ALIENATION IN THE POETRY OF PHILIP LARKIN*

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Abstract

In this study, the theme of alienation in poems of Philip Larkin, one of the most significant poets of English Literature, is examined. It is understood that the source of the alienation theme in Larkin's poems is his real life experiences. It can be said that Philip Larkin's poems are autobiographical. Bad childhood memories, unhappy marriage of his parents and disconnected relations with other members of the society caused a feeling of alienation in the poet's mind. As a result of pessimistic thoughts, Larkin wrote poems such as *Reasons for Attendance*, *Dublinesque*, *Strangers*, *The March Past*, *Bridge for the Living*, *Livings*, *Two Guitar Pieces*, *Here*, *Dockery and Son*, *Best Society*, *Single to Belfast*, *The Importance of Elsewhere*, *High Windows*, *Deceptions*, *Dry-Point* and *Wants* in which theme of alienation can be observed. The help of method of literature review writes down the study and some of Larkin's poems are handled, as the theme that is aimed to be demonstrated exists in them.

Keywords: English Literature, Alienation, English Poetry.

Introduction

The beginning of 20th century was an era of rapid social changes that affected the mind and imagination of human beings. Slavery of 'man serving man' of Middle Ages was altered into 'man the slave of technology and machinery' for non-humanistic aims. The two World Wars caused modern man to have an ambiguous mind and artificial values in beholding the meaning of existence and reliability of civilization. Moreover, industrial and socio-cultural developments had negative impact on both the individual psyche and the structure of society.

As an essential medium of the experience of society, literature has taken the role of criticizing or celebrating its values as well as transcending the environment. The literature of the post-war period is comprised of rehabilitation of religious, philosophical and traditional values. The artist, escaping from the turmoil outside, puts the individual at the center of the universe and focuses on an autobiographical inner world of pessimist and alienated personality. With self-defining attitude, an imaginary world is created and there the artist tries to understand him and the other.

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Philip Larkin's poetry sets an example for drawing human attention onto the pessimist and negative nostalgic mood of an alienated, lonely modern man. An analysis and illustration of his poetry takes us to basic and familiar truths about the difficult and oblique relationships man has formed with modern society. From The Poet's reflections, it can be observed that the two World Wars have created inescapable defects on social communication and involvement. Moreover, that from lived or felt experiences the imagination realm of the postwar artist has achieved a negative tone.

In this thesis, it is argued that the profound theme of Philip Larkin's poetry is loneliness, alienation, negative nostalgia and lack of communication. In addition, that there are two major sources of his alienation; one is 'autobiographical' and the other is 'social.' As Larkin indicates, "Generally my poems are related, therefore, to my personal life" (Motion, 1993, 273). Some scenes of the poet's alienated, separate and self-dramatized life and his negative tone and evaluation of life as well as learning about Larkinesque answers to social conflicts and illustrating his alienated world reflected in his poetry.

1. The Socio-Cultural Background of England in 1950s

The first half of 20th century witnessed important developments in culture, literature, science and technology. The economic and politic crisis enabled the emergence of new ideologies, social groups, philosophical views, democratic developments, religious views. Despite these developments during the post-war years, there was "a decline and continuing failure of Britain to compete with the newly developing economies of the world" (Sokhanvar,1999, 198). That continuing failure affected the social life in England, so "the calm, steady, well-regulated life of the old England disappeared after the Second World War" (Thornley and Roberts, 1968, 149).

The industry of the country was in bad conditions: the factories were damaged, and there was a lack of machinery, raw materials, and fuel. Most of the surviving population of the citizens was women, children, the sick, the aged and the crippled. "...the war destroyed and forced the rearrangement of much of the old social and economic structure of England, just as it rearranged the political map" (Betts, 1979, 167). England had to establish a new life standard, which would have been based on a powerful economy, a trustful policy and a respectful religious view. England left its past behind. It entered a global political system and a global economy. "There seemed to be three kinds of ideologies for English society; fascism, communism, and welfare-capitalism" (Sinfield, 2000, 89).

Each of those ideologies based on different ideas. "Communism represented the state ownership and control of all the means of production, distribution and exchange, under a dictatorship of the proletariat, or working class" (Eddy, 1931, 16). Fascism was an ideology that belongs to the right-wing. It saw that society, the origin, the race and the nation were ahead of other things. "It emphasized a myth of national or racial rebirth after a period of decline or destruction" (Lyons, 1996, 35). During that time "Welfare capitalism emphasized on commitment proved well suited to managing college-educated workers, who were fast becoming dominant in the labor force" (Jacoby, 1997, 9). In 1950s there were different social groups defending different ideas and had different expectations for future such as "working-class, people of color, the unemployed, and lone-parent, Catholics in Ireland, gays and lesbians" (Sinfield, 2000, 92).

As Betts states (1979, 212), "the old had nostalgia for pre-war years, while the young generation disliked the pre-war years because of dominant imperialist power. Many young people became 'alienated,' positioned in resentful opposition to the world they lived." The multi-ideological social structure showed that struggle among the different groups of people continued. Post-war Englishmen were not able to get the calm and regular days of prewar years. In 1950s, new philosophical views occurred. Until World War II people supported the Descartes' utterance, 'I think therefore I am.' During the World Wars, they turned to the philosophy of Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi philosopher, whose motto was 'We think with our blood.' Existentialism was another philosophical idea of postwar man.

