Thomas and W. B. Yeats, here he found solace in Thomas Hardy's poems. Hardy's poems talked of men and the suffering of men, which were very close to Larkin's own experience. Thanks to his influence he had another shift in his own style of writing.

In May 1946 Faber accepted *The Kingdom of Winter* to be published with a £30 advance, which was a very different experience from The Fortune Press since they had given him nothing. When *Jill* first appeared, at the end of 1946, Larkin was not happy with it: "a few mild obscenities"[23] had been taken out of the text without him knowing and the critical response was almost non-existent. He believed himself doomed as an author. Four months later *A Girl in Winter* was published and Larkin was much more uplifted. One reviewer wrote: "We look forward with eager anticipation to further work from the pen of this remarkable young writer"[24], and he kept that piece of paper with him all his life. He did not publish any other novel after *A Girl in Winter*, he started other drafts that he eventually gave up on. Despite believing novels were more interesting and complex than poems, he came to the conclusion that they were "just too hard"[25] for him.

For a while he had wished to leave Wellington, he didn't really like the city, and applied for other jobs as a librarian, but they all fell through. Ruth was anxious: should she give up her studies for him? Should they get married? Larkin was having the same thoughts: Amis discouraged him, and kept him distant from her and she noticed it, as she recalled in her memoir. In June 1946 he applied for a sub-librarianship job at University College, Leicester where he was accepted and where he started to work in September. Did this mean he and Ruth would split up? Even if the decision seemed

[23] Ivi, p.158.

[24] Ivi, p. 164.

[25] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 121.

simple by the way he spoke of her to his friends, not very kindly, on the day when they separated he said he was sadder than he expected. The same sentiment was reciprocated by Ruth, so they kept seeing each other, either in London, where she was studying, or in Leicester.

1. 4 Meeting Monica Jones

The three years he spent as a librarian in Leicester were very pleasant for him, opposite to the years in Wellington. Leicester was also particularly significative for Larkin because here he met Monica Jones.

Monica was a lecturer in the English Department, the same age as Larkin and soon would become one of the most important people in his life. They didn't know it but they had already crossed paths: they had both attended college at Oxford, but had never met. In Leicester they were aware of each other but it took them a while before they actually developed a relationship.

By the end of 1947 Larkin wanted to start writing another novel, but his depression was coming back, brought on by many factors: he had new digs which he didn't like and distracted him, Ruth was worried about their relationship and this affected him, he had started to feel something for Monica. While he was stuck with writing a novel, he had put together a collection of poems, 24, that would become *In the Grip of Light*. It was a misjudgment, put together only because he wanted to ride the success of his last novel. Faber, among other publishers, rejected it.

At the end of 1947 everything came to a halt: Sydney, his father, was ill. They had discovered cancer after an operation and he never recovered. He died on Good Friday 1948. This was a real shock for Larkin: not only he had grown closer to his father in recent years, he had always contemplated death but never faced it so closely. The death of his father changed him, or at least enhanced some of his traits: he was more sarcastic, more decisive about what he believed, a little melodramatic.

The death of his father brought on two decision: what to do with his mother and what to do with his relationship with Ruth. For the first it was settled that they should sell the house and buy one in Leicester so she could rent rooms, one to her own son, to be closer to each other. When she was settled, after a while, he would look for a place for himself.

For the other Larkin decided to give Ruth a ring, as a promise, that would not necessarily lead to marriage. “By promising his life to both of them, he hoped he might be able to keep it for himself.”[26]

Even while visiting friends to tell them the news, their relationship became more and more strained. Ruth pressed on the matter of marriage and Philip retreated. When she changed jobs and moved to Newark, he didn’t go see here there. In May 1950 he applied for a job at Queen’s University of Belfast, which he got. This meant leaving his mother (who went to live with his sister, Kitty, for a brief period and then on her own from 1951) and resolving once and for all his relationship with Ruth. He wavered back and forth on marriage until Ruth herself put an end to it. By the end of 1950 they were less than friends, with brief contact towards the end of Larkin’s life.

During this time he wrote thirteen poems that would eventually become part of his mature collection, *The Less Deceived*, and wrote a twelve-page play called *Round the Point*, in which he tried to reconcile his feeling towards women. The concept sprung from a letter he sent Sutton in which he told him: “[…] Above all they like feeling they “own” you - or that you “own” them - a thing I hate”.[27] This was the fear that he had with Monica, to do things as he had done them with Ruth, but he kept seeing her nonetheless, going together on holidays and visiting on weekends.

1. 5 Life in Ireland

Larkin sailed for Ireland in September 1950 to begin a new life. Queen’s “evoked and academic atmosphere more like Oxford than Leicester. […] He felt he had found somewhere familiar”.[28]

He made an effort to join the social life there: he started to dress like he had in Oxford, in a very peculiar way which made him look more friendly and confident. He made friends with some of the library staff, but to only very few told that he dedicated part of his time to writing. One of them was Arthur Terry, his companion in the Queen’s Chambers.

---

[26] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life*, p. 179.

[27] Ivi, p. 190.

[28] Ivi, p. 198.

He went home for Christmas 1950, to his mother and his sister Kitty, and also saw Monica before going back to Ireland. Even if both felt the need to be independent, they were starting to fall for each other.

In Ireland, however, he had met another woman: Winifred Arnott, to whom he dedicated his poem 'Latest face', written in February 1951. This interest, only on his part (she had a boyfriend in England), made him think again about marriage. There was never the possibility of a real relationship, because they had very different ideas on marriage: Winifred was very conventional, wanted a husband and children, while it was obvious that he did not. This gave him the freedom of thinking about marriage without it being a real possibility and therefore a burden, like it had with Ruth. We can see that in other poems from the same period, like 'To my wife' and 'Marriages':

> In 'To My Wife' (19 March) he says, "Choice of you shuts up that peacock fan/The future was", and goes on to say that marriage means exchanging "all faces" for one face which must inevitably become proof of "my boredom and my failure".[29]

In April 1951 a new collection of poems appeared. Since the delusion with the non-publication of *In the Grip of Light*, he had decided to ask a printer to make a pamphlet of twenty poems written between 1946 and 1950: *XX Poems*. The promotion of his new work didn't go down well and received only one, though kind, review in the *Month*, a Catholic journal.

During the summer he went to visit Monica and his mother, and when he came back to Belfast things had changed: Winifred had moved to London to study, he had to change accommodations and his relationship with Patsy Strang (the Strangs, Patty and Colin, were some of his closest friends in Belfast) had become so close that they had become lovers, as their letters suggested.

In 1952 Monica came to stay and they went on a little journey to Glenarm, but she was suspicious of the relationship with Patsy and knew she could be hurt.

In April, despite his "loathing of abroad", he went on a trip to Paris with Montgomery. Montgomery had been one of his closest friends in Wellington but their friendship was fading and never recovered after the trip even though they stayed in touch till Montgomery's death. The trip was not often spoken about during Larkin's life

[29] Ivi, p. 209.

but we know that he "settled for drinking and jazz"[30] rather than going to night clubs. When he came back from the trip, Winifred had also returned but she was engaged and so they stopped their flirtations completely.

He had stopped and resumed writing his third novel multiple times. It was called *A New World Symphony* and there are three surviving drafts, some longer than others, which essentially tell all the same story: Sam and Stella don't really love each other but everyone expects them to be married, so we have, once again, the dilemma of marriage. Motion, in his biography, believes that:

> Larking gave up *A New World Symphony* because none of the endings he could envisage allowed him to write about the regeneration he longed for. Whether Sam got married or not, the outcome would be equally miserable.[31]

On the contrary, Booth believes that this story was titled, in a draft, *No for an answer* and that the two protagonists were heavily influenced by Larkin and Ruth's relationship while the draft of *A New World Symphony* had a different topic and its protagonist, Augusta, was a actually based on Monica Jones.

Then Patsy was gone. She moved to England with her husband and their affair ended. At this point Larkin knew how freedom, not being married, not being in a fixed relationship, in a way also meant loneliness.

1. 6 The Movement

Without Winifred and Patsy he threw himself into old and new friendships: he reassured Monica about his affection for her and enjoyed the company of his friends in Belfast while making new ones, like Donald Davie, a young poet with whom he remained in touch all his life.

He went to England to visit Amis, who had recently published his first novel *Lucky Jim*. The visit was not completely pleasant: Larkin was jealous of his success as a novelist and also, since he had been involved in the process of Amis writing the book,

---

[30] Ivi, p. 222.

[31] Ivi, p. 229.

he noticed borrowings from his own life and works. In particular the book had one character named Margaret, which was not-so-secretly inspired by Monica, who was made fun of on page after page. However the novel was considered by all very funny, a Movement staple, and was dedicated to Larkin himself.

In 1954 Larkin published some poems in the second number of the new magazine *Listen*. Larkin didn't know much about the magazine and didn't think much of it, but its creators, George and Jean Hartley, had other things in mind. They were based in Hull and they wanted to branch out into book publishing, even if they were very precarious, and to publish Larkin as their first author. Larkin at last accepted ("provided it didn't cost him anything and provided we made a good job of it"[32]), but deemed fair that he sent to papers more of his poems in order to have some publicity to back up the release of the book. So he did and his reputation blossomed, also because the *Spectator* started to talk about The Movement a group of writers with very similar principles.

The Movement was not really anything precisely organised, Larkin always insisted on that. It was mainly a reaction to modernism. While the press made it sound like a tight group, Larkin had never met half of the authors cited as part of it and did not want to be associated with it. Later on he said: "Perhaps it is true to say that while there ins't a Movement, there is *something*, which may as well be called a movement as anything else".[33] However "as Larkin realised, whatever the drawbacks of the 'Movement' label, it gave his was a 'brand' image, and in the literary world, as elsewhere, this is a great aid to publicity".[34]

1. 7 Life in Hull

In 1954 he found an advertisement for a job as librarian at the University of Hull. He began the work in March of the following year, while he regretted saying goodbye to Belfast and his friends there. He regretted it even more when he found the lodgings

---

[32] HARTLEY JEAN, *Philip Larkin, The Marvel Press and Me*, Carcanet Press, Manchester, 1989, p. 62.

[33] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 243.

[34] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 206.

provided by the University: the first was “small, bare floored and noisy” and the second “the house ‘too small’ and the family radio ‘like a nightmare’”.[35]

Hull was a fishing town that, because of its harbour, had been partially destroyed by the bombing during the war. Years after his moving Larkin praised Hull in his poem ‘Here’, having finally found a place to stay forever (he died there in 1985).

When Larkin started working he had little time to enjoy the city: the University, and the library in particular, were undergoing a sudden growth and many changes. He was immediately thrown into work, having to design and to redefine the plans there were for the new library. His plans were presented, accepted and the works were set to start in January 1958, creating what is now the west wing. His job at Hull was much more demanding than the previous ones: in 1958 he became secretary of the Hull University Press, presided monthly library staff meetings, created the Bookshop Committee (to endorse student’s book-buying needs), sat on Senate and was a member of the Fine Arts Committee, among other things.[36]

About his social life we can say that in the beginning he mainly saw his work colleagues, but the poetic scene in Hull became more and more active: the Hartleys lived nearby and years later he would become friend with Douglas Dunn, “who after graduating from Hull in 1969 had been for two years an Assistant Librarian under Larkin”.[37] Outside of Hull he saw his mother, Eva, initially once a month and more near the end of her life, and also Monica. They loved each other dearly, he called her Bun (short for Bunny Rabbit, from a mutual love for the books of Beatrix Potter), but both did not want their independence disrupted so they kept seeing each other, without talking of marriage. As for old friends he kept in touch with Amis but their relationship was never the same and Larkin did not share as much of his private life as he had before, in case details appeared in his next novel: “we had inevitably had less time for each other during the last five years or so”.[38]

He also went to visit the Hartleys, as it was due to happen after he moved so close by. He respected them: their house was “frightful”[39], in his own words, but he liked

---

[35] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life*, p. 247.

[36] Ivi, p. 254.

[37] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love,* p. 434.

[38] Ivi, p. 208.

[39] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life*, p. 261.

them or at least respected them for their work and their purposes. They soon realised that he was very lonely in Hull and asked him to visit them often, and so their friendship began.

In 1955 they started the process of publication for his collection of poems *The Less Deceived*, which was dedicated to "Miss Monica Jones" and published in November of the same year. George Hartley had reverted to the old practice of publishing by subscription, in order to have some money to pay the printer and Larkin had agreed to a very loose contract that stated that once all expenses had been repaid, they would share the remaining profits. For a while this solution suited him, but by the Sixties he had grown so frustrated with it that in many of his letters he did not talk kindly of George.

The reaction of the public to *The Less Deceived* took a lot of time to come, but on December 22 it was included in *The Times'* round-up of the year's outstanding books which made it very popular. It was the turning point in his career.

Also in 1955 he went on holiday with Monica, but before that they stopped in London to talk with Robert Conquest. Conquest was interested in making Larkin part of his anthology, called *New Lines*, and the pair soon became friends. Larkin was pleased with the selection of poems that Conquest had proposed because "he thought they illustrated his range as well as his main strengths"[40] (for example: 'Maiden Name', 'Church Going', 'Triple Time', 'Toads' and others). The anthology was published in January 1956 and in the following two years sold 2,000 copies.

With fame came responsibilities: he was asked about interpretations of his poems and was invited to give lectures, but public speaking was not something he enjoyed. So much so that his secretary had a "dossier of various forms of rejection, catalogued from type 'A' to 'F'".[41] With fame also came something else: he had based his poems on feelings of disappointment, remoteness and also longing for a public hearing. Now that he was a successful author he was not disappointed anymore, he could not live a remote life and his longing for public hearing was satisfied, but maybe was the longing that he enjoyed the most and the unhappiness that helped him create poems.

However it is not fair to describe him as a hermit, as many did at the time, because he actually gave a lot of himself to readers: not only in his poems but also in reviews,

---

[40] Ivi, p. 265.

[41] Ivi, p. 272.

articles and bits of autobiography. Motion wrote that "he put almost as much effort into explaining himself to the world as he did into keeping it at bay".[42]

Poets of the 1950s was another anthology that brought him much success. It was published by D. J. Enright in 1956. That same year, on a trip with Monica, he saw the monument to the Earl of Arundel and his wife, which inspired his well known poem 'An Arundel Tomb'. While the poem ends with "What will survive of us is love", at the end of the draft he wrote "Love isn't stronger than death just because statues hold hands for 600 years". This ties into his personal life: his life with Monica continued, but his doubts about marriage never faded and his desire, or need, to be alone even increased, as did his obsession with death. When, in the same year, he moved to an unfurnished flat made available by the University without asking her to move with him, Monica took it as sign of declaring his independence. He stayed there, at 32 Pearson Park, for eighteen years, letting very few people visit him. His house was a solitary place and he liked it that way.

On April 24, 1956 he went to the BBC radio programme *New Poetry*. Despite his aversion to public reading he did not really like the voice of professional readers so he went instead, and later he was included in the series "Four Young Poets" made by the *Times Educational Supplement*. He was later asked to go to the BBC again, in 1958, for the programme 'Young British Poets of Today' created by Anthony Thwaite, which became a close friend of Larkin over the years. Thwaite, once he had left the BBC, became editor for many important papers (*Listener*, *Encounter*, *New Statesman*). He was the one who helped Larkin to start writing reviews for those papers, becoming his editor.

In 1957 two changes happened: the first backlash against The Movement happened, which made him realise that his fame not only made him friends but also enemies, and he employed a new secretary, Betty Mackereth, who worked with him for twenty-seven years and became really close to him ("I was like a wife, really. I knew everything a wife knows, more than some wives know probably"[43]). But why was he so comfortable with her, when he wasn't with other women? Motion explained:

---

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ivi, p. 282.

> Her war work, Larkin knew, had thrown her 'into a pretty rough world, and I sometimes suspect nothing since has ever made much impression on her'. This […] set her apart from the other women in Larkin's life, and made him feel relaxed and trusting.[44]

When 1958 came around, and the construction work for the library started in January, Larkin was busier than ever, not only in his librarian work but also as an author. Following the success of his BBC broadcastings, George Hartley had persuaded him to make a record of him reading his poems from *The Less Deceived*. When it was released, the following year, it was a success. Even if there could be heard a bit of his stammer, his voice "allows the emotional weight of his poems to emerge in a way which is dramatic yet intimate".[45]

He was also invited to London to discuss with Faber a second collection, and on that occasion (January 1959) he met T. S. Eliot. He was excited by the encounter, as he told his mother in a letter. Eliot recalled that "[Larkin] often makes words do what he wants"[46], implying he had read his work and liked it.

Back in Hull he started writing reviews, trying to promote authors that he admired (one of the firsts was John Betjeman). Betjeman himself returned the favour and they appeared together on TV and in photographs multiple times, with the public assuming they were close friends. In reality they were friendly, wrote each other occasionally but were not really that close.

When, in summer 1959, the works at the library reached the end of Stage 1 he did not have time for reviews anymore. He even met the Queen Mother, giving her a tour of the place, when she came to see to the opening of the library. That summer was particularly significant because, during a fortnight holiday with Monica, he found out he was going deaf. She praised the singing of larks and he realised he could not hear them. Going deaf would cause him a good amount of problems: not only for his work hearing was necessary, and this is why he started to use one and then two hearing-aids, but also because the minor disabilities that had accompanied him all his life (his stammer, his weak eyesight) already made him feel isolated and this would only worsen that feeling.

---

[44] Ivi, p. 281.

[45] Ivi, p. 287.

[46] Ivi, p. 291.

Lastly, by the mid Seventies he was not able to hear his jazz records anymore, depriving him of one of his favourite things.

By September the library was finished and the staff started to put books on the shelves. Larkin finally admitted "Librarianship suits me - I love the feel of libraries - it has just the right blend of academic interest and administration".[47] He had to wait three years for the funds to start Stage 2 but was not discouraged.

As well as his work life, his personal life was about to take a turn: in the span of two months both Monica's mother and father died and this increased his fears. He feared death and being confronted with the idea of mortality. But he also feared that Monica, now alone and with not many friends (her strange relationship with Larkin had left her incapable to form other strong relationships), would want to move in with him. So his strategy was keeping her distant in his letters and not once mentioning if she needed any kind of help.

Monica, on the other hand, even though she was disappointed by his behaviour (after all, they had been together for fourteen years) did nothing as well, hoping her passivity would bring him to her like it had in the past. Larkin, however, was starting to show interest for a member of the library staff, Maeve Brennan.

Their relationship bloomed in the first years of the Sixties, from friendship to courtship: Maeve was different from the other girls he had dated. She was in awe of him like Monica had never been. However, his feelings for her did not mean he wanted to break up with Monica. So, when he felt like he had to choose between the two, he decided to apply for a librarian job in Reading hoping that being far from them would make things easier. On his way to the interview for the job he quickly realised that his way of thinking was wrong: if going further away would do anything to these relationships, it would make him finally choose between the two of them. Needless to say, he turned back on his heels and never made it to the interview.

His story with Maeve, when it turned from friendship to more, became complicated. Maeve herself said that "my attitude to sex was high-principled, idealistic and not to be indulged in outside marriage"[48], and marriage was obviously out of the question for Larkin. This, in a way, suited him: in the seventeen years that their relationship lasted this kind of boundary created in him feelings of expectation and of in-between that

[47] Ivi, p. 294.

[48] Ivi, p. 305.

would lead him to write more. He was very affectionate in his letters to her, very romantic, but also very constrained, only showing parts of himself that agreed with Maeve. So much so that when she read his correspondence with others she asked herself: "I wonder whether I really knew him at all".[49]

After juggling the two for a while, he was overcome by illness. He collapsed during a meeting and, while he believed it was his new glasses that made him dizzy, it more likely was a sort of breakdown due to the tension of his situation. During his convalescence he relied on Monica more than on anyone else and she, hurt as she was for his previous behaviour, decided to buy a house a little out of reach, in Haydon Bridge. Larkin resented her at first, while she claimed a bit more independence from him (two years had passed from her parents' passing and she had been undecided about what to do, maybe hoping that he would want to live with her). But then he came around and saw her little house as a place were their relationship could flourish naturally. He still kept his other relationship, as if he needed Maeve's innocence and need to be taken care of to balance Monica, with her independence and her bawdiness that made her more similar to one of his male friends.

1. 8 Working with Faber

In the Sixties he also had much work to do for the library, as Stage 2 was approaching he asked for a library that could house a million books and for seating for 6,000 students, a big increase. Work with the Stage 2 Project Committee filled his life for six years. Committees were always slow and founding always proved difficult, but Larkin was very precise and "went straight to the heart of the matter, whatever it was".[50] Works were due to start in 1965 and to be completed in 1968.

Career wise he had become a regular reviewer of poetry for the *Guardian* (form 1956 onwards), but a new opportunity came in the Sixties. He was introduced to a music critic, Donald Mitchell, who worked for the *Daily Telegraph* and wanted him to become the monthly jazz critic for the paper, which he became in February 1961.

---

[49] Ivi, p. 307.

[50] Ivi, p. 322.

He wrote many poems during his illness and recovery, motivated by his struggle: 'Ambulances', 'Here', 'Broadcast' and others. His popularity increased, also thanks to the publication of *The Less Deceived* in America for the St Martin's Press, but also brought some people against him: literary critic A. Alvarez attacked him, while praising Ted Hughes, in the introduction to *The New Poetry*. Larkin did not like Hughes and when he came to Hull to read his poems he said that Hughes "struck [him] as appallingly bad read aloud".[51]

His fame increased orders of his works to The Marvell Press, that being a very small publisher was slow to respond to orders and in distribution. Monteith, at Faber, encouraged his remonstrations towards Hartley, making sure that Larkin's next collection would be offered to him. And in fact it was: on June 11 he sent the manuscript for *The Whitsun Weddings* and two days later it was accepted by Faber. He was offered a better deal than the one with The Marvell Press (an advance of £75, while the usual was £50; 10% royalties in the beginning that would increase up to 15% after selling over 4,000 copies), but still he asked for more and it was denied. So he accepted the numbers they had proposed and they started to work on their next project: republishing *Jill* with a new Introduction.

His relationship with Monteith became friendship. So much so that when one of his favourite authors, Barbara Pym (Larkin's sister had introduced her to him), found herself rejected by her publisher, he made it his mission to get her published again and felt comfortable asking Monteith, at Faber, if they would publish her. They rejected her as well.

He became part of the Manuscripts Committee, to which he gave the manuscript in which he had written most of *The North Ship* and helped in gaining manuscripts from many authors (Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, W. H. Auden and others), he never missed a meeting. He also was on the board of the Poetry Book Society, one of his duties was giving awards to young poets. He was very interested in helping other writers, as shown with Pym, sometimes responding to their letters or reading their work and sending feedback, but he did not like to read his own work in public so he never did.

He started to take driving lessons in 1964[52], passed his test on the first try and he bought a car, a Singer Gazelle, the same model as Maeve's father. The decision (he had

[51] Ivi, p. 329.

[52] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 293.

already taken lessons a decade before but had quickly given up on them) was prompted by seeing Maeve be escorted around by other men, but Maeve was afraid that the freedom that a car would give him would bring him more often to Monica.

On February 28 the thirty-two poems of *The Whitsun Weddings* came out and in England they were an immediate success: they dealt with ordinary things and were closely associated with the ideals of The Movement. They granted him the Queen's Gold Medal for poetry in 1965. On the other hand, with the success came also hostility and critiques, especially from figures like the previously mentioned Ted Hughes, and then Thom Gunn and Robert Lowell.

1. 9 Women

The BBC was interested in making a film about him, part of a series of films dedicated to the arts. He rejected the offer, in the beginning, but was then persuaded by Patrick Garland, a young film-maker, who promised him that they would not dive into personal matters and they would keep the same style they had with other artists, such as Pound, Graves etc, and his interviewer would be John Betjeman, an author he greatly admired. Filming happened between June 3 and June 10 1964, to be broadcasted on December 12 of the same year.

That year, while it did not seem in the documentary, was actually pretty stressful for his personal life: the conflict between Monica and Maeve was unresolved and Monica had confronted him about it numerous times. He soothed her with letter after letter, all reassuring Monica that he did not feel anything anymore for Maeve, but that wasn't true. When, in 1965, she found out he hadn't been sincere he tried to convince her that he had always told her that he "was no good: it was her fault she had not believed him".[53] This conversation would be a recurring one through the years.

In 1965 he also went to the hospital for a regular X-rays suggested by his insurance policy. This trip to the hospital revealed, in his letters, two things: his hypochondria and also his fight against animal experiments, which he would continue to talk about for the rest of his life.

---

[53] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 356.

Regarding his work as an author it was a difficult time. The Fortune Press had published 500 copies of *The North Ship*, his first collection, of which was not as proud has he had been. He didn't like the poems anymore and seeing them resurface so that The Fortune Press would benefit from his new fame, stealing his copyright, was not agreeable with him. He was legally advised by Monteith, who said that if Faber was to publish it he would regain copyright rights. Larkin agreed with the premise that he would write a new introduction and "correct a few misprints".[54] He signed a contract in September 1965, accepted an advance of £75 and the revised collection would be published in September 1966.

In 1966 he also worked, for the Oxford University Press, to a new edition of *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (the Yeatsian anthology was originally published in 1936). He soon realised that he would be delighted to take the job, but that it would also exasperate him: he did not like many of his contemporaries and he could not ignore some of them as he was used to do in his personal life.

For Easter of that year Monica came to Hull, which was unusual. Her jealousy was showing because she had guessed Larkin's feelings for Maeve, the emotional cheating. What she did not anticipate was an old friend of Larkin coming to Hull in November: Patsy Murphy (he had met her as Patsy Strang, but she had since divorced). While when they were in Belfast they had had a fun relationship, now she was "somewhat depressing as a visitor".[55] At the same time Maeve had found a new boyfriend, which made him jealous even when she said that their relationship was not important.

We must not forget another woman in Larkin's life, maybe the most important: his mother Eva. He had visited her every month for years, but now her health was deteriorating. She would soon start to suffer from Alzheimer's Disease and the first signs were showing, often making Larkin's recurrent fits of rage against her worsen. Nonetheless, he could not do without his mother and kept seeing her as much as he could.

In 1967 Larkin stopped keeping his diary for a while and Maeve said that it was because "his jealousy for her new admirer was too painful to write down".[56] He did not keep his diary but in that same year he wrote four poems in five months. They were

---

[54] Ivi, p. 358.

[55] Ivi, p. 268.

[56] Ivi, p. 370.

very ironic, sharp poems: ‘Annus Mirabilis’ (which is completely different, but the title reminds us of Keats’s ‘annus mirabilis’), ‘High Windows’ (which he had actually started two years prior), ‘This be the Verse’ and ‘Symphony in White Major’.

It was in November that he started to use an hearing aid, for his loss of hearing, and in the same month he wrote to his mother to tell her how exhausted the work in the library made him. Stage 2 was in its final phase and was very tiring, but it would bear fruit in 1970, when he received the Civic Trust Award because of it.

He was even busier in 1968: he became part of the Compton Found Committee. Joseph Compton, a philanthropist, had left the Arts Council of Great Britain £25,000 a year to be used for “poetry”. The Committee was to decide how to use that money. Larkin proposed to use part of the money to “install a writer for a year in the university”[57] so that inspiring poets and authors would have the chance to speak and be taught by an actual writer. This programme lasted from 1969 to 1975 and the writers selected were some more and some less favoured by Larkin: C. Day Lewis (poet Laureate) was the first one and Larkin was more excited about it than the students actually were; he was followed by Richard Murphy, Peter Porter, Ian Hamilton and Douglas Dunn.

He kept on writing his reviews of jazz for the *Daily Telegraph* and during this time he thought of compiling a collection of his articles that would become his book *All What Jazz*. He wanted to print it on his own but he wrote to Donald Mitchell, who got him the job at the *Telegraph*, to tell him he wanted the book to be dedicated to him and to ask if Faber, for whom he was working, could help distribute it[58]. Mitchell, excited by the project, proposed it to Faber, who agreed not only to distribute it but to publish it. They gave Larkin an advance of £200.

As Larkin became more and more entangled with Faber, his relationship with The Marvell Press kept deteriorating. Faber wanted to publish a volume of *Selected Poems*, which would include pieces from *The Less Deceived*, but George Hartley did not want to give them the rights. Furthermore, George and Jane Hartley were going through a divorce and Larkin knew she was the one actually running the publishing house and without her George would be less than efficient.

---

[57] Ivi, p. 379.

[58] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 315.

1. 10 Back to Oxford

The Seventies brought him some changes. *All What Jazz* was published in March 1970, with discreet popularity, he had to go through surgery for a polyp in July and in August went with Monica to Ireland, to Londonderry in particular. While leaving England was usually a burden for him, this time he "had enjoyed himself enough to regret having to restore his daily grind".[59] This is why he asked to leave Hull for some time, taking the time between winter 1970 and spring 1971 for himself to go to Oxford and work on the aforementioned anthology. In the meantime, he stopped working for the *Daily Telegraph*, he could not take on more work without making room for it, so in July 1971 Larkin was replaced by Alasdair Clayre.

When he arrived at Oxford the city was different from how it had been during his school days. After all, when he was there the war was going on and the scene had changed quite a bit. Larkin found it "frightening", and "it was not an old home to which he was returning but a strange city packed with surprising familiarities".[60]

"I don't find any kindred spirits there"[61], he said in a letter to Maeve. He went to dinners with academics but they were concerned by some of his habits, like the one of drinking maybe too much, so he didn't form lasting friendships.

He dedicated his time to forming a routine. He had specific places he went to during the day, like lunch in the back bar of the King's Arms or Beechwood for drinks. The most important place was, obviously, the Bodleian Library. The Bodleian was a copyright library, which gave him access to all the poetry that he could ever want, while in Hull he had to work with what they had there. However he was worried: he was forming an anthology based solely on what he liked and feared that it would not make a good book. Monica reassured him that it was going to be a good book. Their relationship was mending during this period. He gifted her for Christmas a book in which he had inscribed a poem. It was called 'Poem about Oxford: for Monica', about the time they had spent there together without knowing.

---

[59] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 393.

[60] Ivi, p. 403.

[61] Ivi, p. 404.

By spring he finalised the text and sent it to the Oxford University Press and the response he received was the one he had expected: could he please reconsider about some authors? He agreed to include Hugh MacDiarmid, because many people would expect him to be in the anthology, but none else.

He returned to Hull and he felt depressed. There were two main reasons for that. On the one hand, he felt superfluous in the library: they had worked without him for six months, why should they need him now? On the other hand, and on the private side of things, his relationship with Maeve was struggling. They decided it was "better if [she] looked for someone else"[62] and he told Monica that they had put an end to their affair.

As his depression grew he retreated into himself more, he purposefully avoided students, even more than he did before, and started turning off his hearing aids during meetings more often than ever before. He also started to express his political opinions: he had shied away from politics most of his life but in recent years he showed his right-wing beliefs more often and more forcefully. This we can see in his letters to Gunner, with whom he had regained contact in the Seventies: Gunner had written a book and Larkin tried to help him publish it, failing. Nonetheless they kept in touch, with Larkin following his father's septs and talking specifically about politics and all their prejudices.

Towards the end of the year he was not in the mood to write about himself, he had told Monica. So he produced three poems under the title 'Livings', which talked about lives very different from his own: the one of a merchant, of a lighthouse keeper and one about a university don. The trilogy was published by the *Observer* and while the people he spoke about are very different from him, they all share the same feeling of loneliness he was experiencing.

1. 11 Larkin at 50

His mother's health was still deteriorating and it was time for him and Kitty, his sister, to make a decision. She would be put in a home, since neither of them was able to take care of her, on August 4, 1971. She stayed there for four months until she insisted

[62] Ivi, p. 408.

on going home for the holidays and going back to living alone in her house from January. But in January 1972 she fell and broke her leg and she had to go to another nursing home for the time being. Larkin himself had to go to the hospital for some X-rays for the pain he felt in his neck and this new condition, a principle of arthritis, along with his mother's made him write the poem 'The Building', in which the building itself is actually a hospital.

1972 also marked his fiftieth birthday, an occasion in which he did not feel particularly joyful. Monica and Maeve gave him some gifts, and the BBC aired a programme called "Larkin at Fifty", which featured his poems and also interviews he had done through the years, but he "felt the programme marked an end to his poetic activity, not a stage in its development".[63] At the end of the year Barry Bloomfield, deputy of the India Office Library, asked if he could compile a bibliography of his work, and this seemed to Larkin, again, a sign of his life ending. Bloomfield reassured him and the work began. Bloomfield's research lasted four years (Larkin had given him free run over his works, not including diaries and manuscripts) and asked Faber for publication: the book came out in 1979 and was considered "a complete success".[64]

At the same time, in 1973, he was gratified by the fact that at Oxford Roy Fueller's time as professor of Poetry was coming to an end and both Monteith and Auden, one of his childhood heroes, wanted him to be his replacement. He refused, but was honoured all the same. There was even talk of him becoming Poet Laureate, which in the end became Betjeman, while he became Honorary Doctor of Letters at the University of Warwick.

That year, 1973, brought the publication of the Oxford anthology: *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, and with it its controversy. Larkin had not made enough space for the Modernists, he had "misrepresented the modernists; he had omitted people he should have included [..]; etc."[65] While he tried to write an Introduction stating that his was an anthology of poems, not poets, reviewers were not fooled: not only Modernists were overlooked but also American, Irish and Commonwealth poets were excluded. He included young English poets, like Douglas Dunn, but not the Irish Seamus Heaney, the American born T. S. Eliot, but not Ezra

[63] Ivi, p. 423.

[64] Ivi, p. 425.

[65] Ivi, p. 432.

Pound for example, or Sylvia Plath whom he admired and had spent many years in England. Booth believes that maybe his choices would have been different if "Monica Jones had not been so close to the selection process"[66], since some of those authors she openly disliked, and also that Larkin had "compounded his problem by insisting on the word 'English' in the title"[67]. In fact, in the Introduction he explains:

> I have taken 'twentieth-century English verse' to mean verse written in English by writers born in these islands (or resident here for an appreciable time) […] I have not included poems by American or Commonwealth writers […] No doubt in making this up this collection I have unwittingly broken most of these self-imposed limitations at one time or another.[68]

He had detractors but also supporters, and the collection sold all the first print (29,300 copies) and required a second impression of 20,000 copies within a year, bringing him £38,000.

When the talking died down, he sent Faber a manuscript titled *High Windows*, a collection of poems from the previous ten years. Larkin complained the collection was short, but it actually was only one page shorter than *The Less Deceived*, for example. They wanted to publish it the following Spring and they also started to search for an American publisher that would treat him better than the previous ones had: they had let his volumes go out of print and not really spread his name. They found Robert Giroux willing to publish it, but asking for the poem 'Posterity' to be omitted. It is a peculiar poem, in which Larkin had chosen to use an American accent that did not agree with the publisher. In the end they kept the poem and the collection was a success between both publics, American and English.

Another change in Larkin's life was that in an effort to cut expenses the university of Hull had decided to sell some of its properties, and among those there was the building in which his apartment was located. He was shocked. 32 Pearson Park, where he had lived for eighteen years, "had been both a haven from the world and a source for many

---

[66] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 352.

[67] Ivi, p. 353.

[68] LARKIN PHILIP (ED.), *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, Oxford University Press, London, 1973, p. V.

of the images which haunted his poems".[69] He found, through George Cole (whom he knew from the university dining club), a house to buy in Newland Park. He decided to buy it, but found it difficult to adjust to living in it mainly because of a series of little accidents: he lost the main key, sprained his wrists carrying a box, didn't quite like the modern washing-machine he had bought, etc.

He was still depressed and all these changes didn't help him. Even though with the praise of *High Windows* he was also awarded many prizes, he felt like his career had ended. The house, the praise, were sign of success but he had always been able to create when he sensed failure or conflict. Maybe this was the reason he rekindled his affair with Maeve, becoming closer than they had been in months, with Maeve sacrificing her religious principles.

This, them crossing the boundary they had had for so many years, did nothing good for their relationship. Even if Maeve did not mention marriage, Larkin felt their sleeping together made the obligation clearer, so he distanced himself from her again for a while but they never broke up. Thus an affair with his secretary began; she he had known for seventeen years.

Betty Mackereth and Larkin started seeing each other outside of the library in 1975 and he explicitly told her that marriage was out of the question: "I'd have asked you sooner, only I didn't want you to think I was T. S. Eliot - he *married* his secretary, you know".[70] He was, however, attracted to her because of her familiarity and the fact that she knew him completely: she had typed his letters, she knew about his use of pornography, she had seen him at his best and at his worst. She considered herself the Catherine Parr (the last, and surviving, wife of Henry VIII) of his life.[71]

Maeve was deceived by their relationship; she did not find out until after his death. Monica, on the other hand, noticed immediately but recognised that Larkin was doing that because while "he was devoted to her he needed to feel the door connecting him with a different life was still ajar".[72] Moreover she liked Betty and knew that he wouldn't marry her, Monica knew that she herself was the regular companion of Larkin's life so she let their routine continue without mentioning it.

---

[69] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 439.

[70] Ivi, p. 451.

[71] Ivi, p. 452.

[72] Ivi, p. 453.

In 1975 he received many prizes, culminating with the CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), for which Monica was present. The same year he also received a German prize, called Shakespeare Prize. He did not know it but the prize required him to take a trip to Germany (which he had visited as a school boy), give a speech and also be involved in establishing an exchange scholarship between the University of Hull and Hamburg. The approach to the trip, which was to take place in April 1976, was full of anxieties but it only lasted two days, the bare minimum to fly there, give the speech and come back.

Back home, he finally fulfilled something he had started a long time ago: the *Times Literary Supplement* asked him to talk about an author that he considered over-rated and one that was under-rated. For the second category he gave the name of Barbara Pym, whom he had championed for a long time. Finally this gave her the notoriety she needed and received many offers from publishers. A couple of years later Pym would die of cancer, leaving a hole in Larkin's life: he had valued their friendship, their letters, more than he himself believed and knew that she understood him when he needed someone to turn to.

The following year he was busier still: Larkin was asked to be one of the judges in a poetry competition, received many honours and the Associated Director of the National Theatre in London had prepared "Larkinland", a programme that mixed Larkin's poems and also his favourite pieces of jazz. Larkin appreciated it, but also made him feel like all those things belonged to the past and were far from his life nowadays.

1. 12 Eva's death and his last years

From September on many important events occurred. On September 1, 1977 another close relationship of his died: Patsy Murphy (once Strang). Once again, he was not only saddened by her death but also by his obsession with death. Patsy had been a "fun" part of his life, a light relationship, and now she too belonged to the past. Less than two weeks later Robert Lowell, one of his most assiduous reviewers, died. Finally, two months later, his mother Eva died in her sleep at the age of 91 years old.

Their relationship had become simpler since she had been in the nursing home. He did not want to confuse her with his many events and publications. His letters had been

brief and mostly about domestic things, his visits more and more frequent but they spent them mostly watching television together. To a colleague at Hull, he wrote: "It's just the thought of someone being wiped out of existence for ever that is so hard to comprehend".[73] Eva was cremated and later her ashes were placed beside her husband's.

Her death was deeply impactful, even if he did not want to show it (the day after her death he had an appointment that he made a point in keeping). Eva was "the person who had shaped his life more decisively than anyone else"[74] and now she was gone. He resented her, blaming her (as he had always done) for his personality: he was shy because of her, he had had problems with girls because of her, she made him furious during Christmas and holidays. At the same time, he needed her: she was his mother, after all, and all the conflict she created had inspired some of his best poetry, she was his muse in a way, or so Motion wrote in his biography. Her death made him finish 'Abaude', a poem he had started three years before. It was one of his lasts.

Eva's death was the last straw, combined with the status of his relationships and the change of house which had made him stall in writing. Between 1977 and his own death he only wrote eleven short poems and half of them were commissioned. His prose also became biographical, while he had tried all his life to keep his articles and essays separate from more personal writings, like the introduction to *Jill*. He became static in his life, not only in his writing. He followed fixed patterns and remarked his opinions, never changing them.

Regarding his relationships, a crisis was soon coming. Maeve had been surprised by his affection after her own mother's death, but was suspicious still of Monica. When, in 1978, "Larkinland" had been put on in Hull after its success in London, Maeve attended the event with him but he told her that she could not come to the party. She took it as a sign that he had decided that Monica would be his life companion, not her, and when she told him so he did not disagree. They parted ways, trying to remain friendly but both being deeply saddened by the end of a seventeen years long relationship. That same year, he met Andrew Motion a new lecturer from the English Department: future Poet Laureate and also his future executor and biographer.

The following year, 1979, marked his twenty-five years in Hull. He started to think about his achievements in those years, especially in the library department, and started

[73] Ivi, p. 467.

[74] Ibid.

to think about an early retirement but was refused one. They told him he "was material of advantage to the university"[75], which in a way eased his worries.

In the Eighties a computerised system had arrived at the library and this implied deep cuts to the library staff. Even though he openly supported Margaret Thatcher (which did not agree with many students at his library), who was responsible for these changes, he fought whenever he could to save jobs and spoke in favour of the library in Senate meetings. His actions and his words were diverging.

So did his thoughts on faith for a while: he declared himself agnostic, as his father had been, but he had recently met A. N. Wilson, a young novelist, who was very outspoken about his faith. They became close friends and with this friendship Larkin became interested in faith, mainly because of its ritualistic nature. He bought a Bible, which he read and deemed "absolute balls. Beautiful, of course. But balls" and also attended a mass with Monica. This did not, however, make him a believer.

Then, in 1981, he was asked by the University to write a *cantata* to be performed in Hull's City Hall on the occasion of the opening of Humber Bridge (which linked the north and south of the Humber). He delivered less than half the lines they had asked him (40, when they had asked 250), it was called 'A Bridge for the Living' and he tried to distance himself from it, not because he was not proud of what he had created but because it was not the sort of project he wanted to repeat. At the same time, as Chairman of the PBS (Poetry Book Society), he implemented many changes, including an increase in memberships. Both these tasks were prestigious, but he kept retreating into himself.