> The absurdity of life, its fundamental meaninglessness because nothing existed outside one's self-these were the dreadful realities that the existentialist saw and accepted. The war had numbed all intellectual enthusiasm. In 1950s, there was no expression of hope or any outburst of rage. A sense of bleak resignation settled into the thinking of postwar intellectuals who came to accept evil as a permanent element of existence and absurdity as the fundamental human condition (192).

Besides the Existentialism, there were other philosophical views. "If there was a prevailing political philosophy behind such alterations, it was socialism, not liberalism. Bentham's older notion of "utilitarianism" acquired a new social connotation" (185). These philosophical approaches affected the worldview of "some people who protested the comfortable life of bourgeois and democracy, and some others who rejected the oppressive authority" (Thornley and Roberts, 1968, 206). As Sinfield states (2000,

130), "England was not: egalitarian rather than hierarchical; forward looking rather than nostalgic; a place of metamorphosis rather than of determination."

The so-called democratic aura of England disappeared during the postwar years because of new social changes. The increase of population caused a lack of food and civilians met the terror of starvation. Increasing in the number of the citizens caused to lose of the democratic views. "Democracy… meant to include development and development… meant to include the realization of basic human rights, including, of course, civic and political rights" (International IDEA and CSDS, 2008, 3). The definition of democracy was changed. "Ideologically, the state, not the individual, counted. Politically, dictatorship from above, not consent from below, was imposed. Institutionally, repression of the rights of the citizen, not respect for them, was practiced" (Betts, 1979, 141).

Human rights became important. Members of English society thought, "Man had the fundamental right to freedom, equality, and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permitted a life of dignity and well-being, and he bearded a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations" (Betts, 1979, 232). Therefore, lower classes wanted to share the same right of education, social security, health care, and job and equality became a social reaction in 1950s.

1950s was a period when people showed their sexual identity freely. "It was in the mid-1950s, partly in reaction to the increase in prosecutions, that the way of regarding 'gayness' became powerful. Homosexuality came to be considered less as an evil or a sin and more a medical or psychological condition" (Sinfield, 2000, 90). The right of women was another problem.

> During the 1950s, women faced a social, political, and economic establishment that limited their opportunities and enmeshed them in a powerful set of expectations and moral regulations… The ideal woman was seen as a domestic goddess who prepared her family's meals, dispensed wisdom and common sense, and always kept herself well dressed and appropriately coiffed… Between 1945 and 1958, the percentage of women college students dropped from more than 54 percent to only 35 percent, and the number of women in the workforce experienced similar declines. Although 35 percent of adult women worked outside the home in 1956, they had few "career" opportunities and, except for those who worked as teachers and nurses, little chance of promotion and advancement (Olson, 2000, 314).

In old days, women accepted their place in the society, as a housewife or a mother but after 1950s, they wanted to make a career, too. That idea of women caused them to reject their social situation. Women wanted to have important statues and a feminist movement started. "It started from assertions of women's common sisterhood in oppression. Sisterhood expressed the idea that in general women have interests opposed to those of men that men generally dominate women, and generally benefit from this domination" (Ramazanoğlu, 1989, 3). The church had lost its importance and power upon the individuals and people searched new religious views. There was a serious complexity since citizens broke away from religious rules, during the war. People refused the strict rules of the religious institutions.

> Religion was as no longer a set of rules, which must have been obeyed because God said so. It was a personal therapy, which could have been adopted, if one like, because it would have made one felt better. Its key terms no longer had any referents beyond the psyche. As that basic change involved replacing the otherworldly with the mundane, there seemed no obvious reason not to regard it as secularization (Bruce, 1996, 147).

It is understood from the quotation above that during 1950s religion was seen as a philosophical view rather than a doctrine or personal obligation. The above-mentioned social problems in England caused the social reforms by the Labour Government. Those reforms were Nationalization of the Bank of England and of Coal Industry, the Inland Transport Act. Those nationalization bills enabled the control of railroads, roods, canals and harbor facilities by the government.

In 1948, two important social reforms were enacted. The first one was the National Assistance Act, which aimed to raise the life standards of the members of the society. The other one was the National Health Service Act and that act provided the nationalization of hospital and the payment of medicine by the government. Social reforms made the life of Englishmen easy, but were not enough. Marshall Plan (1948) was another way of solving the economic problems.

Marshall Plan or European Recovery Program, project instituted at the Paris Economic Conference (July, 1947) to foster economic recovery in certain European countries after World War II. Marshall urged (June 5, 1947) that European countries decided on their economic needs so that material and financial aid from the United States could have been integrated on a broad scale (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 2004, 30434).

Although the economic problems were solved, the citizens lost their trust in Labour Government and the Conservatives gained power. In the election of 1951, Churchill, a Conservative became the prime minister. "As prime minister from 1951 until his resignation in 1955, he ended nationalization of the steel and auto industries but maintained most other socialist measures instituted by the Labour government" (10355). Churchill's management strategy wasn't enough for ending the economic crisis. "An economic crisis of 1951-1952, brought about by rising inflation and balance of payments problems, was met with reduction in imports, restrictions on credit, government economies, and incentives for production" (Davidson, 1976, 269).