With the new year he retired from the Arts Council and, while more free time should have been welcomed, he was asked to do tasks he did not want: commissioned poems, reviews and also interviews. He gave in only to one interview, with Robert Philips from the *Paris Review*. Larkin asked to be paid 250$, as only Nabokov had before him, and the questions were submitted by post. He took a while to reply and his answers were not as satisfactory as hoped.

In 1982 he turned sixty, and Anthony Thwaite was editing at Faber a new collection (biographical and of critical essays from fellow poets and friends) properly titled *Larkin at Sixty*, which made him apprehensive. One of his fears from the past became true:

[75] Ivi, p. 482.

Noel Hughes, in his essay about Larkin's childhood, mentioned Sidney's fascist tendencies and said that "he [Larkin's father] had pinched girls' bottoms in the City Treasury".[76] Obviously Larkin objected to those statements and not only asked for them to be removed, but he also wanted a statement about his father and his German associations to be included. Hughes accepted the removal but not the new statement in his essay. In the end, both parties compromised: Hughes apologised and even asked Larkin if he wanted the essay removed, but they published it and at Christmas he sent Hughes a conciliatory card.

In June a programme about Larkin was broadcasted and well received. He had already been approached by the same producers (of the South Bank Show) three year prior but they had failed in convincing him. This time, he was assured he did not need to appear on camera and his interview was done on tape, rather than film, and he was given a fee of £2,000. The fact that he did not want to appear on screens only added to his reputation of a hermit, but was manly due to lack of confidence, shyness and maybe because of his ageing appearance.

Monica became ill in autumn, much to his surprise. She had fallen and cut her head. The following year, in March, she developed shingles and had to be hospitalised. Larkin did what he had never done before: he was so anxious about her condition that asked her to come live with him in Newland Park when she got out of hospital. He insisted it was a temporary arrangement but they actually never separated again.

His future was gloomy, having to take care of her so often. He cancelled all his plans besides the work at the library, cooked for her and washed her clothes. When the doctor told her to be more responsible for herself, however, he defended his position as her helper and continued to do so until she felt better. It was his chance to be devoted to her as she had been with him for thirty years.

He left her for the first time in July, for a two day trip to Northern Ireland to receive an honorary D.Litt. When he came back he prepared himself for a new wave of publicity for the publication of a collection of his prose (reviews, essays, introductions to novels), in November. The anthology was titled *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982*. Anthony Thwaite, at Faber, had had the idea back in 1974 and had asked Larkin to collect materials for the manuscript. He crafted the book choosing

[76] Ivi, p. 492.

carefully pieces that would “maintain the image of himself that he had created over the years”.[77] Once published, on November 7, it was universally acclaimed and the demand to interview him, for him to give speeches or to be photographed was high.

Despite the disgust for his appearance that he had developed over the years, because of his thinning hair, his double chin and his age, he was tolerant of pictures. He loved to take them of other people, since he had picked up a camera in his youth he had never put it down, and for himself he asked that they only printed the ones in which “I am not bald, I have only one chin, my waist is concave”.[78]

1. 13 Illness and Death

As soon as Monica had recovered, he had started to feel some more health problems coming. He felt pain in his left leg (which turned out to be a superficial phlebitic thrombosis), he had to use both hearing aids and in 1984 he caught a “virus infection” for which he was prescribed antibiotics.

In January he published the poem ‘Party Politics’ in *The Poetry Review*. The poem had been commissioned by the magazine’s editors. They were the last lines of poetry he ever wrote.

In March Monica announced that she was well enough to go back to her house in Haydon Bridge, but even Larkin did not want her to go. He had got used to her being in the house: “Our walking sticks hang side by side in the hall”.[79] Nonetheless she went there for a fortnight but then came back to live with him.

He had promised that, after the trip to Ireland, he would not accept other honorary doctorates, but made an exception when they asked from Oxford. He was very excited in the beginning but became more and more anxious as the ceremony, June 27, approached. In the end all went well.

On that same day, Betty, his secretary and lover, was retiring from the library. They threw a little party and he gave a speech, not mentioning their affair. Said relationship had had to adjust to Monica being in the house for the past year, and now that Larkin

[77] Ivi, p. 501.

[78] Ivi, p. 504.

[79] Ivi, p. 507.

and Betty couldn't see each other in the library Monica turned a blind eye to his occasional mysterious meetings.

Five years before the National Portrait Gallery had approached him to paint his portrait, but he had refused. They tried again, proposing a different painter, Humphrey Ocean, and Larkin accepted. The portrait took almost a month to complete and was done with Larkin sitting in the book room at Newland Park, where Sydney's collection was housed.

In December he was offered the position of Poet Laureate, which he had already been considered for years before. For months, since the death of Betjeman and therefore the vacancy of the place, there had been speculations on whether they would offer it to Larkin. He declined, and all he felt was relief.

Concerns about his health were growing and growing. He had many health checks and the doctors told him that he suffered from "acute depression and hypochondria".[80] Later on, they found a polypoid tumour in his oesophagus, which terrified him because it had to be surgically removed. Years prior he had written: "I suppose I shall become free at sixty [of his mother], three years before cancer starts"[81], and while he was wrong about the timing, he was correct in the order of things: he had lost his mother at 55 and seven years after that he had got cancer, like his father before him.

The doctors found another cancerous tumour in his throat and gave him six months to live, because it could not be operated. Monica decided not to tell him, probably worried about his depression. The night before the operation he had telephoned Maeve and Betty, and asked Maeve to come see him at the hospital after surgery. Someone else came to visit him and brought him a bottle of whiskey. We don't know who they where, but Larkin drank most of it and the liquor flooded his lungs, he was lucky to be alive.

He refused to see many of the people that wanted to pay him a visit. He allowed in Monica, Maeve, Betty and also Virginia Peace (the wife of the Professor of Russian, whose autobiographical novel he had read) and Michael Bowen (one of the few friends he had let visit him at home, because he shared his love for jazz). When the three women where present the situation was awkward, and made Larkin upset sometimes.

---

[80] Ivi, p. 513.

[81] Ivi, p. 469.

On July 17 he modified his will, which he had made ten years before: he excluded Maeve from it, keeping Monica, the Society of Authors and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals as his main beneficiaries.

When he came back home he felt a bit better, but neither he nor Monica were well enough to do mundane things like grocery shopping, so they asked for the help of friends. When the new term began, he did not go back to work, asking his colleagues to cover for him. On November 21 he missed Maeve's retirement party. He was relieved to not be there, though sorry. She, on the other hand, had started to doubt his affection.

Margaret Thatcher had admired Larkin, they had even met a couple of times: she had once misquoted one of his poems which, to him, was a sign that she had really read his work because "if it weren't spontaneous, she'd have got it right".[82] She had been understanding when he had rejected the Laureateship, but wanted him to receive an honour nonetheless. He was to be made Companion of Honour, but his health forbid him to go to London so they mailed the notification and the regalia.

During November he became weaker and weaker, and on the 29th he collapsed in the bathroom, his face near the heating pipe. Monica asked for the help of a neighbour, they called an ambulance and when the ambulance arrived he begged her to destroy his diaries. Monica visited him, and when at home kept waiting by the phone. He died in the early hours of the morning on December 2, 1985.

The diaries were given to Betty by Monica, because she was not strong enough to destroy them. Betty used the university's paper shredder, but kept the covers of the diaries. However, his testament was contradictory: he had asked for everything to be destroyed unpublished and than gave permission to published whatever they (Anthony Thwaite and Andrew Motion, his executors) wanted. They decided not to destroy his remaining papers.[83]

The papers only talked about him for a few days. His funeral was on December 9, but Monica, deep in her sorrow, did not attend. She did attend the second ceremony they had, on February 14, 1986, at Westminster Abbey. It was arranged by Monteith and some other of his friends, and the Dean agreed to let jazz music play, along with religious music.

---

[82] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, p. 434.

[83] Ivi, p. 446.

Monica decided on the inscription for his gravestone. It only said "writer", under his name and dates. She said: "*Writer*, not poet. He wasn't just a poet. He lived a *writer's* life".[84]

[84] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 524.

Chapter 2 - The Movement and the Modernists

In a brief article on modern poetry from 1957, Larkin quoted Samuel Butler: "I should like to like Schumman's music better than I do; I dare say I could make myself like it better if I tried; but I do not like to try to make myself like things; I like things that make me like them at once and no trying at all".[1] There Butler was talking about music, but the quote could easily be applied to literature. This was Larkin's main concern with Modernism, as he often remarked: they had lost the capacity to please their (elitist) audience. In saying this he was contradicting his part self, who had expressed a completely opposite idea, an idea more in line with Modernists: the poet should not think about the reader when writing. We will see how his opinions changed through the years and how the Movement was born, trying to embody everything Modernists were not.

2. 1 Modernism

The Modernist Movement came to life between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th: it was, plainly speaking, a rupture with the years of Romanticism and Victorianism. It enveloped all the arts: music, visual arts and also literature.

The most famous manifesto is probably the one from the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who published it in the French journal *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909. The manifesto was all about creating new art, different from the past, glorifying the idea of speed, one of the main ideals of Modernism.

For english speaking people London became the focal centre of Modernism from the beginning, not so distant from where Philip Larkin was born a few years later. In 1908 Ezra Pound came from America to England, starting in his apartment gatherings for avant-garde authors. T. E. Hulme, an English philosopher poet, was the leader of like minded literary groups and would write essays on the topic of Modernism. One of those is "From Romanticism and Classicism", in which the author departed from the "moaning and whining" of the romantics and proposed a "hard, dry literature in its

[1] LARKIN PHILIP, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982*, Faber and Faber, London, 1983, p. 82.

stead".[2] A few years later, in 1914, T. S. Eliot moved to England as well. He was already a Modernist and had come to these ideas by himself, without the help of the right and progressive environment. He became acquainted with Pound and later Pound would become his editor.

"Their desire to break decisively with Romanticism and Victorianism - often realised more in theory than in practice - became a recurrent feature in their public declarations".[3] One example is the manifesto of the journal *Blast*, but there are others and even if they are not poetry or novels they became pieces of literature themselves. However, what we should point out is that the affirmation just quoted is true as well for The Movement: they tried to break free both from Romanticism and Modernism, while not always being able to do it. We will see that later on in the chapter.

Modernism was soon followed by a side current called Imagism, in which poetry was as brief as could be and delivered an image to the reader. Another current, that instead wanted to break with the misogyny typical of this movement, is the one of Mina Loy and her *Feminist Manifesto*.

Modernism remained the main literary current from the beginning of the 20th century until World War II, when what we call Postmodernism emerges.

2. 2 Larkin's experience with Modernism in his youth

Larkin's literary taste was shaped first in his father's library, therefore with his father's favourite authors, which included some who became life-long favourites of the author (Thomas Hardy, Christina Rossetti, and W. H. Auden). Only later his father told him about the public library in Coventry, where they lived, and so he went on discovering authors by himself. It was his preferred way of reading, he did not like his school master and his assigned reading very much.

During this process he also started writing and he usually wrote according to the style of the poet he was currently reading and enjoying. He started with the Romantics, Keats in particular. Then, in 1939, he moved on to authors closer to him in time. Funnily enough, for his later rejection of Modernists, he wrote poems that were clearly inspired by W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. An example is 'Last Will and Testament',

---

[2] AA.VV., *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., London, 2012, Vol. E, p. 2056.

[3] Ibid.

written with his friend Noel Hughes, that reminds us of 'Their Last Will and Testament', by Auden and MacNeice; and again his very first two collections were called simply *Poems* as Auden's had been. In an interesting letter, though, he wrote:

> I am not trying to imitate Auden, I am juggling with sounds and associations which will best express the original vision. It is done quite intuitively and esoterically. That is why a poet never thinks of his reader. Why should he? The reader doesn't come into the poem at all.[4]

It is an important piece to read simply because what he expressed here, his not thinking about the reader, was one of the main points he had against Modernists, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter. Nonetheless, there he shared that same view. We will focus on this later. However, it is equally interesting that he said he was not imitating Auden: maybe he was not imitating him, but there was certainly an influence there.

He loved Auden as a poet for all his life, even if he rejected his move across the pond, but he certainly did not love Eliot, or his friend Ezra Pound. In fact he wrote, not kindly: "[…] Pound, for instance, I shit. Likewise Joyce, if you can call him a poet. But Auden, but Dylan Thomas…"[5]

During his Oxford years he met with many speakers who had come to the University to talk about their own poems or give lectures on other authors during meetings of the English Club. Two of those meetings were particularly important: in November 1941 he met Dylan Thomas and in late February 1943 he met Vernon Watkins, who had come to Oxford to give a lecture about W. B. Yeats.

Dylan Thomas therefore influenced his writing for the next year. In 1942 he wrote that, after having read and soaked in his work, he "quite changed style of writing".[6] Soon thereafter he published in the Oxford University Labour Club Bulletin the poems 'Observation' and 'Disintegration', which sound similar to Thomas' work.

The following year he met Watkins and with him the work of Yeats. He hadn't really liked what he had read of Watkins, but the talk the man gave impressed him and he wanted to talk to him again. He probably felt a connection with Watkins' life: it was pretty much uneventful, just like Larkin described his own, and this way he had

---

[4] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1993, p. 72.

[5] Ivi, p. 75.

[6] Ivi, p. 71.

dedicated his life to literature. Watkins was in his late Thirties and was "(as yet) unmarried, he lived quietly, and in peace-time he worked as a clerk in Lloyds Bank in Swansea".[7] He told his friend Amis, full of admiration, that he had never met a more charming man. Years later, when his first infatuation with Watkins had vanished, he still recognised his influence on his own work. In 1966 the reissue of *The North Ship*, his first collection from 1945, was published and in its new Introduction he quoted Watkins, and Yeats, as his main influences. In 1967, when Watkins died, he wrote his obituary and said "[He was] a genuinely modest, genuinely dedicated person, who had chosen, in Yeats's phraseology, perfection of the work rather than of the life".[8]

In the Introduction to the reissue of *The North Ship* we also have confirmation of the influence Yeats had on him. He wrote: "As a result 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".[9] So he distanced himself from Yeats and his ideas, but admitted that he was attracted by the musical way he wrote. So much so that what he produced in those years had "drowned the influence of Auden beneath the influence of Yeats".[10]

His friends at Oxford, especially Bruce Montgomery, did not appreciate this influence. Larkin remembered him "snapping, as I droned for the third or fourth time that evening, *When such as I cast out remorse,/So great a sweetness flows into the breast…*" (a poem by Yeats from 1933). And when Larkin himself sent the Introduction to Watkins, to read before it was published, he wrote: "I think Yeats was a false fire as far as I was concerned, but it gave me great excitement at the time".[11]

It's no surprise then that the fourth, and possibly major, influence on his writing was not a Modernist. The poet that he cited as his favourite for most of his life is Thomas Hardy. He was known to most as a novelist, and Larkin himself did not discover his poetry until 1946:

> Hardy I knew as a novelist, but as regards his verse I shared Lytton Strachey's verdict that 'the gloom is not even relieved by a little elegance of diction'. This

---

[7] Ivi, p. 83.

[8] Ivi, p. 84.

[9] LARKIN PHILIP, BURNETT ARCHIE (ED.), *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2012, p. 336.

[10] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 83.

[11] Ivi, p. 359.

> opinion did not last long; if I were asked to date its disappearance, I should guess it was the morning I first read *Thoughts of Phone At News of Her Death*. Many years later, Vernon [Watkins] surprised me by saying that Dylan Thomas has admired Hardy above all poets of this century. 'He thought Yeats was the greatest by miles', he said. 'But Hardy was his favourite.'[12]

Hardy was in all a Victorian man, born in 1840, and we have seen how Modernism had tried to break free from that style of poetry. Therefore Larkin came full circle: he had experienced Modernism, found what he liked and what he disliked, and had gone back to something previous, closer to his ideal of poetry but not as old as Romanticism.

However he had to confront himself with Yeats again later in life, in a way. In 1966 he was asked by the Oxford University Press to compile an updated version of Yeats's 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. He changed the title from "modern verse" to "English", which was closer to his liking, as we have seen in Chapter 1, and also that of the Oxford University Press, who deemed that in Yeats phraseology there was a "special overtone of experimentalism".[13] He effectively used the book to promote the kind of poetry he liked the most, even if it was maybe not the most popular. The *Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse* reflected what we just said about his taste. The anthology included 203 poets but a very small amount of poems by each. The only dominant figure, as expected, is Thomas Hardy with 27 poems. Eliot, one of the major authors of the time, has only 9.

2. 3 Origin of The Movement

2. 3. 1 Oxford and Cambridge

Donald Davie himself, in an essay, wrote: "For the last fifty years each new generation of English poets […] was formed or fomented or dreamed up by lively undergraduates at Oxford" and each of those had "picked up its Cambridge recruits only

---

[12] LARKIN PHILIP, BURNETT ARCHIE (ED.), *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems,* p. 337.

[13] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 361.

afterwards and incidentally".[14] This is an accurate depiction of the Movement, and also of other previous groups.

Larkin, Amis and Wain were all at Oxford at roughly the same time: Larkin started in 1940, Amis started then as well, but he had been drafted for war in the meantime, and Wain arrived in 1943 during Larkin's last year. However Amis went back to Oxford after the war and both Larkin and Wain visited the college frequently, forming the "nucleus of the Movement".[15] Larkin and Amis were extremely close during those years, Wain was less close to them but he recalled: "We were united in homage to Larkin; we waited eagerly for his successive books…"[16]

Other Movement authors that went to Oxford were Elizabeth Jennings, John Holloway and Robert Conquest, but the only one who could claim affiliation with the previous three was Jennings, who was friends with Amis after the war.

Who came from Cambridge then? Donald Davie, Thom Gunn and D. J. Enright all attended Cambridge but they did not become acquainted at the time: they all were there at different times, both because of the war and because of their different ages (Gunn was ten years younger than the others). Only later they met some of the Oxford alumni.

Their college is not all that they had in common, which would probably not be enough to form a "Movement" anyway. They were described not kindly by reviewers as "provincial, lower-middle class, scholarship-winning, Oxbridge educated university lecturer".[17] However the description was not far from the truth, since many of them shared two or more of these traits. Class struggle is an especially important trait that will be explored later in the chapter.

2. 3. 2 "In the Movement"

The first time the name "Movement" appeared in the literary world was in the *Spectator*. On October 1, 1954 an article, titled "In the Movement", originally anonymous but now known to be by J. D. Scott, appeared. Scott was the literary editor of the paper and in his article he put a handful of writers, not widely known, under the

---

[14] MORRISON BLAKE, *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, p. 29.

[15] Ivi, p. 14.

[16] Ivi, p. 15.

[17] Ivi, p. 56.

same group. In his article he listed: Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Thom Gunn, Donald Davie and Iris Murdoch. He did not assign Philip Larkin to the Movement, not at first.

While the term Movement was coined in the *Spectator*, those same emerging authors and poets had already been grouped in other occasions. The first time was during a radio programme held by John Wain (one of the Movement authors) in 1953. The programme was called *First Reading* and with it Wain wanted to "move a few of the established reputations gently to one side and allow new people their turn".[18] In it he mentioned the values of these new authors, mainly their interest in discipline (opposite to Modernism) and their interest in an older tradition in literature. After stating that, he had read a fifteen-minute extract of *Lucky Jim*, by Kingsley Amis, a novel that at that point in time did not yet have a publisher and by an author unknown to most. The programme had started a controversy. People did not like Wain's tone and Hugh Massingham, a radio critic, stated: "there was something faintly ridiculous in treating young men, whom some of us have never heard of, with the solemnity that should be reserved for Mr. Eliot or Mr. Empson".[19]

The other occasion was, only weeks before the previously mentioned article of October 1954, a review also published in the *Spectator* by Anthony Hartley (poetry editor of the journal). The title was "Poets of the Fifties" and in it its author stated that, without a doubt, there was a new emerging group of authors and it was the first substantial Movement of English verse in two decades.

In 1955 and 1956 two anthologies appeared, which were more defining for them. The first one was by D. J. Enright, a Movement poet himself, and was titled *Poets of the 1950s*. Enright compiled it while he was in Japan and in the Introductions he wrote: "[…] there is undoubtedly a new spirit stirring in contemporary English poetry, and before long we should be able to define that spirit more accurately and in greater detail".[20] He also made a point to distance them both from Modernists (they don't "flog the dead horse of Wastelandities") and Romantics, stating that a "New Romanticism" is not what they wanted to achieve, a remark that Movement authors kept on making all of their lives. The anthology consisted of works by eight authors (Kingsley Amis, Robert Conquest, Donald Davies, John Holloway, Elizabeth Jennings, Philip Larkin, John Wain

---

[18] LEADER ZACHARY, *Introduction: Origins and Ambivalences*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered: Essays on Larkin, Amis, Gunn, Davie and Their Contemporaries*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 3.

[19] Ivi, p. 4.

[20] Ivi, p. 9.

and D. J. Enright), each one preceded by a prose text written for the anthology by the authors themselves. The second anthology, in 1956, was compiled by Robert Conquest, it was called *New Lines* and it included almost the same contributors, with the addition of Thom Gunn. These two anthologies firmly cemented the identity of the group.