In 1955, Sir Anthony Eden became the prime minister. Eden cabinet faced with a domestic economic crisis. "To restore confidence in the British economy R. A. Butler, who continued as Chancellor of the Exchequer, adapted measures to encourage savings and private investment, limited capital expenditures by the government and raised some taxation levels" (269). After solving the domestic economic problems, in 1956, Eden faced the Suez crisis. "The British strongly resisted Nasser's attempt to nationalize it ... By November, the plan had been thwarted as a result of opposition from United States, combined with resistance in the British Parliament by both Labourities and some Conservatives" (269).

In 1957, Harold Macmillan became the prime minister. The most important problem during Macmillan government was application for the membership of European Common Market. Macmillan saw that the trade position of England was weakened and he wanted to apply for membership of the market but his request refused by French President Charles de Gaulle, in 1963. After a struggle, Macmillan resigned the premiership of the market, in 1963.

The entrance of the Britain to European Common Market was not enough to solve the problems. Not only had the economical but also the political and social problems continued in the administration of the next governments' presidents as "Harold Wilson, Edward Heath, and Margaret Thatcher" (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 2004, 19950).

Changing of the government system was not enough for developing a peaceful society since people had some psychological problems after the World War II. The war damaged the soldiers' psychology and they damaged the psychology of their families. The effects of war not only disturbed the people who saw the years of war but also the effects of war transferred from one generation to other and grandsons had to live under the influence of their grandfathers' fault. Therefore, post war period became "a time of crises, a time of transition, a time of disease and despair" (Harris, 1996, 34).

New postwar generation forgot the days of war, which "turned a person into a nation" (Sinfield, 2000, 135). They wanted to live without worrying about future. On one hand, some people did not respect the rights of others. On the other hand, some sentimental ones showed their reaction to new social life by alienated themselves from the society. Those sensitive people first estranged to their relatives and then alienated from themselves. Finally, they committed suicide. That reality showed that the war affected a country both in political, economic, social and psychological respects.

2. The Literary Aura in Postwar England

1950s was the period of changing and developing not only in novel but also in all literary genres; such as fiction, drama and poetry. Literature of 1950s was a "wonderful mix of realism, romance, fable, satire, parody, play with form and philosophical intelligence" (Carter and McRae, 2001, 412). During the 1950s, while writing novels or dramas "the authors generally dealt with the strain and suffering of time and the unsettled state of men's mind" (Anderson, Buckler and Veeder, 1979, 1077). Major literary works underlined the place of people in society. The writers "presented characters from different levels of society and explored different themes; and the changes in beliefs and political ideas were strongly influenced by social events" (Thornley and Roberts, 1968, 143).

There were some themes similar to previous ones. "The theme and the subject matter were still, essentially, the human condition, but the means and methods of exploring them were infinitely richer and more varied then before" (Sokhanvar,1999, 200). The diversity in writing made the literary works of 1950s "a rich mixture of old and new, English and non-English, standard and non-standard, male and female, public and private, universal and individual, certain and uncertain, in the ongoing search to express the world one lived in" (Carter and McRae, 2001, 412).

Like in previous literary works, there were heroes. "There was the individual; solitary, responsible for his or her own destiny, yet powerless when set against the ineluctable forces of the universe" (413). In literature of 1950s "identity was a common theme: sexual identity, local identity, national identity, racial identity, spiritual identity, intellectual identity" (Sokhanvar, 1999, 201). Besides the identity, the general themes were "time, the relationship between the body and the spirit, the power of the image" (Higson, 1995, 14) as well as the government, the structures of family life, violence, madness, isolation, nature, passion, desire, love, parenthood, death, melancholy, ageing, condition of England, social forms, personal objects, region, unemployment, "individualism, consumption, choice, sexuality, pleasure and international humanism" (Sivanandan, 1990, 45).

The new literature was experimental not traditional and there were not strict rules and limitations in form and content. Each writer developed his or her own method of writing which included "complex characterization, free speech, generally first person narration and a style which was ironic, esoteric and antagonist" (Sinfield, 2000, 45). The literati reacted and criticized new discoveries in the literary works that meant to show their dissatisfaction with social, political, cultural, religious and economic problems. In addition, these reactions brought an individualistic and a social alienation.

Philip Larkin was different from his contemporaries who were in a desire of being famous. Larkin desired to deal with his art rather than to have a good relationship with other members of the society. The poet did not like to spend his time with his friends and relatives. He grew up in a family in which he met the broken and selfish relationship among his parents. Because of his bad childhood memories, he did not trust in other people. Therefore, he chose to be alone.

There were other reasons behind his aim of being alone. He did not have a handsome appearance and he had some physical problems, especially with his eyes. In addition, Larkin had a stammer. "His stammer influenced his self-consciousness during his childhood and the traces of stammer continued throughout his life. For Larkin words were the thing out of reach" (Swarbrick, 1997, 3). He did not like his body and even himself, and, in an interview, he said that he would never have got a much happier life without being someone else.

Anthony Thwaite, one of Larkin's old friends who collected and edited Larkin's letters considered that Philip Larkin never gave some detailed information about his life since he thought what was important was his art, not his life and since he tried to hide the unhappy aspects of his life. In addition, Larkin never gave lecture on his poems or he did not want to transport his works to the next generations. Readers only learned the attitude of Larkin in his poems.

> Frequently Larkin presented himself in the poems as an outsider, a man without a past to be nostalgic for and without much faith in the future, a man on fringe of the academy and literary life, an isolated bachelor, a provincial, rejecting all that was not English, refusing to travel beyond the British Isles (Schmidt, 1979, 333).

Larkin who had pessimistic life always placed himself as "isolated in the present, hungry for the past, anxious about the future" (Motion, 1993, 263). Philip Larkin reflected the conflicts of his life to his works. Philip Larkin seemed as if he had spent a boring life and he declared that what was seen in his poems as negative or pessimistic details are the reflection of his life. As it is stated in the following paragraph, Larkin described what he lived or felt in his life.

> My poems are so self-explanatory that any words of commentary seem superfluous. They all derive from things I have seen or done or thought and I doubt if there is anything unusual about their subjects. It was a line he had taken before, but now pursued with more vigour. My point, he insisted, 'is that because what one writes depends so much on one's character and environment – either one writes about them or to escape from them – then it follows that basically one no more chooses what one writes than one chooses the character one has or the environment one has. And further, one no more likes what one writes than the character one has or the environment one has (271).

Larkin used his real life experiences as the source of his poems but he goes beyond his real circumstances by the help of his imagination. "Larkin's poems were attempts to occupy the imaginative space of 'somewhere you were not' and were ultimately concerned with existential questions of identity, choice and chance, isolation and communality" (Swarbrick, 1997, 1). The poet did not have a good personality that could have been admired but he produced wonderful poems and novels, which expressed the hidden images or the views of all people. That is, Philip Larkin acted, as a mirror, which reflected the

secret aspects of life in a very effective way. "Larkin's poems seemed to come to us very appealing as the expression of a personality disclosing itself with self-deprecating honesty" (Swarbrick, 1997, 1). When Larkin wrote poems, he made a combination of his views and emotions, imaginations. To Larkin, "a poem was written because the poet got a sudden vision – lasting one second or less – and he attempted to express the whole of which the vision was a part. Or he attempted to express the vision" (Thwaite, 1990, 5).

Despite all pessimistic realities of his life, Larkin was seen as a romantic poet, but his romanticism was strange. On one hand, "Larkin undervalued Romantic impulse, he was sensitive to beauty of the past and community life as well as the mystery of the living world" (Haffpair, 1995, 265). On the other hand, he never explained the beauty of the woman or the love in his works. His romanticism was behind the ambulances, streets, parks and buildings. Philip Larkin had an ironic romanticism. He was also rejected modernism. His reaction "against modernism and excess in favour of traditional comeliness and clarity, caused him to be regarded as a leader of what come to be called the Movement" (Blamires, 1984, 238).There were certain reason of his rejection of Modernism. Modernist view was away from his poetic view. Larkin attacked the two main modernism themes. These themes were outrage and mystification. In order to define his rejection of Modernism the poet used the following definition:

> 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. This is my essential criticism of modernism, whether prepetrated by Parker, Pound or Picasso: it helps us neither to enjoy nor endure. It will divert us as long as we are prepared to be mystified or outraged, but maintains its hold only by being more mystifying and more outrageous: it has no lasting power. Hence the compulsion on every modernist to wade deeper into violence and obscenity: hence the succession of Parker by Rollins and Coltrane, and of Rollins and Coltrane by Coleman, Ayler and Shepp (Motion, 1993, 398).

Larkin wrote individualistic poems and dealt with personal emotions, but he avoided self-pity and sensation in his poems. He tried to express the differences between himself and other people. Philip Larkin's works were "the discrete, self-referential domain that paralleled his own paradoxical relationship of isolation and connectedness with the world" (Sinfield, 2000, 14). In a sense, Larkin's works were written for expressing his views and he did not consider the others' views. Larkin was suggested the words "stop wondering what other people think of you & consider what you think of yourself" (Thwaite, 1990, 309). The poet thought that he must have written his poems for his desire of writing but not for satisfying the others.

As Bergonzi states (1977, 351), "His main themes were social democratic, egalitarian, philistine, anti-heroic ethos of postwar England." It was not surprising information that Larkin used postwar England as the background of his works because Larkin saw a connection between life and literature and said "Literature is a very tiny thing compared with one's own life (and of course, one's own literature). Life and literature is a question of what one thrills to, and further than that no man shall go without putting his foot in a turd" (Thwaite, 1990, 50). In addition, in his poems, Larkin generally dealt with the negative aspects or unpleasant situations of life. He thought the end of life was dying and there could not have been happiness and love among the dead. For him, life was the combination of annoyance and fear, so he did not give any place to love in his poems.

> At first sight it was hard to see how poems about unhappiness, loss [and] a sense of missing out could have been a pleasure either to read or write but as Larkin said on another occasion, [t]he impulse for producing a poem was never negative: the most negative poems in the world was a very positive thing to have done (Day and Docherty, 1997, 33).