2. 4 Being part of the Movement

As we have previously mentioned, the Movement was not actually an organised group, not like others before them had been. An example could be the famous Bloomsbury group, which never claimed to be a group in a formal way but met every Thursday at Vanessa Bell's home. The Movement was none of that, some of the members had never even met each other.

But what did the authors first think of this "Movement"? We have a few clues on their reactions thanks to public declarations and also private correspondence. Conquest strongly denied that it was ever a conscious affiliation. Moreover, he revealed that in the first draft of *New Lines* he had written in the Introduction a paragraph rejecting the Movement appellation. "New Lines was just an anthology of poets I liked, regardless of sex or sexual orientation, let alone politics".[21] Wain himself said: "it is a fact that the very people who are know dominant were unknown before they became the centre of controversy […]"[22], implying that even if they claimed to not be part of any Movement, it had benefited them. Amis had a different opinion. Since his was the piece that was read in the first broadcasting he was pleased, while Larkin wanted nothing to do with it. In a letter he wrote: "take my word for it, people will get very sick of us".[23]

Alan Jankins opened his essay with this: "Denying the existence of the Movement, or denying that, if it existed, one had any part in it, seems to have started almost at the same time as the Movement itself".[24] Therefore not only some of them did not know each other, but some of them denied that the Movement ever existed. Each one of those authors had a different reaction to the news of being part of a group, which is very interesting, and they also had different opinions on it, some of those changed during the course of their life. While we now acknowledge that the Movement undoubtedly

---

[21] CONQUEST ROBERT, *New Lines, Movements and Modernism*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered*, p. 307.

[22] ZACHARY LEADER, *Introduction: Origins and Ambivalences*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered,* p. 5.

[23] Ivi, p. 4.

[24] JENKINS ALAN, 'I Thought I was so Tough': Thom Gunn's Postures for Combat, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered,* p. 187.

existed, because a new and distinct trend was present in their publications, it's interesting to see the authors' reactions to it.

Thom Gunn was completely adamant that he had nothing to do with the Movement, he didn't even know what it was. In a 1978 essay about himself he wrote: "It was around the time of the original publication of [my first] book, 1954 or perhaps a little earlier, that I first heard of something called the Movement. To my surprise, I also learned that I was a member of it…"[25] Thom Gunn maybe had the most reasons to react this way: he was the youngest member of the group, had already defied the Movement principles of loathing of abroad and Englishness, since he had gone to live in California, and had also started experimenting with his poetry, being closer to poets of the Sixties (but not confessional poetry).

In opposition to Gunn's experience with the Movement we have Donald Davie's response. The two were particularly close, like Amis and Larkin had been or more, but had different views. Davie was "probably the most sure that [the Movement] existed as something more than a journalistic PR operation".[26] In a later essay titled "Remembering the Movement" (which echoes his poem 'Remembering the thirties') he reflects on the Movement and explains how in "our poems […] you can see the same craven defensiveness which led us, when we were challenged or flattered or simply interviewed, to pretend that the Movement didn't exist".[27] The piece just quoted was from 1959, but it was already describing the Movement as something from the past. The main problem was that Davie was already developing out of Movement ideals as the Movement took root. This explains why, when the group of authors was deeply criticised in reviews, he agreed with many of the critics and only added that "the cultural phenomenon they represent as a group should not be disparaged".[28]

A more conservative Movement author, Kingsley Amis, was ready to pronounce himself part of it. Amis was believed by most to be the greatest novelist of the Movement, with many books published, starting with *Lucky Jim* (1954). One of his most famous declarations about it came from a letter to Larkin dated 1954: "There's not doubt, you know" […] "we are getting to be a Movement, even if the only people in it

---

[25] DAVIE DONALD, quoted by Ian Hamilton, in "The Making of the Movement", in *A Poetry Chronicle: Essays and Reviews*, Faber and Faber, London, 1973, p. 130.

[26] WILMER CLIVE, *In and Out of the Movement: Donald Davie and Thom Gunn,* in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered,* p. 205.

[27] MORRISON BLAKE, *The Movement*, p. 99.

[28] PRITCHARD WILLIAM H., *Donald Davie, The Movement and Modernism*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered,* p. 229.

we like apart from ourselves are each other…"[29], and went on stating what he believed about the work of others. In this fragment he not only admitted to there begin a Movement, but also that he was undoubtedly part of it and simultaneously that he did not really like the other members, apart from his friend Larkin.

Of John Wain we have already established that he was the one who put together those authors even before they were called the Movement. He scripted and hosted the programme *First Reading* in 1953, which was not well received and made him change his mind (or run for cover). He himself said "it was some months before the "metropolitan literary world" forgave me for thinking Amis a good novelist, Alvarez a good critic, and Larkin a good poet".[30] He also made the public doubt the existence of the Movement itself: in his 1965 memoir, *Sprightly Running*, he called it the "so-called Movement". But our doubts are cleared by a Thom Gunn statement that he gave in 1964. In this passage he explained how he found out about the existence of Movement authors and closed it with stating that to him the Movement did not exists, while proving that it was real enough for Wain:

> He [Wain] was extremely nice to me and had read some of my poems in Cambridge magazine. He said, There are some other champs up in London who are writing like you, we must all get together… I wasn't quite sure who those other chaps were… The big joke about the Movement was that none of the people had ever met each other and certainly never subscribed to anything like a programme. There were a few chance resemblances, but they were pretty chance.[31]

Elizabeth Jennings, one of the only two women cited as part of the Movement, shared with the other poets many aspects: she went to Oxford, where she had met Larkin, Amis and Wain (becoming close friends with the second there and the third afterwards) and her first two collections in particular shared Movement ideals, so the reason why she was included as a part of it are clear. That changed in 1958 with her collection *A sense of the world*, and from that point forward she distanced herself from it. She started to refer to the Movement as an "artificial group invented by systemizers

---

[29] HOMBERGER ERIC, *New Lines in 1956*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered,* p. 257.

[30] MILLER KARL, *Boys on the Move*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered*, p. 182.

[31] WILMER CLIVE, *In and Out of the Movement: Donald Davie and Thom Gunn,* in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered*, p. 207.

and newshound"[32] and in 1961 she stated that "it is not very surprising to find those [Movement] poets developing away from the group, especially when they were rather uneasily huddled together in the first place".[33]

Lastly, Philip Larkin first denied the Movement and then admitted it in his own way two different times. In a 1958 letter to an American academic that wanted to study the Movement, Larkin wrote:

> I expect most writers you have met will vehemently deny any but the slenderest connections with The Movement, and I am no exception. I have never met Elizabeth Jennings, Thom Gunn, John Holloway or Iris Murdoch. My acquaintance with Donald Davie, though friendly, is recent and intermittent. I have known John Wain for about ten years, on and off, but can't pretend to be in very close touch with him, though we meet occasionally. In fact, my only close associate in the group is Kingsley Amis, whom I have known fairly well since 1941, though we have inevitably had less time fo each other during the last five years or so. Our affinity is rather difficult to explain, since I do not think we have many artistic aims in common, but we usually agree in the things we found funny or derivable. I dare say you have noticed *Lucky Jim* is dedicated to me, which is a fair evidence of this, and commemorates a period of intense joke-swapping just after the war.[34]

But he knew, as did his interlocutor, that simply not knowing each other was not enough to deny the existence of the Movement. So in a following letter he wrote: "Perhaps it is true to say that while there isn't a Movement, there is something, which may as well be called a Movement as anything else".[35] When in 1978 Blake Morrison, author of *The Movement*, asked him about it he remarked: "I have still never met Thom Gunn and I don't think I met Elizabeth Jennings until 1970".[36]

Larkin's only active participation in the Movement emerged only at the end of the last century. Amis had asked Movement authors to put together a parody of their own poems entitled *All Aboard the Bravy Train: Or, Movement Among the Younger Poets*, and Larkin worked with him on editing it. The work was to be published with a

---

[32] BUXTON RACHEL, *Elizabeth Jennings, the Movement, and Rome*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered,* p. 292.

[33] Ibid.

[34] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 243.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

pseudonym, but no-one they asked to accepted it. While in it they made fun of themselves and what was perceived to be the Movement identity, the fact that they collaborated on the project reinforces their belonging in the same group. To read an outsider perspective we can look at Anthony Thwaite's "How it seemed then: An autobiographical anecdotal essay".[37] Thwaite was an outsider in the sense that, even though he was an author at the time and was extremely close to some of the authors in the Movement (with Philip Larkin, for example, of which he edited the *Collected Poems*), he was not a Movement poet. In his essay he recalled what he knew at the time of those authors ("Some names I didn't know at all") and his opinions on them. Having already seen them together in the 1953 publication *Anthology of Young Poets and Writers* by Peter Owen, in which some Movement poets were included, he "didn't have any sort of revelation" when he saw them cited in the *Spectator*. Instead he was irritated by the piece, that he found had a wrong tone, and to which he responded with a letter that was more of an outburst, defending the people mentioned.

2. 5 Characteristics of Movement Literature

During the years since the Fifties many critics and authors have studied Movement writers and their work, and from those studies some recurrent characteristics emerged. While many had tried to simplify Movement ideals they were actually more complex than they seem. Critics, Blake Morrison is the perfect example, have seen how Movement literature has lasted and has been revisited trough the years.

Morrison is the author of *The Movement*, an insightful book written in 1980. When he published it many of the people of whom he talked about in his work were still alive. Larkin himself would die half a decade later and many others would follow him soon after. But when more than twenty years later he wrote his essay "The Movement in the 1950s and Today", which is part of *The Movement Reconsidered* by Zachary Leader, he definitely reconsidered some of his positions on these authors with the perspective of time and of work published since.

The main ideals that Movement literature dealt with were: its opposition to Modernism and Romanticism, the loathing of abroad, the idea of neutrality, a literature in line with verbal hygiene, its relationship with romanticism and Englishness. All of

---

[37] THWAITE ANTHONY, *How it Seemed Then: An Autobiographical Anecdotal Essay*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered*, p. 247.

these characteristics fit the majority of Movement authors, but there was always the odd exception. We will see how these traits are important to them, why and in which way they were able to fulfil them or not.

2. 5. 1 Contrast with Modernism

The conflict between the Movement and Modernism was perhaps the former's most prominent trait, especially because it was reflected in all the other that follow. However, how did this loathing of Modernism came about?

The first reason was generational and tactical: they declared Modernist authors as old, almost all dead or soon to be, mainly in order to promote themselves as the new and rightful generation of poets, critics and novelists.

Other reasons were more substantial and will be discussed further in individual subchapters. To summarise them we could say there was: a social reason, since Modernist were seen as élite while Movement authors were middle class; a political issue, in which far-right Modernist ideas had pervaded their work, while Movement authors maintained neutrality; a patriotic reason, by which they saw Modernism as straying from the good English poetry of Hardy and the Georgians; lastly, the aesthetic reason fully supported by Larkin, by which Modernists had stopped writing to please their reader.

However true or untrue these claims we may find, we have to remember how in debt with Modernists all Movement authors were, especially Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis, and how similar they sound in some of their opinions. After the two Movement anthologies were published, a counter anthology titled *Maverick* appeared. In an essay it was possible to read this quote which seemed to be fit not only for Mavericks and the Movement, but also for Modernists and Movement authors:

> Many readers would be surprised to see that if they re-read some Movement poems and some Mavericks texts, the differences are not at all striking. One reason is that the ambition of both parties was simply to write poetry of a high standard (and both succeeded in they highest achievements). Another, even more obvious reason is that the really heated debate was going on in their criticism and (even more so) in private letters from the era.[38]

---

[38] RÀCZ ISTVÀN R., *Larkin and The Movement in Two New Books*, in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, vol. 18, no. 1/2, 2012, p. 545.

2. 5. 2 Loathing of abroad

Loathing of abroad is a specific expression that describes Movement authors, they hated not being in England and they especially hated America (at least some of them), probably as a consequence of the war and post-war climate. Larkin in particular only went abroad three or four times in his life and all trips made him extremely uncomfortable. "I think [the trips to Germany] sowed the seed of my hatred of abroad"; "I hate being abroad".[39] He has many poems that talk about frontiers or departures. An example is 'Poetry of Departure'. The reader will notice that actually it goes on accusing people of departing, disapproving of it as a bad move to make. The poem reads:

> Sometimes you hear, fifth-hand,
> As epitaph:
> *He chucked up everything*
> *And just cleared off.*

This is very similar to the accusation that Larkin moved to Auden, who left Britain for America in 1939: the result was a "low-pressure non-serious element [in his poetry]… directly traceable to his change of country".[40]

The same accusation was moved by other authors against another very famous poet, Dylan Thomas. Thomas visited the United States multiple times in his life and during his last trip fell ill, an illness which resulted in his death in New York in 1953. They believed these travels abroad to have "destroyed what was left of his talent".[41]

Nonetheless, there are exceptions to this attitude: Amis maybe liked America too much and had a great time whenever he was there (he lived in Princeton for a year, as a lecturer there and in other northern universities), deciding to come back to England only to "avoid the fate of Dylan Thomas and be able to write again".[42] The same amount of time, or even more, was spent by Davie (occasionally) and Gunn (practically all of his

---

[39] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, p. 26.

[40] MORRISON BLAKE, *'Still Going On, All of It': The Movement in the 1950s and the Movement Today*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered*, p. 25.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

adult life) in California. Some of them even despised American literature, but they read it and more than once benefited from it. As Morrison put it:

> Would Jim Dixon have been so eloquently, slangily denunciatory of Professor Welch and his phoney values without the example of J. D. Salinger, whose *Catcher in the Rye*, published three years before *Lucky Jim*, had popularised the anti-pony stance? Would Philip Larkin have allowed himself to fire all his big guns at the end of 'Church going' had he not read Robert Frost's poem 'Directive' […]?[43]

This ideal of insularity is a consequence of the Movement anti-Modernism. While Modernism was all about breaking boundaries and going far, the Movement was its opposite. Not really because abroad, or America, were bad places. It had more to do with the fact that they were nationalists, that England was their home and they liked it there, as states Amis novel *I Like it Here*. Moreover, we are not talking about Britain in general, but of England in particular. Wales, Scotland and Ireland were considered as "abroad" for the most part. In 1955 Enright published his first novel, *Academic Year*, which was actually set in Egypt. However its protagonist, which was all in all English, did not even notice his surroundings: the Mediterranean "was a bit of nature, and he was interested in the *man*".[44]

"Being steadfastly British" said Morrison, "indeed English […], the Movement felt honour-bound to be critical of aspects of American life and art. But in the end it was too open-minded - too interested in its own good - to resist them".[45]

2. 5. 3 Englishness and social classes

Coming directly from their despise of abroad, Englishness became a recurrent Movement characteristic. Being British could also mean coming from Scotland, Wales or Ireland, but being English was only that, and was automatically considered a "good" quality. However, to speak of "England or Britain or Great Britain or the British Isles or the United Kingdom 'as though forty-five million souls could somehow be treated as a unit' […] is foolish for a number of reasons, notably that 'England [is] notoriously two

---

[43] Ivi, p. 26.

[44] LEADER ZACHARY, *Movement Fiction and Englishness*, in *The Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2013, p. 264.

[45] Ibid.

nations, the rich and the poor'"[46], as Orwell put is in his 1940 work "England Your England".

Therefore, social class became a Movement concern, still related to the concept of Englishness. In 1940 the middle class had an upward and downward extension. The downward extension was what preoccupied Movement writers: they already came from lower-middle and upper-lower classes, to extend the middle class further down was to diminish its value. Again, Orwell reflected on this and gave one explanation: they could despise the situation or leave England as some had done, but it was still their nation and "no Englishman could sincerely believe that this is the worst possible world"[47], which is connected to the reason why, we will see it later, they rejected extreme political positions.

Where do Movement writers express Englishness and talk about social classes? Mainly in novels. Even authors that are best known for their poetry, like Larkin, actually published novels first and there it's easier for us to notice these details.

If we take *Jill*, Larkin's first novel that was published in 1946, it showed us a main character, John Kemp, who was similar to Larkin himself for certain aspects. He was away at Oxford where he made up a sister, that then became an "almost-girlfriend", called Jill. He wrote letters to her:

> His pens hung over the word 'Kemp'. He did not, he found, want to connect her with himself that way. What should he call her? After a moment he finished it: Miss Jill Bradley. Bradley was a nice name, it was English, it was like saddle-leather and stables.[48]

The reason that made Jill the perfect girl, a wholesome girl, is that she was English and embodied English values. John Kemp himself was extremely English: he was shy and reserved and he was not deceived by love. When a girl named Gillian appeared into his life but he got rejected, he proclaimed love as dead ("love died, whether fulfilled or unfulfilled").

In Larkin's second novel, *A Girl in Winter* (1947), national identity was inherently a central theme. The protagonist, Katherine, had come to England from a foreign country and the novel reflected on what was considered English time and time again. When she

---

[46] Ivi, p. 250.

[47] Ivi, p. 251.

[48] LARKIN PHILIP, *Jill*, Faber and Faber, London, 2005, p. 131.

spent her first summer in the country, in Oxford, the family she spent it with was "nothing if not English", they boy she wrote to was "the perfect Englishman".

Katherine and John Kemp were very similar in a way: "their shyness is an extreme form of reserve or repression, proverbially English qualities in twentieth-century writing (Katherine is a very English foreigner)".[49] Moreover, Katherine was also, like Kemp had been, less deceived: in the end she realised that she did not care for Robin, whom she once loved, and love was, once again, dead.

Even though Larkin was not a comic novelist, a role occupied by Kingsley Amis in the group, his novels have some comic elements, again a peculiarity of Movement literature. More than a Movement characteristic this was, once more, an English characteristic.

Class anxiety and social constraint were very much present in John Wain's *Hurry on Down* (1953). The protagonist, Charles Lumley, was unhappy and the reason for that was his social class, the constraint and repression that came from it: he wanted to rise above it but his upbringing prevented him from doing it. Class struggle is important because it was a struggle that Movement authors themselves had had, but at the same time that made them more similar to their readers, closer in a way:

> [The Movement's] sociological importance is very great, and it consists in this - that for the first time a challenge is thrown down, not by individuals like Lawrence, Arnold Bennett, Dylan Thomas, but by a more or less coherent group, to the monopoly of British culture sustained for generations by the London haut-bourgeois.[50]

In another Wain's novel, *Living in the present* (1955), understandable, clear writing and simplicity were considered English virtues. It is easy to understand why: they were in contrast with the obscurity of Modernist writing, a quality that they did not appreciate, Larkin in particular. In Larkin's "The Pleasure Principle" essay he claimed that "the modern poetic audience, when it is not taking in its own washing, is a *student* audience, pure and simple", implying that modern poetry was so difficult that authors had to explain it and audiences couldn't simply read it and enjoy it, but they had to study to understand it.

---

[49] LEADER ZACHARY, *Movement Fiction and Englishness*, p. 257.

[50] MORRISON BLAKE, *The Movement*, p. 58.

To social class was added what was called the metropolitan bias: where you lived classified you. If you lived in London, like famous literary groups had (the Bloomsbury group lived in Bloomsbury), you were considered upper class, like Modernists had been; if you lived anywhere else, you were considered provincial and less important. Movement writers lived everywhere but London, and they fought against this prejudice. It did not help their cause, however, their loathing of abroad (clearly shown in *Academic year*, by Enright), which made them seem even more provincial.

All these traits that we have discussed up until know are present in the best known Movement novel, *Lucky Jim*, by Kingsley Amis (1954), which is the perfect example of what we mean by Englishness: class anxiety, Jim himself came from a lower-middle class; he repressed his feelings; the girl he loved was wholesome and unaffected; some characters were self-performers, bringing a comic element to the mix; on top of that the writing style was straightforward and clear to the reader.

2. 5. 4 Neutrality

In the Fifties, after the war, there was a period of calm and quiet. It was a period in which even poets did not express much of their political opinions, once again in contrast with what their predecessors had done. While Modernists were very vocal about politics, Movement authors assumed, for a while in their most influential years, a neutral tone. Davie himself, in his poem 'Remembering the Thirties', wrote: "A neutral tone is nowadays preferred"; Gunn wrote: "The agony of the time is that there is no agony".[51]

> As the extent of Nazi and Soviet atrocities became known int the decade after the war, the dangers posed by extreme or totalitarian ideologies, whether extreme left of right, contributed to the moderation of Movement politics and to pride in English moderation.[52]

Blake Morrison went even to the extent of calling this neutrality, which generated in the poets a certain uncertainty, Negative Capability, making the connection of the Movement with the Romantics more and more explicit.

---

[51] MORRISON BLAKE, *'Still Going On, All of It': The Movement in the 1950s and the Movement Today*, p. 29.

[52] LEADER ZACHARY, *Movement Fiction and Englishness*, p. 252.

These poets and writers have been long accused of being fascists and misogynists and racists, but if we read their work we will find no trace of what may have been their beliefs. Poetry and writing was a "prejudice-free zone; a space for exploring ideas and feelings, for entertaining doubts and mysteries".[53]

Did this neutrality do them any good? It did, and it didn't. Larkin embodied this perfectly. While he had far-right prejudices, rather than full fledged opinions (as shown in letters to friends and family), they did not come into his work as a writer. The feeling of uncertainty was expressed over and over in his poems. In 'Church Going' he wrote: "someone would know, I don't". But if on the one end they themselves were disgusted by them not taking sides, by them not having the courage perhaps to do that, it still made them more and more relatable to the reader. Everyone knew that feeling of uncertainty. Moreover, the characters on the page were not necessarily always their better selves but they were common people, exactly what the Movement wanted them to be.

2. 5. 5 Verbal hygiene

Verbal hygiene ties in with neutrality. If neutrality has to do with opinions, verbal hygiene has to do with words. However, it is not to be considered a linguistic theory, rather it has been argued that more than one Movement writer shared linguistic concerns. The main authors we can discuss are Donald Davie, the theorist of the group, Kingsley Amis and even D. J. Enright to an extent. The exception here is Philip Larkin, who was not really concerned about language and made few remarks about it. If he did express ideas about language, it was mainly in interviews when he was specifically asked about it or in reviews of other's works.

But what is verbal hygiene? "An umbrella term denoting all the discourses and practices through which people attempt to 'clean up' language and make it conform to their ideals of what it should be".[54]

Once again a connection to another typical Movement concern can be made: language and social class are heavily linked. We have already established that the majority of these authors came from the lower-middle class, but thanks to the reforms

---

[53] MORRISON BLAKE, *'Still Going On, All of It': The Movement in the 1950s and the Movement Today,* p. 32.

[54] CAMERON DEBORAH, *'The Virtues of Good Prose': Verbal Hygiene and the Movement*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered*, p. 141.

from the Forties they had been able to attend Cambridge and Oxford, thus entering in etile groups. If we look back, in 1921 a report called the "Newbolt report on English teaching in schools" had been approved. Its aim was to eradicate the non-standard dialects that were common between the middle-class. The goal was unrealistic, but started the sort of verbal hygiene that would influence Movement writers, who were all born around the Twenties, leading the lower-middle class to speech hypercorrection.

Kingsley Amis had particular prejudices on language: one was lack of knowledge and the other, more relevant for our discourse, was affectation. If he was writing a critical piece and the author he was writing it about had misspelt a word, he would attack them for it, for their lack of knowledge or for disrespecting the rules. But affectation leads us back to the life long strive of the Movement to distance themselves from Modernism: obscure and unintelligible discourse was simply not the way they spoke or wrote. Donald Davie, in particular, believed that Movement poetry had to be so clear that it could be almost seen as prose: "All we really have in common is a desire to write sensibly… we all try to write poems that are intelligible in the sense that they can be paraphrased".[55] Poetry should not be only enjoyed by a small elite, like it had in Modernist times, but rather everyone that would want to read it should be able to do it.

However, later Kingsley Amis stopped following his own guidelines of being clear and simple. If we look at his 1994 novel, *You can't do both*, the writing was not as straightforward as we would expect:

> He was not the sort of boy to admit to loving his mother but quite often, like now, he experienced a surge of liking to her, not hard to feel for such a cheerful, nice-looking woman, nice-looking both in the sense of looking a nice old thing and quite pretty too, not so very old in fact, mid-forties perhaps, and with her mostly auburn hair and bright brown eyes declared attractive by that rigorous tribunal, an ad hoc selection of his schoolmates (who had had a look at her at speech days and other such functions).[56]

An influence on Movement ideas was, once again, George Orwell. In a 1946 essay, "Politics and the English language", he defended plain and intelligible writing, in order to avoid political corruption and manipulation (his famous novel *1984* is the perfect example of what he meant for corruption and manipulation). However, two points

---

[55] Ivi, p. 149.

[56] AMIS KINGSLEY, *You Can't Do Both,* Hutchinson, London, 1994.

should be made. First we shall not consider Orwell's ideas as completely anti-elitist, mainly because "those ideas were appropriated to bolster conservative and elitist critiques of mass culture", and also "it is the way the writer positions himself and his audience, as intellectually superior to the great mass of the population".[57] On a second note it is incredibly interesting how not only Amis, but also Auden, shared these views.

In 1967 Auden delivered the T. S. Eliot Memorial lectures, addressing the corruption of language and blaming it on the up and coming mass media and mass education. While striving to distance themselves from Modernists, they actually shared the same ideas.

2. 5. 6 Relationship with the audience

Movement writers often spoke about their relationship with their audience, and as we established before they wanted to please it (as per Larkin's words) and they also were closer to them (mainly middle and lower classes) than any literary group had been before. When Larkin wrote the Introduction to his own poems for Enright's *Poets of the 1950s* he said that he wrote to "preserve things I have seen/thought/felt… both for myself and for others".[58]

It was a Fifties phenomenon because in that period a series of publications investigating literary audiences appeared, one even written by Donald Davie. The title was *Purity of Diction in the English Verse* (1952). In the text one of Davie's points was that, in his studies, he had noticed a change of pattern in authors' relationships with audiences: the relationship had been close up until the 19th century, when it was not anymore with the Romantics. This disruption was seen as "the source of energy and liberation in Romantic poetry"[59] but he criticised it because its consequence was a lack of urbanity in their poetry. By urbanity he meant the idea of homogenous society that was unavoidably destroyed by the Industrial Revolution. In 1966, reflecting on his text, he clarified that he wrote it to understand what he was doing in his own poems at the time, which was suggesting Augustan, rather than Romantic, poetry as a model for Fifties poetry.

---

[57] Ivi, p. 150.

[58] MORRISON BLAKE, *The Movement*, p. 108.

[59] Ivi, p. 109.

The same interest was shared by Kingsley Amis, who published an essay of similar topic in 1954. He posed his attention on Victorian poetry, but stressed on this concept: "a poet who is concerned to communicate with an audience is more likely than one who is not to produce work which will survive the passing of its originale reader"[60] (the original reader is the first to read your work and to critique it, what Larkin was for Amis).

However, how was the audience that they were keeping in mind? Amis and other Movement poets suggested not to consider a large audience, but rather a smaller one (like that of Augustan poetry) since "it is time for the poet to start worrying when his poetry begins to sell half as well as the average nondescript novel" as Enright had written in the introduction to *Poets of the 1950s*. Therefore a small audience was not just suggested but desirable for a good poet.

Who was part of their audience? In line with wanting a small audience, part of it were other poets and academics. A good point was made by David Timms in his 1973 book called *Philip Larkin*:

> The Movement poets all "spoke the same language". In a sense they were writing poetry for each other, or at least, for people very much like themselves. Their work was first published in limited editions by small private presses, and so was aimed not at the general public, but at the restricted, probably academic, audience which was the only one likely to buy poetry in limited editions. The audience, in fact, was very much like the poets.[61]

And the poets were academics or reviewers or librarians. Philip Larkin was both a university librarian and a reviewer, others became professors or gave lectures in universities and when they were writing they wrote for people like them. Two points could be argued. First: having such a small and well-read audience was inherently elitist. And secondly that in a way they were not fulfilling their other goal, that of keeping in mind their audience when writing since it seemed that they were writing for themselves if the target audience was so similar to them.

How can we infer this from their work? There are various indications. First, we can easily see that some of these poets took for granted their readers' knowledge of poetry:

---

[60] Ivi, p. 110.

[61] Ivi, p. 117.

they spoke at such a high level that could only mean the reader was either a poet himself or a professor of poetry.

Another one is the type of wit they used in their work, usually clever word-plays and ambiguities. This kind of wit earned them the name "the University Wits" and also the "Empsonian"[62], after Empson, a 20th century academic who was also a successful poet.

A further indication is the frequent use of the pronoun "we", which is not uncommon in poetry. However in Movement poetry it seemed to indicate not a generic "we", not a couple, but rather was used in a way that seemed to signify "our generation" or "the group of us"[63], implying this audience so similar to them. Here Philip Larkin was, again, the perfect example of an exception, preferring a larger audience more similar to that of Georgian poets rather than Augustan. Since many of his poems used the word "we", we would expect to find them addressing this small audience we have described. And while his use of the word may derive from his sense of addressing his friends, his fellow poets, what we perceive is a much broader audience than what Amis or Davie had talked about. This happens because, in Larkin's own words, he "tend[s] to lead the reader in by the hand very gently"[64], showing them his initial experience and then making it universal, including his reader, whomever they are. His views on the subject of audience were made very clear in his essay "The Pleasure Principle", that we have already quoted in 2. 5. 3. The same view, that a strictly academic audience was not his ideal and who he aspired to write for, was shared by Enright in his essay "The poet, the professor and the public".

Another common word that reflects this tendency the Movement had to be closer to its audience is the word "chap", which is very colloquial and used in person. This feels, once again, a reaction to Modernist behaviour. Modernists, like the Romantics, were seen as not interested in their reader and Movement authors believed that "indifference or hostility to the reader to be responsible for what they saw as the obscurity of Modernist poetry".[65]

How can we justify this two very opposite tendencies internal to the Movement? Morrison's answer is socio-political and reflects Britain in the Fifties. Yes, the Movement was an élite made of academics but at the same time they were the first

---

[62] Ivi, p. 118.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ivi, p. 125.

[65] Ivi, p. 134.

generation of post-war poets in a society in which elitism was not as popular anymore. They were encouraged to write for everyone and share their knowledge.

An attempt in this sense can be seen in *Interpretations*, by John Wain (1955). In the introduction to this anthology of essays John Wain was pretty harsh in his criticism of other fellow writers but made his point clear: "literary criticism […] should not consist of critics "doing each other's laundry" and need not be remote and specialised; it was "an activity that any sensible person can hope to train himself for"".[66]

2. 5. 7 Relationship with Romanticism

Donald Davie once said "Romantic was for me and my friends the ugliest imputation that could be thrown at anyone or anything, a sentence of death from which there was no appeal".[67] Movement poets dismissed the word Romantic both when applied to an attitude, as an adjective, and both when it was used in literature, as the Romantic period.

Reaction against the Romantics had started rather easily and soon after Keats' death in 1821. Many generations of poets after them had disregarded Romanticism and had tried to eradicate it. Different sources indicated that with modernists any trace of Romanticism had disappeared. The Movement, however, did not share this view. In their eyes "Modernism was a development out of, rather than a departure from, Romanticism, and that Romantic assumptions had not only survived Hulme and Eliot [believed by others to be a return to Classicism], but had during the Thirties and Forties actually been strengthened".[68]

It's no surprise, then, that a poet who could easily be described as "romantic" was initially loved and than discredited by Movement authors. During Dylan Thomas' golden years, the Forties, Movement authors saw Romanticism at its new peak and were not pleased. Attacks to him as a man and as a poet were both made. It was the man that they were most annoyed by. His attitude, his vices, him being seen as a "drunk, fornicator, rebel, etc"[69] they disapproved of. Some authors liked his poetry, we have seen something of Larkin's relationship with his work, but others did not find it good enough. One of them was Amis, who in reviews expressed some admiration for his

---

[66] Ivi, p. 138.

[67] O'NEILL MICHAEL, *'Fond of What He's Crapping On': Movement Poetry and Romanticism*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered*, p. 271.

[68] MORRISON BLAKE, *The Movement*, p. 155.

[69] Ivi, p. 146.

work but in the end believed that "Thomas will satisfy only those who want from poetry 'something sublimer than thinking'".[70] This appears to be a peculiar comment, because for many poetry readers poetry is and must be sublimer than thinking. Nonetheless it was a common view of the Movement, since Davie also made similar remarks, claiming Thomas's work was lacking control and intelligibility, once more referring to the obscurity of Modernism.

Logical positivism, which is a type of philosophy that considers as true only scientific knowledge, was popular at the time and is one point to keep in mind when thinking about the historical period of which we are talking. Led by logical positivism, Movement authors were sceptical and alert and tended to write poems as if they were writing logical arguments, with a clear path in mind.

Amis made his opinion clear in his poem 'Against Romanticism': the poem started with its author's interpretation of the origins of Romanticism ("A traveller who walks a temperate zone/–Woods devoid of beasts, roads that please the foot–/Finds that its decent surface grows too thin:/Something unperceived fumbles at his nerves") and went on making references to all the romantics and their sins (Morrison suggested for example that "verbal scents" was referring to Keats, or "anarchy" to Shelley). The Romantics had disrupted the balance of the 18th century and he was trying to re-establish it, along with some others of his fellow authors.

The praise of the "sublime" and the "unknown" (mostly regarding nature) was a tendency that Movement authors did not like and it was especially present in Shelley's work. Therefore it is not surprising that a number of criticisms against Shelley arose. Gunn wrote about Shelley's death in 'Lerici', talking about it as surrender; Davie wrote about Shelley's poems as vague in 'Hypochondriac Logic' and Amis mocked 'Ode to the West Wind' in his 'Ode to the East-Noth-East-by-East Wind'.

Urbanity was another important theme for the Movement, while nature had been important for the Romantics. They were indifferent to nature, they only mentioned pets and farms in some of their poems. Davie claimed this was because the Movement poet "makes himself numb to nonhuman creation in order to stay compassionate towards the human".[71] This compassion was also a reaction against the Romantic myth of the hero and of the artist, exceptional men that people were in awe of. The Movement hero was usually a common person, someone normal just like his author and their audience:

---

[70] Ivi, p. 147.

[71] Ivi, p. 171.

"heroes are interesting to the Movement at those points where they resemble the rest of humanity".[72] It is a common way of thinking, if we reflect on the post-war period in which normal people were asked to do important acts and could become heroes in a different way.

They did not only disapprove of the themes of Romantic poetry, but also to the figure of poets, much like with Dylan Thomas. Some people considered poets special, different (Henry Treece said that "to be a poet is to have your blood running a different way from other men's blood"[73]) which was an idea completely disregarded by Movement authors. In the same way they rejected the idea that a poet was only a poet, that they must not have any other job in order to succeed in their career. It is evident why they would disagree: each one of the Movement poets was not only that. They were novelists, librarians, professors, critics, reviewers and journalists. To have only the job of "poet" would not have been realistic, at least financially at the beginning of their careers, and it would have been frowned upon, coming from working middle classes.

Other Movement poets were more conflicted in their opinion on Romanticism, especially Thom Gunn and Elizabeth Jennings. Gunn was the youngest Movement poet, as we have already mentioned, and the one to share only part of Movement ideals. This was true also for Romanticism. In his poem 'To Yvor Winters, 1955' he wrote:

> You keep both Rule and Energy in view,
> Much power in each, most in the balance two:
> Ferocity existing in the fence
> Built by an exercised intelligence.

There are two opposites in the first line: Rule and Energy. Morrison attributed "Rule" to a sympathy towards Movement ideas, while "Energy" (also "Ferocity") was an admiration of Romantic ones. In 1952 he had written, about Dylan Thomas, "the very fact that he has such vitality as to be incoherent is refreshing".[74] Gunn also showed in his poems an attitude towards Existentialism, which was often associated with Romantic individualism, and not at all typical of Movement poetry. The duality in him is best seen in one of his earlier poems, 'On the Move', which combined the strictness of composition and the explanatory tone of the Movement with an existentialist

---

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ivi, p. 176.

[74] Ivi, p. 185.

undertone and a sympathy for violence that would have been disapproved by the Movement.

Similarly Elizabeth Jennings used the Romantic idea of individualism and nature herself, in her poem 'The Island', in which men are "islands". When in it she said "Something of me is out in the dark landscape" she was evoking both the Movement and Romanticism. "Something of me" implied scepticism, typical of Movement authors when thinking about what was human and non-human. But her reflection on nature was much more similar to the Romantics.

The last author is Larkin. In the first chapter we have seen how he had loved the Romantics at first, had even copied Keats, and then had set them aside. But had he really? O'Neill in his essay said that that was not the case. His poem 'Reasons for Attendance' seemed to follow in the wake of 'Ode to a Grecian Urn'; Edna Longley wrote "I think is now more generally accepted that Philip Larkin was a Romantic who covered his tracks"[75]; Davie in his elegy after Larkin's death drew a parallel between him and Byron when he said "What's said should be unsaid/Of Byron dead", implying that he should not have diminished in his later work a poet he once loved, like others had done with Byron at the time; Morrison wrote that in certain poems Larkin wrote in a way "unmistakable as a Romantic poet".[76]

Giving an alternative to Romantic poetry was important for the Movement, both to extend poetry consumption to a wider audience and to define their different aims, but "once this aim had been achieved, however, the Movement were liberated from their role as anti-Romantics".[77]

In the end, to summarise perfectly, we could use these words, found in the introduction to a 1968 anthology called *Writing in England Today: The Last Fifteen Years*, by Karl Miller. But we should also take note of the fact that while they tried to break free from Modernists and Romantics their body of work was influenced by their predecessors, even if they did not want to admit it.

> Many of the writers who rose up to prominence during the Fifties were identified with a new sobriety and with a taste for comedy and iconoclasm; they were tired of

---

[75] O'NEILL MICHAEL, *'Fond of What He's Crapping On': Movement Poetry and Romanticism*, p. 289.

[76] MORRISON BLAKE, *The Movement*, p. 191.

[77] Ibid.

> the international, experimental avant-garde and of mandatory modernity; they were tired of the romantic individualism, the religiosity, the martyred sensitiveness that had been favoured by writers during the war; they were sceptics; and they were democrats. An implicit stage-direction of their collective comedy: "Exit the hero."[78]

2. 8 Posthumous relevance

The essay "The Movement in the 1950s and Today", in which Blake Morrison revisited the ideas he had already published in 1980 in his book *The Movement*, is particularly interesting. In it the author talked about how Movement authors are still relevant today.

Movement authors had been contrasted since the beginning: first the harsh reviews after the *Spectator* article but also later on, when they were considered too conservative or even obscene. Larkin in particular has been described as obscene and labelled a misogynist. After all, their group was quite selective: white, studied at Oxbridge, middle class and for the most part male and heterosexual (Elizabeth Jennings and Thom Gunn were exceptions). Later, even in the Nineties, they were cast aside: "Jake Balokowsky [saw] Larkin and his lot as 'old-style, natural, fouled-up guys' and Lisa Jardine proudly [announced] 'we don't tend to teach Larkin much now […]'".[79] Then why is their work still studied today and is felt as something still relevant? Morrison answered:

> The Movement survives because Larkin and Amis in particular have left us with an indispensable body of literature - indispensable to our pleasure and understanding of the world, but indispensable too in its realism, honesty and courage.[80]

It should be said that Morrison talked about the Movement not only as the handful of poets who had been put under that category, but as about a "set of values, or beliefs, to

---

[78] MILLER KARL, *Writing in England Today: The Last Fifteen Years*, Penguin Books, London, 1968, Introduction.

[79] MORRISON BLAKE, *'Still Going On, All of It': The Movement in the 1950s and the Movement Today,* p. 19.

[80] Ivi, p. 17.

which these writers gave expression and others in they generation, not necessarily writers, also shared".[81]

Courage may be a strange word for the reader to see it applied to Movement authors, but so does the word Movement if we actually reflect on it: they embodied static and stoic Fifties ideals, they mostly stayed in Britain and did not travel much, they strayed from previous Modernist ideas which were all about movement and speed. Therefore, why not courageous?

The reasons why they are still relevant today are many. Much of their work, and personal correspondence, was published after their deaths, giving us a deeper understanding of their work and their lives that sometimes may not have been as transparent.

Moreover, this further insight and the study of their literature shows that their "ideas about love, death, sex, marriage, God, gender, politics, and art are more fraught, complex and open to interpretation than they've been credited for".[82] Morrison in particular found some of the characteristics that we have already explored that are typical of Movement poetry and literature to be still relevant today.

For example, if we take neutrality, their situation then mirrors our situation today, or even better our situation before 9/11. The feeling of not having contrast going on in the world made us relax and not take extreme sides, a tendency that is re-emerging nowadays while more and more conflicts break out in the world everyday.

Lastly, the most obvious reason is that their work was good and it is still enjoyable today. Blake described Larkin as the best poet of the time, Amis as the best comic novelist, Davie a great critic and the others considerable poets, not to be undervalued.

---

[81] Ivi, p. 16.

[82] Ivi, p. 19.

Chapter 3 - Love of Jazz

Richard Palmer, in his introduction to his book *Such Deliberate Disguises*, discussing the author's life as a poet, as a librarian and as a jazz reviewer, wrote: "Although Philip Larkin always wrote in his own name, it is essential to identify and understand the many masks he used, consciously or otherwise, in order to come closer to what he felt was his authentic voice".[1]

Philip Larkin started to love jazz when he was still very young, when he lived with his family before going to Oxford. His opinions about jazz were very strong and precise, and he dedicated part of his life to writing about it. He once wrote: "I must say home is where the records are".[2]

3. 1 Brief history of Jazz

Marshall Stearns gave one of the most accurate definitions of Jazz music:

> a semi-improvisational American music distinguished by an immediacy of communication, an expressiveness characteristic of the free use of the human voice, and a complex flowing rhythm; it is the result of a three-hundred-years' blending in the United States of the European and West African musical traditions; and its predominant components are European harmony, Euro-African melody, and African rhythm.[3]

He gave a detailed scenario of how the rhythm we find in jazz actually came from African music and how slave trading in the 19th century has influenced how and where jazz was born. In fact the southern states of America, like Georgia, Mississippi and cities like New Orleans, were first interested by this phenomenon.