Larkin's poems sometimes appeared as having a positive meaning. It was the surface meaning of his poems and his poems deeply had a negative or pessimistic meaning. "Larkin's pessimism was as a kind of death instinct though that view was contradicted by the fear of death" (40). He had a sense of failure or a feeling that his lifetime passed unused. In his poems, characters always aimed to achieve an unreachable object, person or career. Thus, he never understood the value of the things that he had. There was not any place to words to success in Larkin's works. He used the words to fail in his works, even his poem entitled *Success Story*. "His poems often had dramatic or narrative plots, and details were enlisted not decoratively, but to clarify aspects of plot and character" (Schmidt, 1979, 331). While using dramatic plots or pessimistic characters in his works Larkin tried to make a combination of his old memories or experiences and the new developments in his life. To Larkin "Poetry consisted in expressing these old & well-worn ideas & emotions in new and exciting forms so that the emotion or idea emerged new again" (Thwaite, 1992, 17). In his works,

Philip Larkin developed a new view of literature, 'Larkinism', in which ordinary things or events being explained worse than they actually were, in a strange and unique way. Larkin's works seemed alive and fluent. His each poem is as a continuation of another. That is, his verse complemented to another. Larkin used the rhythms of modern life in his verse. Philip Larkin used a personal, realistic, emotional, direct, frank, melancholic, objective, intelligent and honest style in his works. His poems were short and his general subject matters in those poems were dreary, empty, boring life, depressing view of human nature, unhappiness, fear of death, alienation and loneliness.

3. Alienation in the Poetry of Philip Larkin

Alienation has been a main theme in the poems of great poets since it is a reality of life. Philip Larkin, a cornerstone in English Literature, uses the theme of "alienation", a sense of individuals that means to feel isolated in community or being different from other members of the society, as the main idea of his famous poems. It can be said that "the separation, isolation and loneliness of the individual, especially the artist, is the theme or the counter point of most of the poetry, if not all art, composed from Wordsworth to the present" (Covey, 1993, 11). The modern man has never been able to catch a full harmony of life and existence. "Even though well clothed, well fed, well housed, well-educated and surrounded by others who enjoy the same status and the same amenities, there remains an emptiness, a hunger, a thirst, a longing after something else" (Harris, 1996, 34). Larkin is a poet who feels alienation in his life and reflects his feelings into his poems.

Reasons for Attendance is the best example of the Larkin's poems in which "Larkin is the observer, the outsider, expressing his isolation" (Day and Docherty, 1997, 43). In that poem, Larkin describes the different ideals and expectations between him and the people around him. Although they have the same social status or share the same activities, the poet does not seem to take part in. In the book *Out of Reach, The Poetry of Philip Larkin (1995)* Andrew Swarbrick suggested that in this poem there are:

> Two opposing attractions the one sexual and communal, the other solitary and vocational, that the speaker is poised. In using the occasion of a jazz-band to prompt these reflections, Larkin is also saying something about his own love of jazz either as an involvement in a shared popular culture or as the pursuit of a solitary aesthetic. Even here, it seems, Larkin is divided between communality and privacy (Swarbrick, 1997, 55).

In the poem, Larkin observes the couples who are dancing at a party and begins to think his loneliness. Everybody similes, dances or speaks with each other but there is not anyone around the poet. By criticizing the others, "Larkin is condemned to weigh forever the rival claims of self and society, sexual loneliness and sexual attachment" (Motion, 1993, 235). The speaker of the poem "watches young people dancing and feels excluded from their 'happiness'. Or is it happiness, he asks himself" (Perkins, 2001, 435).

In the first verse, the scene makes him question his own distance: "why be out here? /But then, why be in there?" (Covey, 1993, 12). He tries to understand the reason of feeling himself so lonely and different from others. At first, the poet sees the cause of the difference only as sex, but the problem changes "in the second and third verses between sex and art. And it is, perhaps, an inkling of this falsity which causes the speaker to reach only a conditional end to his dilemma" (19).

At the end of the poem, one can understand that finally the poet finds the reason of feeling different from the couples. He is alone. There is not a woman with him. Everybody is cheerful but he is not. They are two reasons of his feeling himself as an alienated person but these realities are not the real reason of alienation. The reason of the sense of alienation is the behavior of the couples, which are caused the poet to feel that they are acting as animals. Therefore, he considers his superiority upon the couples and is not satisfied of being in such a community. He does not want to take part in their activities so he chooses to stay outside. Thus, he defined himself as an alienated or different person.

> The last line of the poem, with its suggestion of doubt, at first seems to undermine the speaker's choice of art over involvement with the dancers he sees through the window. However, the line can't erase the assumption the speaker has made in the poem that by choosing art (more precisely, art calls the speaker) he is condemned to remain outside the arena of their activity... In making 'sex' the interest which separates him from the dancers, and in using the world 'maul,' the speaker animalizes them, and in doing so makes the difference he perceives between them and himself not just a matter of 'believing this' or 'believing that,' but instead turns this issue of 'choice' into a rationalization for his superiority. To linger on the opposition the speaker

posits between sex and art and to conclude that the poem has 'an air of spurious self-alienation, is to miss the point (19).