Arrigo Polillo argued that while this definition was still valid, some forms of jazz do not have that "flowing" rhythm that Sterns talked about and believed that nowadays jazz is simply "the best musical expression […] of a certain culture: that of black people who

---

[1] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* Continuum, London, 2008, p. XV.

[2] LARKIN PHILIP, THWAITE ANTHONY (ED.), *Philip Larkin: Letters to Monica*, Faber and Faber, London, 2012, p. 171.

[3] STEARNS MARSHALL, *The Story of Jazz*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1956, p. 282.

live in big United States cities".[4] Polillo also added that Afro-American music started from folklore, with what were called folk songs, and only with time became a type of music performed for the public by professional musicians.

While it is impossible to put these folk songs in chronological order, the way we can classify them is to divide them by their purpose. In Plantations people used "calls" to convey messages ("to call people from out of the fields, to make people go to work, to get the attention of a far away girl"[5] etc); they had "work songs" which were performed by multiple people with a lead singer, are derived from slavery years and were used in plantations, among railway workers, fishermen or even people in prison and had various topics, like protests, personal events, reports… and many others; there were ballads (examples are *Ol' Riley, Frankie and Albert* or *John Henry*, all of them told different stories), very long and structured songs that derive from work songs but were not sung in the work environment anymore; there were "Negro spirituals" which were derived from the strive to convert African, and therefore pagan, people to Christianity and many more.

Some of these forms were later transformed in *Blues music*, which also originated in southern states. Therefore, Blues shared African roots with the songs previously mentioned. A peculiar feature of Blues was "double talk", a method in which Blues singers hid "secrets" in their songs: there was a double bind constituted by what they sang and by what they were presenting to the listeners. This could be explained by their root in slavery: black people, both slaves and emancipated, had to keep their thoughts for themselves. Their "Blues", this deep sadness, was different from the one of the white man, because it was rooted in their history.

Jazz basically derived from Blues. "Jazz was born when they started to play, other than sing, Blues, which became possible only some years after the Civil War".[6] Who played jazz? The jazz musician, also known as jazzman, was usually solo and acted both as writer and performer (unless it is an orchestra performance), often times improvising on the spot rather than preparing beforehand. Here rings true the "immediacy of communication" that Stearns has put as one of the main features of jazz.

It is common to place the birth of Jazz in New Orleans, where it started to take form since the 19th century. In the second half of the 20th century, however, people started to

---

[4] POLILLO ARRIGO, *Jazz: La vicenda e i protagonisti della musica afro-americana* (enlarged edition), Mondadori, Milano, 2017, p. 12.

[5] Ivi, p. 24.

[6] Ivi, p. 40.

study the history of jazz more accurately and to doubt that New Orleans was the only place in which jazz originated. Instead, in every city something similar was happening, even if it was not really jazz yet. Critics believed that the title "jazz" could be initially attributed only to music produced in New Orleans, while elsewhere music became jazz only when New Orleans musicians brought it outside the city. Interestingly, when jazz music became popular in a wider area, in New Orleans it was already considered outdated and uncivilised.

The next big city was Chicago, mainly because people in the North were short of workforce since immigration from Europe had almost completely stopped. Therefore, immigration from South to North America began. The first musicians to go there were Tony Jackson, Jelly Roll Morton and the Original Creole Band of Freddie Keppard (the first white band was the one of Tom Brown). They also hoped to leave racial injustice behind them but they were disappointed: very tense relationships between black and white people were formed, culminating in violence.

A famous group emerged. It was called the Original Dixieland Jass Band and they became famous not only in America but also across the Pond: in 1919 and 1920 they were in England, performing at the Hippodrome and the Palladium and, maybe more importantly, for King George V. Some gave them, wrongly, the credit of having created the jazz genre and they did nothing to deny it. At that point a new kind of jazz emerged: European jazz, which became especially popular in the latter half of the 20th century and was a little different from American jazz.

They also brought jazz to New York City in 1917, along with a very famous musician named James Reese Europe. In the Twenties there was what is called the "Blues craze" and jazz started to become popular. In 1924 Paul Whiteman put together a concert meant to display the progress made by jazz so far and to give space to the so-called symphonic jazz. It was a milestone for jazz music: up until that point the word jazz (also spelt "jass") had a bad, vulgar connotation. This idea that symphonic jazz was "better" is culturally based: Whiteman, soon after named the "king of jazz", had a very different culture from the one shared by black people, who originated jazz. This gave way to two currents of ideas: two types of jazz, black and white, a separation that went on for decades.

The golden age of jazz was the Twenties, with jazzmen like Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke and the soloist Sidney Bechet and Blues stars like Bessie Smith. However, in 1929 the financial crisis hit the United States and the Blues era ended, since it was

mostly made of sad songs in a very sad period, while jazz came to a halt temporarily. What F. S. Fitzgerald had called "the age of jazz" was only a memory and famous musicians and singers became once again common people, often times without a job (by 1932 the unemployed were more than 12 millions, the crisis hit harder on black people). Some of them, those who were lucky, stayed afloat: Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington went to Europe to find a new crowd of spectators, for example. Bars and venues stayed open in Harlem, NY, but the main source of revenue for musicians that played big venues was the possibility to record their most commercial music. It wasn't, however, a possibility for everyone and more and more people had to change profession completely. New York was the new capital of jazz, since by the time of the crisis there was less and less jazz in Chicago.

In America hope came with the election of F. D. Roosevelt and the New Deal. Also, trying to lift people's spirits, musical movies and broadway shows were put on featuring jazz music. Another source of income was the British market: the demand for records there was high, while in the States they had gone from 104 millions of records in 1927 to only 6 millions in 1932.[7] Thanks to that American stars like Bessie Smith were asked to record again after years of inactivity. In these years a very young Billie Holiday started to record as well.

Right at this time Kansas city became very popular for musicians: it was a rich city, while everywhere else there was financial crisis. The venues there became famous for their "jam sessions", almost races between the best black musicians there were.

"During the decade 1935 to 1945, a period known as the "Swing Era", the greatest mass conversion in the history of jazz took place".[8] In the late Thirties the Great Depression was almost over, thanks to the New Deal, and a new desire to have fun was very common, especially among young white people. Swing, a term used to describe one quality of jazz, was no other than a type of jazz, an easier to like jazz. "The operation to make jazz more sellable necessarily entailed the sacrifice of some of their more distinctly Black traits".[9] It was, however, a time of unity: both black and white musicians contributed to the rise of Swing. Two were the main reasons: black people, in order to be accepted, had started to adopt white manners and to dissimulate their feelings towards years of repression; on a lighter note they finally saw some recognition

---

[7] Ivi, p. 155.

[8] STEARNS MARSHALL, *The Story of Jazz*, p. 198.

[9] POLILLO ARRIGO, *Jazz*, p. 166.

for the music they played, so long considered vulgar and distasteful, and did not want to miss the opportunity to play it.

One of the major names in Swing era was Benny Goodman, a white man who played clarinet and who had "never hidden his admiration for black musicians".[10] He gave way to this new age: in 1934 a three-hour radio programme of ballroom music made his songs popular and during a tour he discovered that people knew him, and his band's music. This launched him into stardom. An equally famous black artist of the time was Duke Ellington.

The decline of the so-called "swing craze" started with the beginning of the war in Europe. The main reason was that men were constantly drafted to go to war, therefore orchestras and bands had less and less members to rely on. In 1939 the only type of records created were "v discs", discs recorded to send out to the army, and the most popular genre was still swing. Swing died in those years, and the other reason was because the American Musicians Sindacate was trying to win a battle: they wanted musicians to be payed not only for the individual recording, but also for the future use of their recordings, so they went on strike. They won, eventually, but the absence of new records had created a lack of demand of new material from the listeners.

In 1945 the War ended and a new genre took root, one that had been born in the Thirties jam sessions. It was called bebop (after a while it became only "bop") and completely divided the opinion of the public. Bebop was described as "cool, light and soft" while jazz was "hot, heavy and loud".[11] The public was either pro bebop, and those listeners were few in the beginning, or they were sceptic of it: we might call them modernists and conservatives respectively.

The Minton's playhouse, with the jam sessions held there, was the place of birth of bebop and one of its main characters was Charlie Parker, also known as Bird. He became a regular there from 1941 and completely revolutionised jazz, along with another important name, Dizzy Gillespie, a trumpeter, composer and singer. They toured without much success until 1946 when the new genre was more widely known and appreciated.

---

[10] Ivi, p. 169.

[11] STEARNS MARSHALL, *The Story of Jazz,* p. 231.

However, after Parker jazz "stopped being a popular type of music or either a music of escapism, of entertainment, as it had been in the "swing age""[12] and this was part of the reason for its decline.

Even if Parker and Gillespie were both black, the black public did not express enthusiasm for bebop, which became more elitist. Bebop was seen as a mainly white genre, while they wanted a more violent music, something that would make you want to dance. This music became what is called *Rhythm and Blues*, because it was founded on the Blues genre but with a new rhythm, something more primitive than bebop, and its most important instrument was the saxophone. The main names in rhythm and blues, in the late Forties, were Joe Liggins, Roy Milton, Johnny Otis and Louis Jordan. By 1950 bebop had completely lost its public and only the big names, Parker and Gillespie, still made a living out of it.

The beginning of the Fifties was a though period for jazz and the entertainment industry as a whole: the post-war enthusiasm had dried up and there was less and less demand for concerts. Moreover, the entertainers had spent all their creativity in those years. Orchestras started to dismantle, people did not go dancing as they had done before.

Bebop was, as we have said earlier, "cool" while jazz was "hot". Well, the new kind of jazz was actually called cool and it was rooted in bebop, but had been modified by white people. It was a highly sophisticated type of music, a "reorganisation, in white standards, of many innovations that came from the reformation of the impetuosity and mess of beboppers".[13] Cool jazz was short lived, it ended before 1955, and its main star, the group of nine created by Miles Davis, had to break up after few performances. Their jazz, however, became popular through recordings and it was reproduced both in America, California was the new focal point of jazz music, and Europe.

The new jazz from the West Coast was born in 1950 in Los Angeles, it was inspired by cool jazz but was also more likeable for the public, and more white. In the summer Gene Norman organised a recording session with Shorty Rogers and some members of the Kenton orchestra, creating a recording called *Shorty Rogers and his Giants*. They sympathised for cool jazz but they also attracted the attention of California's new jazz

---

[12] POLILLO ARRIGO, *Jazz*, p. 207.

[13] Ivi, p. 225.

lovers.[14] A quartet, with leader Gerry Mulligan, also became very popular and shaped this period. Jazz thrived again.

The Fifties were a very slow and submissive period, even today it's difficult to summarise it. In music the two teams were clearly divided: on the one hand we had white jazzmen, more sophisticated, that had started in California; on the other hand African-American jazzmen, with a more aggressive and improvised music, rooted in New York. However, while many black people were persecuted (the Little Rock episodes in 1957 were particularly serious) there was some sort of union between black and white musicians: Kai Winding and J. J. Johnson put together a band of five, Gunther Schuller and John Lewis got together uniting the two styles of music. The golden rule of the period was that musicians had to "swing hard" and also that they had to improvise everything during sessions.

This was also the age in which rhythm and blues became popular and more widespread with some adaptations for the big public, being then renamed *rock and roll* and attracting both black and white people. The other genre that became popular was the one sang by Mahalia Jackson: gospel songs had been going on for at least twenty years already, but they were only used in Afro-American communities, while now everyone was listening to them. Jazz became hard bop, emerging from what was left of bebop.

In the Sixties, however, the jazz scene was once again in New York and the spotlight was on black music. People who "stayed in California became more and more absorbed by the anonymous, but well retributed, study work: they were well versed instrumentalists that knew how to read at first glance hard scores".[15] Many of the big names had either gone to Europe, like Gerry Mulligan, or travelled to the East Coast, like Jimmy Giuffre. Shorty Rogers stayed in Los Angeles, but stopped playing after a while and became involved with the music industry. The last man standing to bring forward cool jazz was John Lewis, with his Modern Jazz Quartet, who would play for a long time for conservatives in Europe.

It's no surprise, in retrospect, that the Sixties were a decade of revolts and tumult, and this is reflected in the music of the period. Right at the end of the Fifties the major names of the new era started to be noticed: John Coltrane (the real star of the time) and his quartet, Ornette Coleman and his saxophone and the pianist Cecil Taylor, who

---

[14] Ivi, p. 228.

[15] Ivi, p. 233.

helped Archie Sheep getting recognised. Aside from jazz, the Sixties were also the time of Bob Dylan.

It was still a time of revolts. Martin Luther King's voice was getting louder and louder every day but, especially in the South, racisms was not at all overcome. Even the approval of the Civil Rights Act was not enough. Then Kennedy was assassinated, as was Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King started to loose popularity, until he was also killed in 1968.

One of the branches of jazz changed name. The word "jazz" felt antiquated, these new musicians claimed to be making free music (a music free from aesthetics rules, "Free jazz" was the name of a Coleman recording) or black music, proud of the color of their skin rather than trying to blend in has they had done before. The contents reflected this: their rage for this situation can be seen and can be felt in their performances.

New York was the main place where jazzmen found their public, but it was still slim. The new frontier was, once again, Europe: both because of music and art, but also for a "desire to escape the violent atmosphere that was now part of the American life and that had […] expanded the gap and incomprehension between black and white".[16] Coleman recorded there his comeback records, for example, after a couple of years of silence.

At this point, past 1965, it became difficult to talk about jazz. Not because jazz was not being played, but because it had gone through so many mutations that it was tricky to define it clearly.

There was a new popular genre: rock. Rock and jazz did not mix in America, but they became known as jazz-rock in Europe, where they had both become popular around the same time. Blues had made a come back, thanks to the demand of youths, while gospel was still popular in restricted communities. Along with a more mainstream white jazz, still strict and precise in execution, a mainstream black jazz was still present, as an heir to hard bebop. It was a time of women in jazz, not only singers but also as musicians themselves. None of this genres, however, ever gained the popularity of their predecessors.

[16] Ivi, p. 285.

3. 2 When Larkin met Jazz

> They began to listen to jazz. Sutton heard it first, blasting from the wireless in his free-and-easy home, and "moved Philip in the same direction", whereupon the interest immediately became an obsession. Sydney […] proved surprisingly difficult to offend. He paid for his son to take out a subscription to the magazine *Down Beat* and bought him "an elementary drum kit" on which Larkin "battered away contentedly, spending less time on the rudiments than in improvisation and accompaniment to records".[17]

This was Philip Larkin's first experience with jazz: he was 12 or 13 years old. Soon after he, along with his friend Sutton, began to attend his local Hippodrome to see live bands play English jazz. He spent his pocket money to buy new records, which throughout his life remained his primary source of new jazz. He preferred records to concerts, as much as he preferred reading poetry by himself than listening to it at poetry readings, and he shared his love for jazz mainly with male friends. His taste was very varied but he always favoured jazz above all kinds of music.

The two friends talked about records constantly, even in letter form, and soon they discovered proper American jazz. Their world opened when they started to listen to names like Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke and Sidney Bechet which became favourites of the poet. What he loved the most about jazz, as a genre, was its rhythm: "I was, in essence, hooked on jazz even before I heard any… what got me was the rhythm. That simple tick of the suspended beat, that had made the slave shuffle in Congo Square on Saturday nights, was something that never palled".[18] And again, he said: it "makes me tap my foot, grunt affirmative exhortations, or even get up and caper around the room. If it doesn't do this… it isn't jazz".[19]

When in 1939 he went to Oxford, he brought his passion for jazz with him and met "people who knew more about jazz than [he] did".[20] Motion wrote that there was an "unofficial club" of "probably a dozen or so like-minded undergraduates [who] didn't buy records much but enjoyed a get-together late at night in someone's rooms".[21]

---

[17] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1993, p. 21.

[18] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, Faber and Faber, London, 1984, p. 16.

[19] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 48.

[20] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, p. 17.

[21] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin*, p. 40.

Oxford, with its many shops in which to buy records, was a happy place for him. However, the war brought a shortage of jazz in his life. When he left college in 1943 he had lodgings that did not allow music to be played and he recalled that when in 1948 he moved houses and started to listen to it again, he preferred to enjoy the records he already owned rather than immediately buy new ones: for a while he only bought new records by artists he already liked or replaced broken or missing ones. Not only for him, but for music lovers in general, the war brought with it the strike of recording companies, as we have seen, so between 1942 and 1944 there was no new music available to the public. By the mid Fifties he also had a period of resistance against the long-playing record, to which he eventually gave in to. His own self inflicted isolation and the ban on recording are the first two out of three gaps in Larkin's jazz experience that Leggett found in his essay "Larkin's Blues: Jazz and Modernism", the third one will be seen later.

He was not, however, unaware of what was going on in the music realm. He knew of the separation that was occurring in jazz: traditional jazz and modern jazz were once the same and now they were not. He was not completely on board with either. For traditional he said that was more common in Britain, but about some of it he commented: "I could never bring myself to take these grunting and quavering pastiches seriously", while for the latter he said "for modern jazz I was even less briefed".[22]

In the late Fifties he had started to make his name known as a jazz critic with a dozen reviews written for different journals, like the *Truth* or the *Guardian*. This brings us to the Sixties and gives us an idea about which point he was at when he started reviewing jazz for the *Telegraph*.

3. 3 Jazz reviews on the Daily Telegraph

In 1961 Larkin, now living full time in Hull, met Donald Mitchell, a music critic who worked for the *Telegraph* at that time. He immediately suggested that Larkin should be the new jazz reviewer for the paper and so it was: on February 11, 1961 he started his monthly columns for the magazine, columns that would end only 11 years later.

During this long period of his life he had many occasions to go to concerts and jazz events and to listen to live music, but unless there was one of his favourites playing he

[22] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, p. 18.

did not care for those. He preferred to listen to his music at home, in form of records ("The real jazz lover must be a record collector".[23]) Music labels sent him their new records to review and this sometimes explained the abundance or the lack of reviews on determined musicians: he reviewed everything by Charlie Parker, though he disliked him, but did not the same with Dizzy Gillespie as he was "less well served by record companies".[24]

His time at the *Telegraph* was fundamental and he dedicated a great amount of time to the job. However, he did not take his role as a reviewer as a burden, he was always glad to talk about jazz, and neither he did it for the money. He produced 126 monthly columns and more than 900 record reviews. The most significant were later collected by Larkin himself in the infamous, for its Introduction, *All What Jazz*.

This decade of reviews not only gave us an idea of Larkin's taste in jazz, but it disclosed something about the man behind the reviews and also traced significant changes in the industry. It was clear by his words from the first reviews how enthusiastic he still was about jazz, while his last reviews show how deeply changed jazz was and how less and less people cared about it.

The first changes, though subtle, were already evident in 1964: "it is as if Larkin senses the impending crisis that would transform the fortunes and popularity of jazz within three years".[25] Still, his reviews remained vigorous as before. Critics usually point out a sudden change, much harsher but still not even close to his words in the Introduction, in a piece from March 1967: an attack on Ellington showed the bitter direction his jazz reviews were taking.

Many critics of Larkin's production have overlooked his jazz writings, which have only become more significant and studied in recent years. In the Introduction to *All What Jazz* he himself discredited his work and said that he "was patently unfitted to [write those articles] and should have declined"[26], that he had no business being a jazz critic and when he was talking to Faber about publishing *All What Jazz* he did not want him to "put it forward as a piece of jazz scholarship".[27] However, he dedicated one

---

[23] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 10.

[24] Ivi, p. 38.

[25] Ivi, p. 54.

[26] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, p. 18.

[27] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 42.

column (a 1966 piece titled "How am I to know?") to describe what makes a good critic.

> Hi ear will tell him instantly whether a piece of music is vital, musical, exciting, or cerebral, mock-academic, dead, long before he can read don De Michael on the subject, or learn that it is written in nineteenths, or in the Stygian mode, or recorded at the NAACP Festival at Little Rock. He must hols on to the principle that the only reason for praising a work is that it pleases, and the way to develop his critical sense is to be more acutely aware of wether he is being pleased or not.[28]

This paragraph will become more interesting later on in the chapter, but for now we can only assume that he was talking about himself, therefore defining himself as a critic. This appears evident when we look at the last sentence: music had to please its listener, which was a firm rule in Larkin's ideology. In fact, he wrote an essay titled "The Pleasure Principle", criticising those who did not care to please their audience.

But why did he make those first statements? It was clear that he enjoyed talking about jazz and writing those columns, and it was also clear that he was a well-formed scholar of jazz, his reviews were those of a proper critic. These remarks sound as "false modesty"[29], but scholars believed that they were probably made to ease the judgement that he expected in reviews after the publication of the book. Still, they were proven not true by the columns he published for so long and also by the pieces that follow the Introduction, his work remains valid today.

3. 4 Jazz and Poetry

His love for jazz remained strong during all of his life, but during his time at the *Telegraph* he came to the apex of his literary career. It would be safe to say that some of his passion for jazz must have infiltrated his poetry, and despite being true it did not happen often.

We can spot, however, a few poems that either mention jazz or have a rhythm similar to that of music. Critic Richard Palmer pointed out five poems that unequivocally

---

[28] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, p. 156.

[29] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 42.

address jazz and some that could be seen as having "rhythmic and dynamic properties that can be associated with jazz".[30]

In the first category we have: 'Two Guitar Pieces' (1946), 'Reasons for Attendance' (1953), 'For Sydney Bechet' (1954), 'Reference Back' (1955) and 'The Dance', a poem he never finished. In the second category we have 'Days' (1953), 'Church Going' (1954), 'Fiction and the Reading Public' (1954) and 'Love Songs in Age' (1957).

The most significant was probably 'For Sydney Bechet', which was dedicated to one of Larkin's favourite jazzmen, second only to Louis Armstrong. However, this poem will be more significant for a consideration on Modernism and we will analyse it later. The second most important one was the unfinished 'The Dance'.

Larkin began work on 'The Dance' in 1963; he wrote thirty-eight pages of draft and then abandoned it in 1964. He wrote on it again after a while, composing eight lines that he did not include in the typescript. Here is the first stanza:

> 'Drink, sex and jazz — all sweet things, brother: far
> Too sweet to be diluted to "a dance",
> That muddled middle-class pretence at each
> No one who really…' But contemptuous speech
> Fades at my equally-contemptuous glance,
> That in the darkening mirror sees
> The shame of evening trousers, evening tie.
> White candles stir within the chestnut trees.
> The sun is low. The pavements are half-dry.
> Cigarettes, matches, keys –
> All this, simply to be where you are.[31]

It's clear from the fist line that the "dance" that he was talking about was a jazz dance. However, critics considered this poem both a celebration of jazz and a goodbye. It's a celebration in the sense that Larkin is recalling memories of people dancing, happily, to jazz music. Still, the time frame in which he was writing it makes it sound more as a departure. "Come 1965 *danse à seul(e)* to a loud an insistent beat was the new

---

[30] Ivi, p. 6.

[31] LARKIN PHILIP, BURNETT ARCHIE (ED.), *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2012, p. 306.

orthodoxy: the discotheque had not only supered the traditional dance-floor but within a matter of months effectively consigned it to history".[32]

This thesis was confirmed by a subsequent piece, not very well known, that Larkin published for the *Telegraph* on April 23, 1965. It was called "Requiem for Jazz", a self-explanatory title, and despite sharing some of the same ideas he would express in the Introduction to *All What Jazz* years later, the tone was different: sorrow, grief was prevalent here.

> Jazz was a unique phenomenon, set off by an unprecedented balance of sociological factor - in the same way as, shall we say, the Border ballads […]. The music Parker plot in two is now vanishing simultaneously into the vulgarities of popular entertainment, and will soon be a historical memory, like ragtime. The world will have lost that incredible argot that in the first half of the 20th-century spoke to all nations and all intelligences equally.[33]

It could be surprising for the reader how little jazz impacted his writing. After all his production of poetry was extensive while his poems that refer to jazz were very few. However:

> It may also be that, apart from poems that openly embrace jazz […] the traces left by jazz and Blues in Larkin's verse are so elusive, so deeply submerged as to be nearly inaccessibile, or to be retrievable only through more speculative readings. Still, it is in intriguing to conceive of a jazz or Blues interred inhabiting the Larkin canon that may be glimpsed now and the, as in the opening of Larkin's last great poem "Aubade", "I work all day, and get half drunk at night," a line that, read in another context, could easily be attributed to Sleepy John Estes or Blind Lemon Jefferson.[34]

Richard Palmer, in *Such Deliberate Disguises*, has drawn an interesting parallel between Larkin and T. S. Eliot, whose work Larkin despised, then traced another parallel between two jazz musicians, John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins (their names will become more significant later). Eliot was a poet who often cited jazz in his work, but his

---

[32] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 21.

[33] Ivi, p. 23.

[34] LEGGETT B. J., *Larkin's Blues: Jazz and Modernism*, in *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1996, p. 274.

reasons for doing so were different from Larkin's. Palmer believed that these mundane things he mentioned, especially in *The Waste Land*, are regarded as irrelevant: what he wanted to achieve was transcendence, which could only be pursued trough religion. In this way, Palmer saw him as similar to John Coltrane: one of the major names in jazz music, and also one that Larkin openly disliked. "Coltrane, too, was after transcendence, and eventually that meant leaving behind all the properties one associates with jazz"[35], a choice which Philip Larkin did not appreciate.

On the contrary, Larkin was considered transmutational just as Sonny Rollins. Larkin loved popular culture, from which jazz derives, and the same was for Rollins. Moreover, transmutational is certainly an adjective fit to describe jazz: born from sufferance and hardship, had transmuted to joyful performances.

> Intense in feeling, it was also tough, rich in humour of all kinds […], and totally sophisticated to the highest degree: witness the double-edged nature of Blues, for instance, whose apparent focus on hardship, raisers and tragedy so often transmutes into ineluctably tough, even joyous affirmations.[36]

Could not the same be said about Larkin's poetry? His close relationship to jazz is undeniable, even when you can't read the word "jazz" on the page.

3. 5 All What Jazz - A Record Diary

In 1968 Larkin had decided, after pondering for a long time, that he should collect some of his most significant *Telegraph* columns into a book. He finished putting it together in November and then it was time to decide what to do with it. It seems that his first intention was to employ a printer and then try to distribute it himself, but in the process he decided to write to Donal Mitchell, who had got him his *Telegraph* job, for different reasons. As Larkin put it in his letter, he firstly wanted to ask permission to dedicate the book to him, then to ask if he wanted to read the Introduction, and only thirdly to ask if Faber had "ever distributed books they had not actually published, and, if so, what their terms for doing so would be".[37] Critics here differ in their opinions in

---

[35] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 62.

[36] Ivi, p. 63.

[37] MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin*, p. 386.

whether he was being sincere or he was simply trying to subtly test the ground before asking Faber to publish the book. This speculation does not interest us here: what really matters is that Faber promptly answered and asked Larkin if they could acquire and publish *All What Jazz*. After that exchange, plans were made for the book to be published in late 1969, but then it was postponed, making Larkin incredibly disappointed: "they just bloody well forgot about it until I raised mild enquiries and found they were idly scheduling it for March 1970 - God!"[38]

As we have already said, he did not want it to be seen as a piece of scholarship and he very much stressed the importance of the Introduction, which in retrospect we know is the most discussed part of the collection. The book was eventually published in February 1970 and critical response was divided: some agreed with him, but "more informed reviewers were not impressed"[39] about his talk on modernism and also about his definition of what makes a good critic. However, the book continued to sell steadily and in 1984 they published a second edition, adding some pieces that he had written between 1968, when he had put together the book, and 1971 when he had left the *Telegraph*. In 1971 Larkin was tired; he still enjoyed writing but felt that the jazz he liked had died and so he recommended Alasdair Clayre as his replacement, ending his jazz columns.

3. 5. 1 The infamous Introduction to *All What Jazz*

> *Of course!* How gibly I had talked of modern jazz, without realising the force of the adjective: this was *modern* jazz, and [Charlie] Parker was a modern jazz player just as [Pablo] Picasso was a modern painter and [Ezra] Pound a modern poet. […] I have a suspicion that many readers will welcome my grouping of Parker with Picasso and Pound as one of the nicest things I could say about him. Well, to do so settles at least one question: as long as it was only Parker I didn't like, I might believe that my ears had shut up about the age of 25 and that jazz had left me behind. My dislike of Pound and Picasso, both of whom pre-date me by a considerable margin, can't be explained this way. […] No, I dislike such things not because they are new, but because they are irresponsible exploitations of technique in contradiction of human life as we know it.[40]

---

[38] Ivi, p. 396.

[39] Ivi, p. 400.

[40] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, pp. 22-27.

This is probably the most significant point Larkin made in his Introduction (written in 1968) to *All What Jazz*, and it is not difficult to understand why it raised lots of doubts about these affirmations.

Let's take a step back and see how Larkin came to this conclusion and then see what critics had to say about his famous 3Ps: Pound, Picasso and Parker.

In the first part of his Introduction, Larkin simply recalled his history with jazz music: when he discovered it, what was his first record (*Tiger Rag*, by Ray Noble), what happened when he went to Oxford and the subsequent gap when he left, all of which we have previously discussed. Then, in the second and third parts of the Introduction, he defined himself "unfitted" to be a critic, in a way it reads as if he wanted to let go of any responsibility for the pieces that follow, his *Telegraph* columns. Moreover, he tried to justify his dislike for certain jazzmen, addressing them as "modernists". In his words, when jazz became modernist he did not appreciate it anymore, just as he did not appreciate modernist art (Picasso) or modernist poetry (Pound). In the fourth part of his Introduction, Larkin changed tone, talking briefly about how in the reviews he had tried to be "free of such polemics" and adding that above all "I hope they suggest I love jazz".[41]

Critics have tried, many times, to understand the reasons why he wrote that Introduction, and whether he was being truthful or not. Certainly, the fact that he was at the apex of his fame at the time made him more confident in his words.

In his Introduction Larkin touched many interesting points and between the Introduction and the reviews that he chose to publish in *All What Jazz* we could make many observations. Firstly, the reviews give us a broader understanding of his preferences in jazz. Therefore, his remark about not linking modernism is not as strong as it seems at first glance: his treatment of modern jazzmen makes us doubt that he was an anti-modernist. Lastly, the accusations of racism that Larkin faced after his death are, if not cleared, at least put in doubt by his jazz reviewer work.

While a reader that has not studied Larkin's poetry and persona could simply agree with him and move along with the book, many critics have reflected upon his words and what they have found is very interesting.

---

[41] Ivi, p. 28.

3. 6 The contradictions in the Introduction

It is important to remember that the reviews in *All What Jazz* are dated from 1961 to 1971 (the date of the second edition; the first edition ended in 1968), but the Introduction was written not long before publication, in 1968, so quite some time had passed since the first pieces of the collection. Nonetheless, the changes in Larkin's tone and opinions are astounding.

The first time Larkin dedicated a column to Parker was in May 1961 and his remarks were:

> One has the impression of a man who not only could translate his ideas into notes at superhuman speed, but who was simultaneously aware of half a dozen ways of resolving any given musical situation, and could somehow refer to all of them in passing beyond it.[42]

It would be difficult for the reader to see Parker, after such a praise, as a musician hated by Larkin. Moreover, this was only one of many remarks that he made about other "modern" musicians and jazzmen, a style of jazz he was supposed to hate: Gillespie's solo was described as "tremendous", the Modern Jazz Quartet's music had "a natural swing under its shimmering restraint" and so on.[43] David Wheatley put it clearly: "The other two P's in his infernal trilogy, Pound and Picasso, never moved Larkin to praise like that".[44] Larkin himself has told us that in his reviews he tried to be more neutral, to not express outrageous opinions, but is it all we can find in the story?

This is where Leggett collocates the third gap, the other two have been mentioned before, in Larkin's life: "the gap between the conception of jazz in Larkin's introduction to *All What Jazz* and that in the reviews it introduces".[45]

His detractors simply followed the idea that "by 1961 Larkin had no idea where jazz was"[46], but his own reviews prove how good and precise a critic he was. Others have tried to explain his attacks in the Introduction and his very different opinions in the reviews, which is a more interesting debate.

---

[42] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, p. 41.

[43] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 16.

[44] Ibid.

[45] LEGGETT B. J., *Larkin's Blues: Jazz and Modernism,* p. 265.

[46] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 17.

What Larkin wanted us to believe was, simply, that he did not like modernism in any shape and that he faked his first two years of reviews, the ones most involved in his praise of Parker. Leggett said that "Larkin's explanations is that he found himself in the awkward position of coming upon the traditional-modern controversy 20 years too late. It was in the late Forties [during the gap in his jazz life] that the battle had been fought; to adopt the traditional viewpoint once again in 1961 would have been "journalistically impossibile", since the issue had long been decided".[47] Therefore Larkin simply went on with his plan of "undiscriminating praise"[48] and only later, when writing the Introduction, he decided to come clean about his first years as a reviewer. But why would he?

Janice Rossen said that the Introduction and the reviews seem to be have been written for two different and opposite types of audiences. And again, Cedric Watts was more likely to believe what Larkin wrote in the reviews, stating "the "untruthful" Larkin of the reviews often seems more trustworthy than the sincere Larkin of the Introduction".[49] Others, like Leggett, believed that "Larkin's own rereading uncovers obvious contradictions and he tells a story to account for them".[50]

Richard Palmer, a scholar who extensively analysed Larkin's life as a jazz critic, supported this last theory. In Larkin's *Selected Letters* he found proof that Larkin himself knew how his Introduction sounded: "The thesis of the introduction [… is something which] I don't think has actually been said before, and, while it may not be wholly defensible, I think it is sufficiently amusing to say once".[51] Nonetheless, he went along with his statements from the Introduction, which to Palmer are his most expensive mistake, and defended them in later interviews.

Moreover, he found Larkin's explanation and attack on modern jazz flawed simply because there had never been anything more modern than jazz music:

> […] *jazz was the quintessence of Modernism from its very inception*. The developments in all other genres - literature, dance, painting, classical music - were radical, sticking and many other things, bu they were not, finally, new. Their practitioners used the same means, the same media, even the same vocabulary as

[47] LEGGETT B. J., *Larkin's Blues: Jazz and Modernism,* p. 267.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ivi, p. 269.

[50] Ibid.

[51] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 26.

> the artists and work from which they so self-consciously were departing. Nothing like jazz had ever been heard, not even in its own county.[52]

And Larkin was aware of this uniqueness too, even if he did not describe it as modern: "what was so exciting about jazz was the way its unique, simple gaiety instantly communicated itself to such widely different kinds of human being - Negro porters, Japanese doctors, King George VI".[53] He contradicted himself.

Palmer made some other interesting points: the infamous Trio (Parker, Picasso and Pound) was made of very different artists. Of his hatred of Parker we have already said. The most famous of all was undoubtedly Picasso, so important as to be compared to Larkin's favourite jazzman, Louis Armstrong. When Larkin was asked to write Armstrong's biography he refused because he felt under-qualified, and wrote: "[Armstrong was] an enormously important figure in our century, more important than Picasso in my opinion, but certainly quite comparable".[54] So he placed Picasso on the same level as Armstrong, a man he greatly admired. At the same time, he placed Picasso on the same level as Parker, in a way admitting to their equal importance and greatness.

As for the third P, Palmer believed that Pound was put in the trio as a joke: Pound was, at the time, a minor and already forgotten figure in modernism. It would not have been difficult for Larkin to find another P as a substitute, Sylvia Plath for example (whom he actually liked as a poet). In Palmer's words "his inclusion is decisive proof that Larkin's purposes were ludic"[55], he was humouring the public, he was lying and he knew it.

His last point was this: why did he go on for another three years at the *Telegraph*, if he so despised "modern jazz"? Unless, what he said in his Introduction was not true and he still found some pleasure in this activity.

There are two answers: he either was a liar, as Leggett said, or there was a duality in Larkin, which is a thesis that more than one critic has put forward. Clive James attributed this discrepancy to a shift in taste, and when there were contradictions it only meant that Larkin was still of "two minds" about a certain author. However, this goes against Larkin's own statements.

---

[52] Ivi, p. 29.

[53] Ibid.

[54] OSBORNE JOHN, *Larkin, Modernism and Jazz*, in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2003, p. 24.

[55] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 30.

Palmer made a similar observation, explaining how, for him, Larkin had two natures: Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Robin Goodfellow. One led him to play some games with the reader in the Introduction, while the other made him consider jazz as "high art (even jazz he disliked) and […] wanted to proselytise it"[56], as was evident mostly anywhere else in his jazz writings.

3. 7 His preferences

> After a time, it became his costume, when he had a record by an artist he admired, to begin his brief review with an even briefer essay on that artist; and those so treated give us the spectrum of Larkin's taste.[57]

His absolute favourites were easy to spot: Billy Holiday's "taut, vibrant voice expresses all the human feeling of the world"[58]; Louis Armstrong that "brought tears to [his] eyes"[59] with *Hello Dolly!* and whom he considered the Shakespeare of jazz; Duke Ellington and obviously Sydney Bechet, for whom he also wrote a poem.

However, *All What Jazz* is not the only source we can examine to find what he thought of this or that jazz artist: his private correspondence, published after his death, had many references to records he was listening to or, more rarely, events he was attending. Even with Monica, who did not really appreciate jazz music, he sometimes spoke about jazz ("Though she tolerated references to jazz in letters, Monica Jones preferred 'Classical. Mozart. Beethoven'".[60]) For example he told her about some records that he bought without knowing what was inside and ended up being by pleasantly surprised:

> […] And I played my new records - six unsuspected sides by Muggsy Spanier, Pee Wee Russell *et al*. discovered by me in *Tempo* lists, *6/6* each. I ordered them blind,

---

[56] Ivi, p. 31.

[57] TOLLEY A. T., *My Proper Ground*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991, p. 138.

[58] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz,* p. 72.

[59] Ivi, p. 119.

[60] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love,* p. 316.

> & played them trembling, fearing lest they should be a fearful let down - but they weren't: not a dud amongst them.[61]

Other times he recalled his love for Sidney Bechet, especially in 1959 when he heard of his death, giving us a glimpse on what he most loved about the jazzman (probably other than the fact that, much like Larkin himself, critics describe him as "always a solitary man"[62]):

> I was saddened to hear of the death pf Bechet tonight: of course, he hadn't produced much lately - living among the French had brought out his Creole side musically - but he was a wonderful player in his day […] At lest one could understand his musica: not like this modern stuff… cacophony (mumble mumble), deliberate atonalism (mumble) etc etc.[63]

What he appreciated most about him was his simplicity, or rather the fact that it was not difficult for the listener to comprehend him and what he was trying to convey with his music. Once again, "modern" was the opposite of what he liked: intricate, complicated pieces by artists that did not pay attention to their listeners, exactly like those of Charlie Parker. Parker was considered a genius, and he still is, but he "reinvented the syntax and the morphology of jazz music and redirected its course"[64] making him exactly what Larkin did not like.

Larkin's idea of what he liked was very clear; he wrote an essay titled "The Pleasure Principle" where he explained how too complicated poetry (or other art forms) did not interest him and he made clear that the artist should always have its audience in mind. This is why he also wrote, in 1982, an essay on Louis Armstrong with the title "Pleasing the People", which, according to Palmer, was "among the most fervently eloquent pieces he wrote anywhere".[65] Written in a time in which poetry did not come easily to him anymore, he was still inspired by the jazz he loved.

---

[61] LARKIN PHILIP, THWAITE ANTHONY (ED.), *Philip Larkin: Letters to Monica*, Faber and Faber, London, 2012, p. 67.

[62] POLILLO ARRIGO, *Jazz*, p. 334 (my translation).

[63] LARKIN PHILIP, THWAITE ANTHONY (ED.), *Philip Larkin: Letters to Monica*, p. 249.

[64] POLILLO ARRIGO, *Jazz*, p. 594 (my translation).

[65] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 6.

What we can observe, even in pieces that result to be not too enthusiastic, is how his "writing is always the product of careful, perceptive, engaged listening".[66] This is why his attack on Parker in his Introduction felt so out of character when we explore his first reviews, and even his later ones. However, Parker was not the only "modernist" on whom he had something to say. He kept reviewing their work over and over even if he did not appreciate it. Why would he have done that, if nothing about them gave him any sort of pleasure?

There is something else worth saying. In a May 1962 column, Larkin went out of his way to compliment Parker, even placing him, for a brief moment, above Louis Armstrong. The "something else" that distinguished Parker was:

> […] in a word, complication. Parker found jazz chugging along in 4/4 time in the tonic and dominant, and splintered if into a thousand rhythmic and harmonic pieces. Showers of sixteenths, accented on hale-and quarterbeats, exhibited a new harmonic fecundity and an originality phrasing that ha scarcely been hinted at before. *Parker did not 'follow' anyone, as Armstrong followed Oliver. He just appeared*.[67]

The reviews, that predate his Introduction, contradicted the latter. It could be simply explained by Larkin's own excuse: he had lied in the first two years at the *Telegraph*. Still, the poignant essay "Requiem for Jazz" was more in accord with the reviews. "Requiem for Jazz" post-dates the supposed two years in which he did not disclose his true opinions. There he wrote about Parker, his most hated jazzmen: "To say Parker destroyed jazz as well as himself would be the crudest of generalisations".[68]

Charlie Parker remained one of the most mentioned figures in his reviews. Less time he dedicated to others on which he has the same opinions: in *All What Jazz* there was less material, for example, on Dizzy Gillespie, who in the Introduction was certainly not praised ("I found his sense of humour rudimentary") but who was nonetheless described as "tremendous" in "After the Moderns" (a column from March 10, 1962).