Another poem, which reflects Larkin's view of alienation, is *Dublinesque*. In the poem, Larkin tries to reflect the sense of alienation by using a distanced speaker. This poem is the explanation of a streetwalker's funeral in which "the detached observer, because of his distance, cannot know the individuals he watches" (16). The origin of the poem is a dream. Larkin says, "I just woke up and described it.' Larkin detected in the procession 'an air of great friendliness' and 'of great sadness also' – partly, no doubt, because the dead person might have had his own sister's first name" (Motion, 1993, 395).

The funeral, which is observed by the poet, causes him to feel unhappy and alien. He does not directly say that the dead person may be his sister, Kitty. He only describes everything as an observer, not as a member of the funeral. His dissatisfaction is understood by the last two lines in which one can understand that the death of Kitty causes loss of all beauty, and love that causes the unhappiness and a sense of alienation. Larkin's other poem which is titled 'Strangers' is also an example of the view of alienation. "*Strangers*, begins, keep their distance and do not demand attention; as a corollary, to live there, among strangers, / Calls for teashop behaviours" (Swarbrick, 1997, 39). The poet chose to define himself as an outsider to describe his ideas freely. He also uses some metaphors as the 'lurid fancies' or the 'buried treasures' to make his description of social alienation clear. They are the objects, which symbolize his distance to the other members of the society in which he lives.

> The sequence of images fails to cohere, but they suggest how being an outsider leaves the speaker free to preserve himself. That his fancies remain 'lurid' and the 'treasure buried' (his imagination and inner self) legitimizes his isolation, and the distance between self and others is what preserves the self's knowledge of itself, a 'treasure' that can only be a treasure for as long as it is 'buried'. The formalities of social intercourse – 'teashop behaviors' – preserve this creative distance (40).

As Andrew Swarbrick argues, "Larkin's poems emerge from the gap between self and others, a disjunction embodied in his use of dramatized personae. When Larkin's poems look beyond society, to elemental presences, they yearn not just for an escape from society, but from selfhood" (41). One of the poems, which narrated the desire of escape from personality, is *The March Past*. This poem obviously shows the mix of being witness and thought on society. Thus, this poem characterizes poet's later poems on observation of social individuals.

In *The March Past* "Solitude preserves the artist's creative integrity, but the speaker of the poem wants not to express himself, but escape himself." (Swarbrick, 1997, 40). This desire of escape shows a yearning of Larkin "that is perceptible throughout his career: a desire not so much for transcendence as for a sublime self-forgetting." (40). Like *The March Past* which is previously described *Bridge for the Living*, expresses a sense of alienation by its first six lines which included words as "Hull is an 'isolate city', only 'Half-turned to Europe', and beyond that again is the North Sea" (Motion, 1993, 487). The next lines of the poem describe the view of the poet obviously.

Reading the lines, one can consider that Hull where Larkin spent his last days caused him the sense of alienation and loneliness. He described his feelings indirectly by making a similarity between the ships and the birds both of which symbolize loneliness. They are not alone or isolate but the poet is lonely and alien. In the following lines of the poem, "Larkin struggles to convince himself that he doesn't mind his solitude being violated. He concedes that the bridge's 'stride into our solitude' might be beautiful but can't help implying that their function is deplorable" (488).

As Motion states (397), "In some parts of Larkin's life, a sense of alienation brought him to a superior wisdom…. And he discovered that everything he had loved in jazz as a boy and young man had been turned into 'chaos, hatred and absurdity." His negative feelings are used in his poem *Livings* as the general dilemmas of three characters. "Its three characters are all people who enduring isolation for different reasons and with different reactions" (416). In each part of the poem the poet describes the reason behind the isolation of each character. In the first part of 'Livings' "the grain merchant is 'wondering why/ I think it's worth coming' to his father's old stamping-ground, knows 'it's time for change', but gives no convincing sign of escaping the life he was born into. His loneliness induces a myopic boredom" (416).

The first lines of the poem describe the character's ordinary life, which is not satisfactory. It is obvious from the last lines of the poem that the reason of first character's isolation is his life style and his job, which is a heritage from his father. He has to live in an atmosphere in which he is not happy so he isolated himself and tried to find the happiness in a Hotel room. In the second part of 'Livings' "the lighthouse-keeper, 'cherishes' his creature-surrounded outcrop of rock, where human kind ('keep it all off!') has been

reduced to voices on a radio. His isolation is ecstatic, inspired and engrossed" (Motion, 1993, 416). In the third part of the poem a new isolated character, starts to express the reason behind his own isolation. "He and his colleagues ponder their learned but trivial questions, experiences another kind of loneliness. He is cut off from the primal, instinctual world, the 'Chaldean constellations' which 'Sparkle over crowded roofs' are things he can name but not enjoy" (416).

As Swarbrick states (1997, 133), "*Livings*, can be read as further attempts to escape from personality, what Everett describes as 'the concentration of personal feeling... accompanied by an extreme circumscription of any merely personal expression of the self." Larkin describes not only the isolation of three different characters in Livings but also he describes his own desire of estrangement. "*Livings* expresses the contrarieties in Larkin: the yearning for difference, self-sufficiency and remoteness; and the grateful acceptance of sameness, community and mutual reliance" (134). As Swarbrick states (1997, 42), "Solitude allows one to define oneself, but self-definition can only be relative (or else transformed into absolutes by 'oblivion' and ultimate 'absence'). So identity emerges by its relationship with and separateness from other identities." The poems of Philip Larkin as *Two Guitar Pieces* have the pieces of his identity that emerges because of his separateness from others.