An uncertainty, a sort of duality of the kind we have mentioned before, coated Larkin's view of Miles Davis, the famous trumpeter. "Davis has several manners: […] and I dislike them all". This is the short consideration Larkin gave him in his

---

[66] TOLLEY A. T., *My Proper Ground*, p. 141.

[67] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, p. 62 (my italics).

[68] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 37.

Introduction. However, anywhere else there was an "intriguing mixture of outright rejection and a respect bordering on surprised enjoyment".[69]

"It was with Coltrane, too, that jazz started to be *ugly on purpose*"[70] was the sentence he emitted on John Coltrane. And again "I still can't imagine how anyone can listen to a Coltrane record for pleasure", he said in an unpublished piece, before *All What Jazz*, from 1967 titled "Looking Back at Coltrane".

Still, Coltrane was one of the most reviewed jazzmen in the entirety of *All What Jazz* (21 reviews), second only to Ellington (24), one of the author's favourites. Why? Many explanations have been given here. Clive James and B. J. Leggett agreed on the theory of the duality of Larkin: the high number of reviews was due to the fact that he was still not over this kind of music.

Richard Palmer, who is also a jazz scholar, gave multiple explanations, one relating directly to the "two minds" theory. The first was that maybe not only there was a discrepancy in Larkin's opinions, but in Coltrane's music as well:

> It is a very long way from *Ballads* and *Africa/Brass* (1961) to mid-1960s works such as *Ascension* and *Meditation*. The difference is not merely one of degree but of kind: the latter works are not only more strident, more difficult, more relentless than ever, but a signal departure from his previous style. Most crucial is the fact that they eschew swing; indeed, for all their frenetic rhythmic activity, nothing resembling a jazz pulse is detectable.[71]

There's no need to be a jazz expert to see how such music, void of "jazz pulse", would be unwelcome to Larkin, who loved jazz rhythm above all things, and why he would have dedicated much time to Coltrane in hope to find something more similar to his earlier records.

Moreover, what he really disliked of Coltrane was his attitude towards his audience: "He did not want to entertain his audience; he wanted to lecture them, even annoy them", he wrote in 1967 in occasion of the death of the artist. He was exactly what he had described as wrong (and "modernist") in "The Pleasure Principle". Nonetheless, going against his own principles, Larkin reviewed Coltrane time and time again. Palmer then made this point: Larkin, despite being attentive as he was as a reviewer, would not

---

[69] Ivi, p. 40.

[70] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, p. 21.

[71] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 42.

have put himself through years and years of listening to Coltrane just out of duty. And, if Clive James' statement that *All What Jazz* was "the best available expression by the author himself of what he believed art to be"[72] is true, then Coltrane was part of that canon.

Another explanation that Palmer suggested, which is also very valid, is that Larkin knew how Coltrane had shaped jazz music, how important he was in that world and therefore how important it was that he talked about him. He could not ignore "the key figure in 1960s jazz", both for his readers who probably expected to see him mentioned, and also for himself as a professional figure. He even went as far as putting Coltrane's 1965 record *A Love Supreme* among his Records of the Year, recognising its importance for jazz history. Coltrate is still today one of the major influences in world jazz music.

It may have been hard for him to tolerate, but as we have seen in Chapter 2 neutrality could always be found in his poetry, where not very many strong opinions were present. This could be the same principle, applied to jazz reviewing.

Palmer made three more considerations, about the treatment reserved for three more modernist jazzmen, modernist being the key word here. They were either dismissed in short or not mentioned at all in his Introduction. However "his review-judgements confirm how thoroughly he could absorb their music, and while he ultimately stands at some distance from it, his responses are far more sympathetic than one would anticipate".[73]

The first was pianist Thelonious Monk. Opinions on Monk have divided jazz fans for years, but Larkin, who did not particularly like him, kept a firm line on him: he was funny, his work inspired many great pieces by others but "these qualities carry no more weight in jazz than in any other art, and despite the originality Monk remains a funny-hat man to whom it would be idle to ascribe profundity".[74]

The following two are more interesting for our purposes. The second was Sonny Rollins, which was described as someone who "blended the sound of Coleman Hawkins with Parker's harmonic and structural approach".[75] From this we could assume that he was not the recipient of Larkin's appreciation. However, more than once he gained the

---

[72] Ivi, p. 44.

[73] Ivi, p. 47.

[74] LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz*, p. 156.

[75] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 49.

reviewer's favour. In the review called "A Far From Indifferent Guy" his *Three Little Words* gained the praise for being "smoothly amazing".

The third, alto-saxophone player 'Cannonball' Adderly, was the opposite. He was "exactly the kind of modernist one would think would appeal to Larkin"[76], and while some reviews were at least approving, his opinion on him changed suddenly around 1968, when he was writing his Introduction. There, Adderly was not even mentioned. Still, Palmer believed his was a disservice to the jazzman, even different from what he had done with Coltrane: Larkin, perceptive as he was, had recognised the latter's importance, but he had dismissed that of Adderly, like many others had done.

3. 8 Modernism (and Romanticism)

Before diving in the topic of Modernism, there are a few words to dedicate to Romanticism. In Chapter 2 we have seen how Romanticism was another word to avoid for Movement authors, but many critics had come to the conclusion that "Philip Larkin was a Romantic who covered his tracks".[77] It should come as no surprise then, and it should further reinforce the critics' belief in Larkin, that jazz "is a Romantic art as well as a quintessentially Modernist one".[78] It is no coincidence then that in a 1961 book review Larkin wrote:

> It is hard to think of the carrier of, say, Six Beiderbecke of Charlie Parker without sensing […] something of the emotion behind Wordsworth's
>
> *We poets in our youth began in gladness,*
> *But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.*[79]

It's clear that he was associating a period and two jazzmen he did not favour, but the first line in the Wordsworth poem was positive, meaning that Larkin saw something good in those two. Moreover, connecting the Romantic period to something he loved, like jazz, makes us doubt that he so disliked it.

---

[76] Ivi, p. 50.

[77] O'NEILL MICHAEL, *'Fond of What He's Crapping On': Movement Poetry and Romanticism*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered: Essays on Larkin, Amis, Gunn, Davie and Their Contemporaries*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 289.

[78] PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises,* p. 61.

[79] Ibid.

By now, we know fairly well of the hatred Larkin felt, or rather claimed he felt, for modernism. Nonetheless, critics have tried multiple times to analyse his work and have found that maybe he was not so anti-modernist as he wanted to be. We have seen how this applied to poetry, but there is also an example regarding music, and jazz in particular. The main point here is the fact that jazz was modernist from the beginning, long before Larkin had ever experienced it. Commenting on a passage from the Introduction to *All What Jazz*, John Osborne wrote:

> One can hardly be more categorical than that: Larkin hates Modernism; jazz becomes Modernist in the 1940s; therefore the history of jazz fits a lapidarian model being divisible into pre-Parker (good) and post-Parker (bad) eras. Alarmingly, even when they disagree with his view that it represents a qualitative decline, most commentators tacitly accepts Larkin's assumptions that jazz becomes Modernist with Charlie Parker. The truth, of course, is quite otherwise, and such as to destabilise Larkin's cod absolutes. For if Modernism is characterised by radical stylistic innovation, then jazz was from its inception Modernist music par excellence - and was recognised as such at the time.[80]

This reinforces the idea that his claims on Parker are if not wrong, at least untruthful: maybe he did not like Parker, even if we have seen reasons to believe otherwise, but certainly Parker was not the artist that had turned jazz into "modernist" music.

The poem 'For Sydney Bechet' is the most evident example of Larkin addressing jazz in his poetry. Here it is:

> That note you hold, narrowing and rising, shakes
> Like New Orleans reflected on the water,
> And in all ears appropriate falsehood wakes,
>
> Building for some a legendary Quarter
> Of balconies, flower-baskets and quadrilles,
> Everyone making love and going shares—
>
> Oh, play that thing! Mute glorious Storyvilles
> Others may license, grouping around their chairs
> Sporting-house girls like circus tigers (priced
>
> Far above rubies) to pretend their fads,
> While scholars manqués nod around unnoticed
> Wrapped up in personnels like old plaids.
>
> On me your voice falls as they say love should,

[80] OSBORNE JOHN, *Larkin, Modernism and Jazz*, p. 7.

Like an enormous yes. My Crescent City
Is where your speech alone is understood,

And greeted as the natural noise of good,
Scattering long-haired grief and scored pity.[81]

John Osborne, in his essay "Larkin, Jazz and Modernism", believed that in this poem Larkin was not only obviously addressing jazz but that the poem was also constructed according to modernist standards, therefore contradicting many of the previous statements Larkin had made about his poetry and good poetry in general.

First of all the it contradicted the Realist dogma, meaning that poetry should be representational. "Poetry is an affair of sanity, of saying things as they are", said Larkin in *Required Writing*. However, Osborn's point here was that he was basing an entire poem on another art form and, more than that, the most abstract one: music, jazz in particular. Moreover, the Storyville line was connected to Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', which in turn was connected to Milton ("Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest"). Therefore a single line in a Larkin's poem was based on art, the music of Bechet; on art, the Elegy; about art, that of Milton.

The second concept was that the view of the artist was alway right, if someone interprets it differently from how the author intended it was simply not correct. Here there are two points to touch: "the poem resolutely declines to conflate its narrator with Larkin, disclosing little or nothing about the age, race, gender, marital status" etc. and, therefore, that "Bechet's music is described from a number of perspectives, none of them biographical".[82]

Thirdly, Larkin believed that "twentieth-century criticism [wanted] to demonstrate that what looks simple is in fact complicated, and that what seems to have one meaning has three or four".[83] But if the previous remark was true, and Larkin was not actually the narrator and there were multiple perspectives, then we could have multiple interpretations of the poem, each one different and based on who was reading it and one's knowledge of Bechet and jazz.

---

[81] LARKIN PHILIP, BURNETT ARCHIE (ED.), *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2012, p. 54.

[82] Ivi, p. 11.

[83] Ivi, p. 10.

In the lines "That note you hold, narrowing and rising, shakes / Like New Orleans reflected on water / And in all ears appropriate falsehood wakes" we could interpret "appropriate falsehood" as the sensations that his music gave us to be false. However, Osborne believed that that was a reflection on Bechet himself, who was in fact from New Orleans, and was always described as being part of that scene, while actually he had left the city as a teenager in 1919 and hardly ever came back. This clashes with the idea that "art should not only tell the truth, but should also do so in a style so lucid as to obviate critical explication".[84]

While his ideas, those seen in the poem, seem Modernist, his verses were not. He was "at most, a Realist with a Modernist sensibility".[85] What could surprise the reader was, however, the form of the entire poem. It had seventeen lines and it did not fit any usual metric scheme known: it was not a sonnet, nor a villanelle, nor there were perfect tercets or couplets. This was a true modernist trait, being free of form.

"He loved and learned from many aspects of Modernist music, and literature, and lied about it: the proof is to be found in the only place that matters, the poems".[86]

3. 9 Racism

After the publication of Andrew Motion's biography, *A Writer's Life*, many accusations of racism and misogyny have been moved against Philip Larkin. Of course, he was not alive to defend himself, but the scholar community stepped away from him for a while. Since then, it was 1993, different critics have tried to rehabilitate his name. One above all was James Booth, with his own biography painting a much more positive picture of the author, saying how he always went to dinner with an Indian colleague and how he "approached publishers on behalf of the young poet and novelist Vikram Seth".[87] Moreover, in his letters:

---

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ivi, p. 18.

[86] Ivi, p. 24.

[87] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014, p. 327.

> Larkin does on occasion entertain some of his correspondents with expressions of pungent bigotry. However, these are performative riffs, always requiring inverted commas. They never come directly in his own voice of without subversion.[88]

Racism ties in with the topic of jazz. Many claims of racism have been made because of details found in his private correspondence, but his jazz reviews and his love for jazz in general puts these claims to rest.

Sydney Bechet, a black man, was for the entirety of Larkin's life one of his favourite jazzmen. In 1941 he bought one of his records and wrote to his friend Sutton: "I rushed out on Monday and bought *Nobody Knows the Way I Feels This Morning*." Fucking, cutting, bloody good! Bechet is a great artist".[89] When he was in Paris, the author, who was not really comfortable going out to listen to live bands, went "visiting a Parisian night club under the misapprehension that the Claude Later band would that night be featuring its regular guest star, Sidney Bechet".[90] Would he have done it, for a man, a black man, he was supposed to hate? How could he write so kindly about black musicians, if he was indeed a racist, in a period in which literature of all kind was full of others forms of racism?

Moreover, he recognised time and time again how the birth of the genre he so loved came from the hardship that African-American people had to go through: "The Negro did not have the Blues because he was naturally melancholy. He had them because he was cheated and bullied and starved".[91] The word "negro" would not be used today, but it is probably a product of the time in which the author was writing. Still, he knew what happened to those people and made no excuses for it. More than that, he did not treat black or white jazzmen differently: implying that jazz was exclusively a black art would belittle great white jazz players, and at the same time it would imply that it came naturally to black people, belittling their talent and time spent practicing. This showed us, in Osborne's opinion, great sensibility on Larkin's part.

In 'For Sidney Bechet' one line reads: "On me your voice falls as they say love should". Here Larkin was describing how the narrator was the recipient of love, love from a black man.

---

[88] Ivi, p. 326.

[89] OSBORNE JOHN, *Larkin, Modernism and Jazz*, p. 21.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ivi, p. 22.

3. 10 Jazz after 1971

From 1971 onward, after he had resigned his place at the *Telegraph*, he still published pieces on jazz from time to time, longer than he published poetry. However, his experiences with jazz became more and more complicated: in 1967 he had been tested for his hearing and at the age of forty-five he was already at "the threshold of social adequacy".[92] Soon after that, he had needed hearing aids not only to listen to records, but to simply function in society. However, the conclusion to his love for jazz happened in the only way it could, with death. In a review he wrote: "I realise afresh the truth of Baudelaire's words: 'Man can live a week with our bread, but not a day without righteous jazz".[93] Still, he refused to listen to jazz in his hospital room when he became fatally ill, having a change of heart only when he went back home for a while before his death in 1985. Nonetheless at his memorial, on Valentine's day 1986, jazz music played.

> A distinguished jazz ensemble played at Philip's Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey on 14 February 1986. The moving recreations of his favourite tunes - 'Blue Horizon' (Bechet), 'Davenport Blues' (Biederbecke) and trumpeter Alan Elsdon's plangent solo performance of 'A Closer Walk With Thee' - impressed the large congregation of friends and admirers. Of all the many tributes to his life and work, these were the most fitting and sadly appropriate - and surely more the Philip's liking than the prayers and recitations of his poems up at the 'holy end' of the Abbey.[94]

---

[92] BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin,* p. 308.

[93] WHITE JOHN, *Goodbye, Witherspoon: a Jazz Friendship*, in SALWAK DALE, *Philip Larkin: The Man and His Work,* Palgrave Macmillan UK, London, 1989, p. 45.

[94] Ivi, p. 47.

Conclusion

While the First Chapter of this dissertation aimed at giving a useful piece of information to understand Philip Larkin, his life and his works; all the other chapters were more based on discussions that took place between critics during the many years after his death.

The Second Chapter, in particular, is focused on the author's belonging to the group called The Movement. We have seen how the poet denied, for the most part of his life, his belonging to it. However it is undeniable that he was a Movement author if we really consider his work in full: his loathing of abroad cultures and literatures was very clear, for example. At the same time, since The Movement was not an organised group by any means, he also strayed from it in certain aspects: his idea about audience was much broader than that one of his peers; he was not as focused on what we have called verbal hygiene. All the traits we have seen seem to take root from the bad reputation that The Movement had given to Modernism: in a way or another, their desire to break from Modernism was felt in any discussed detail and chapter during my work. The question that scholars have asked themselves time and time again is if Larkin, in particular, really meant his disdain for Modernism, and Romanticism, or if it was only a sort of generational gap: instead of following in their steps, it is not unusual for poets to discard the ideals of the generation before them and, rather, going back to a previous one, Victorian poetry in Larkin's case. More modern critics believe that this is the real explanation, and I tend to align with them: his hatred towards Modernism was simply a reaction typical of his generation and even if the Movement claimed not to like those authors, the debt they owed to them is great. That particular debt can be easily seen in Larkin's own writing: he tried to write like those poets when he first discovered them, because he undeniably saw something in them, to the point that he even adopted some traits that remained part of his style.

The Third Chapter has presented Larkin's love for jazz music, which was maybe greater than poetry: poetry required him an effort that listening to a record didn't. He once said: "I can live a week without poetry but not a day without jazz".[1] After years of

[1] TOLLEY A. T., *My Proper Ground*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991, p. 137.

reviewing for the *Daily Telegraph* scholars were shocked when he published *All What Jazz* and claimed to have spoken highly of jazzmen he did not really like for such a long time, Charlie Parker in particular. We cannot set his words completely aside: he was the one to write them and to back them up some time later in interviews, so there had to be a reason for his thinking. However, in that particular chapter many points of views have been analysed and the common belief was that he actually did not despise those jazzmen as much as he claimed. Two things had actually happened: firstly, he was famous by that point and much more confident in expressing harsher or controversial opinions; secondly, given his open distaste for Modernism he could not claim to like, let alone love, more "modern" jazzmen. Of course, jazz was the most modernist of all musical forms, but he associated Charlie Parker's music (a sort of more complicated type of jazz) to that modern poetry he felt was difficult to understand. He was really adamant that he did not appreciate art that was hard to comprehend. Still, in all those years at the *Telegraph* he made many points in favour of these musicians. Therefore, we tend to believe that certainly he did not love them, not like he loved Sydney Bechet. His opinions, expressed in his Introduction to *All What Jazz,* are the result of his fame and also on the bitterness he felt for the decline in popularity jazz was having at the time.

Soon after his death, when some of his private letters were shown to the public, many started to reject Philip Larkin and his work. For example, academics claimed that "we don't tend to teach Larkin much now in my department of English".[2] The letters were not showing the best side of him, but it was also private correspondence shared with his most intimate relationships. In later years, much more kinder words were said about the poet. Examples of his generosity and his care for others were brought forward in biographies like the one by James Booth, who is more favourable than Andrew Motion in his own contribution to Larkin0s life and work. Despite his private life and character, which we will never know personally and completely, his poetry is still taught at high levels of education because it is still considered that of a fundamental British poet. This means that his work, even almost forty years after his death, is still relevant, can still entertain and, most of all, can touch and reach people. But after all, he said it in one of his memorable sentences: "what will survive of us is love".[3]

---

[2] MORRISON BLAKE, *'Still Going On, All of It': The Movement in the 1950s and the Movement Today*, in LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 2.

[3] LARKIN PHILIP, BURNETT ARCHIE (ED.), *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2012, p. 72.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

LARKIN PHILIP, *A Girl in Winter*, Faber and Faber, London, 1947;

LARKIN PHILIP, *All What Jazz: A Record Diary*, Faber and Faber, London, 1984;

LARKIN PHILIP, *Jill*, Faber and Faber, London, 2005;

LARKIN PHILIP (ED.), *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1973;

LARKIN PHILIP, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982*, Faber and Faber, London, 1983;

LARKIN PHILIP, THWAITE ANTHONY (ED.), *Philip Larkin: Letters to Monica*, Faber and Faber, London, 2012;

LARKIN PHILIP, BURNETT ARCHIE (ED.), *Philip Larkin: The Complete Poems*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2012.

Secondary Sources

BOOTH JAMES, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014;

DICKINSON PETER, *Philip Larkin Remembered*, in *RSA Journal*, April 1989, Vol. 137, No. 5393, pp. 309-311;

HARTLEY JEAN, *Philip Larkin, The Marvel Press and Me*, Carcanet Press, Manchester, 1989;

LEADER ZACHARY, *Movement Fiction and Englishness*, in *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 2013, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 247–268;

LEADER ZACHARY (ED.), *The Movement Reconsidered: Essays on Larkin, Amis, Gunn, Davie and Their Contemporaries*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009;

LEGGETT B. J., *Larkin's Blues: Jazz and Modernism*, in *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1996, pp. 258-276;

MORRISON BLAKE, *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980;

MOTION ANDREW, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1993;

OSBORNE JOHN, *Larkin, Modernism and Jazz*, in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2003;

PALMER RICHARD, *Such Deliberate Disguises*, Continuum, London, 2008;

RÀCZ ISTVÀN R., *Larkin and The Movement in Two New Books*, in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, vol. 18, no. 1/2, 2012, pp. 545-558;

TOLLEY A. T., *My Proper Ground*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991;

WHITE JOHN, *Goodbye, Witherspoon: a Jazz Friendship*, in SALWAK DALE, *Philip Larkin: The Man and His Work,* Palgrave Macmillan UK, London, 1989.

General Sources

AA.VV., *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., London, 2012, Vol. E.;

AMIS KINGSLEY, *You Can't Do Both,* Hutchinson, London, 1994;

MARSHALL, *The Story of Jazz*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1956;

MILLER KARL, *Writing in England Today: The Last Fifteen Years*, Penguin Books, London, 1968;

POLILLO ARRIGO, *Jazz: La vicenda e i protagonisti della musica afro-americana* (enlarged edition), Mondadori, Milano, 2017.