> *Two Guitar Pieces*, opens with a description of a guitar player (he has a southern voice) sitting by a railroad. It then turns to an 'I' and a friend standing at a window while behind them the player 'lifts the guitar to his lap/Strikes this note, that note. Apparently random, this music nevertheless creates art's 'accustomed harnessing of grief', consoling the speaker even as it reminds him of his isolation and social sterility. 'And now the guitar again,' the poem ends, echoing Eliot, 'Spreading me over the evening like a cloud, / Drifting, darkening: unable to bring rain (Motion, 1993, 30).

Philip Larkin's desire of alienation was so obvious in his real life that one of poet's friends Jean Hartley describes him in terms his "voyeurism, noting his habit of using binoculars to watch the park across from his house to see 'its trees, birds, children, and lovers'. She sees a Larkin who 'needed ... to be able to distance himself ... to become an outsider" (Covey, 1993, 16). Besides Larkin desires to be an outsider in his real life, he wanted to be an observer in his poems. "Larkin, 'stands back and looks" (22). *Here* is an example of Larkin's being an outsider, to get a freedom. "The poem clearly endorses a freedom which is found only in isolation so intense as to suggest the disappearance of self" (Swarbrick, 1997, 104). There is not only a social isolation in *Here* but there is also a personal isolation. "The juxtaposition of two isolations – individuals isolated in the crowd and the individual isolated in the landscape – is heightened by the speaker's isolation from both, a middle-man undertaking a verbal transaction" (Schmidt, 1979, 336). Larkin tried to find a personal isolation in a crowded society not physically but imaginatively. Haffpair (1995, 273) suggests that *Here* is a geographic journey into isolation, with a detailed look at the crowded, busy, social world in the middle of the poem".

> A cut-price crowd, urban yet simple, dwelling
> Where only salesmen and relations come
> Within a terminate and fishy-smelling
> Pastoral of ships up streets, the slave museum,
> Tattoo-shops, consulates, grim head-scarfed wives;
> And out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges
> Fast-shadowed wheat-fields, running high as hedges,
> Isolate villages, where removed lives
> Loneliness clarifies. Here silence stands
> Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,
> Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,
> Luminously-peopled air ascends;
> And past the poppies bluish neutral distance
> Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach
> Of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:
> Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach (Thwaite, 1990, 79-80).

Loneliness in *Here* not only used for a personal one but it describes a social one. "Loneliness does clarify the 'removed lives' of those who live in isolation, but only the self is clarified: other people become merely 'shapes'. *Out of reach* is effectively ambiguous; it can suggest the impossibility of this dream of purified self" (Haffpair, 1995, 273). There are influences of real life experiences behind Larkin's using 'the theme of alienation' in his poems. There is a similarity between the speaker of the poem *Dockery and Son* and

Larkin himself." In *Dockery and Son*, he hears that the son of a former classmate is now a student. The news jolts him into reflecting on his own situation" (Perkins, 2001, 437).

> To have no son, no wife,
> No house or land still seemed quite natural.
> Only a numbness registered the shock
> Of finding out how much had gone of life,
> How widely from the others (Thwaite, 1990, 108).

Philip Larkin used Dockery and his son to emphasize that he does not have a family, wife or child, like his friends. In his real life, Larkin does not marry and he chooses to live alone. In this poem, Larkin "goes on to meditate on different courses of life he and Dockery have followed and to speculate on their motivations. In the end, however, it makes no difference, for all lives follow the same course in general and end in the same way" (Perkins, 2001, 437).

> Life is first boredom, then fear.
> Whether or not we use it, it goes,
> And leaves what something hidden from us chose,
> And age, and then the only end of age (Thwaite, 1990, 109).

This poem expresses the sense of alienation that Larkin lived in his own life. As in the last lines of the poem, life is a combination of the boredom and fear for Larkin. "Andrew Motion calls the poem 'a compressed autobiography. It encapsulates Larkin's views about the effect of his parents on his personality; it reports spiritedly on his undergraduate career, it grimly sketches the attitudes which dominated his adult life" (Swarbrick, 1997, 112).

Another poem in which the 'theme of alienation' can be seen is *Best Society*. Philip Larkin uses the word of 'solitude' repeatedly in the poem to make the meaning of the poem clear. In this poem, Larkin says that the more someone wants to achieve solitude, the more it becomes difficult to get it. "But it is also undesirable, not really because it is thought 'Our virtues are all social', but because our individuality can only be defined in terms of difference from and similarity to others" (41). The lines which describe the individuality in terms of having same aspects and different aspects with others are "for what/ You are alone has, to achieve/ The rank of fact, to be expressed/ In terms of others" (Thwaite, 1990, 147). In the poem Larkin also declares the necessity of solitude for an individual to achieve sublimity.

> Solitude allows one to define oneself, but self-definition can only be relative (or else transformed into absolutes by 'oblivion' and ultimate 'absence'). So identity emerges by its relationship with and separateness form other identities. But however thus defined, it is only in solitude that the self can truly know itself. Larkin's writing, even at its most ironical and satirical, becomes an attempt to define himself. The attempt starts in his youth when, as a dandyish aesthete, Larkin expresses identity as an egocentric, lyrical 'I'. But it shifts, with difficulty (apparent in the coyness of the quotation below) to the perception of self through others so as to achieve a sublime anonymity. Failure becomes triumph; vacancy is all (Swarbrick, 1997, 42):

> Once more
> Uncontradicting solitude
> Supports me on its gaint palm;
> And like a sea-anemone
> Or simple snail, there cautiously
> Unfolds, emerges, what I am (Thwaite, 1990, 147).

There are some other poems in which the poet used the theme of alienation. *Single to Belfast* is an example of this theme. "*Single to Belfast* is a poem which gives detail about a few days that the poet spends in Belfast. By explaining the general conditions of Belfast "Larkin's explains his own solitariness and his own anonymity" (Swarbrick, 1997, 38). One of the most important poems, which indicate the poet's strangeness, alienation, and loneliness in the society where he lives, is *The Importance of Elsewhere*. Bernard Bergonzi (1977, 344) requires that "In 'The Importance of Elsewhere' Larkin comments briefly but significantly, on his experience of exile". When Andrew Swarbrick analysis the title of the poem he describes that "'elsewhere' stands for Larkin as an imaginative space, contiguous with experience but never actual, like the 'padlocked cube of light' which in *Dry-Point* we can never enter. It is a realm of escape, of fulfillment, of fantasy" (Swarbrick, 1997, 94). Richard Haffpair's idea about the poem is different. Haffpair (1995, 274) says, "*The Importance of Elsewhere* is a brief autobiographical meditation on how for Larkin loneliness clarifies. "Lonely

in Ireland," he could make sense of strangeness, the measurements of difference were all around him; they proved him separate":

> Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home,
> Strangeness made sense. The salt rebuff of speech,
> Insisting so on difference, made me welcome:
> Once that was recognised, we were in touch
>
> Their draughty streets, end-on to hills, the faint
> Archaic smell of dockland, like a stable,
> The herring-hawker's cry, dwindling, went
> To prove me separate, not unworkable.
>
> Living in England has no such excuse:
> These are my customs and establishments
> It would be much more serious to refuse.
> Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence (Thwaite, 1990, 105).

Larkin criticizes his being alone in a strange place at the beginning of the poem. Everything around him is different for him. Ireland causes him to feel strange and weakness. "What is significant in the poem is that he appears to say that the weakness is not in being at home but in being Philip Larkin. Our existence should not need to be underwritten (secured or guaranteed) by that which is alien to what we are" (Haffpair, 1995, 274). *Deceptions* is a poem, which dramatizes the view of alienation or isolation for three characters. These characters are the girl, the speaker of the poem and the rapist. There are different reasons of their isolation, which will be end as alienation. "The girl, the rapist and the speaker are fundamentally isolated: the girl in her desolation, the rapist in his delusion, the speaker by history" (Swarbrick, 1997, 58).

> Of course I was drugged, and so heavily I did not regain
> consciousness until the next morning. I was horrified to
> discover that I had been ruined, and for some days I was inconsolable,
> and cried like a child to be killed or sent back to my aunt.
>
> --Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*
>
> Even so distant, I can taste the grief,
> Bitter and sharp with stalks, he made you gulp.
> The sun's occasional print, the brisk brief
> Worry of wheels along the street outside
> Where bridal London bows the other way,
> And light, unanswerable and tall and wide,
> Forbids the scar to heal, and drives
> Shame out of hiding. All the unhurried day,
> Your mind lay open like a drawer of knives.
>
> Slums, years, have buried you. I would not dare
> Console you if I could. What can be said,
> Except that suffering is exact, but where
> Desire takes charge, readings will grow erratic?
> For you would hardly care
> That you were less deceived, out on that bed,
> Than he was, stumbling up the breathless stair
> To burst into fulfillment's desolate attic (Thwaite, 1990, 105).

As Swarbrick states (1997, 58), "In *Deceptions* the image of light is bound up with the desire to escape identity. But in this case the girl knows only an appalling, self-tormenting exposure: 'All the unhurried day/ Your mind lay open like a drawer of knives." Different characters, as the girl in *Deceptions* declares that member of different social classes may feel isolation or alienation in his inner world.

In another poem, *High Windows* the alienation takes a new aspect. In that poem, the poet insists on the alienation not from the community but from oneself. In this poem "freedom is treated ironically; there he was free to be himself only if he separated from his full self, here the sexual freedom of the younger generation is compared to the freedom from religious authority of his generation" (274). By making the

comparison of the religious authority and the younger generation, Larkin aims to express his desire of alienation. "The poem's sudden lift represents an imagined escape into pure freedom, a freedom from all desire and language, an escape from identity and expression" (136). At the end of the poem, there is "a desire to get away from it all.... One longs for infinity and absence, the beauty of somewhere you're not. One longs for it, but it means nullity: the diction if not the tone insists on that" (Haffpair, 1995, 274). As Haffpair states (266), "Colin Falck claims that Larkin believes in 'the necessity of life's meaninglessness." Behind his idea of life's meaningless, there are his bad memories and experiences. To a poet who sees the life as meaningless, it is normal to fell the sense of alienation deeply and use it in his works as *Dry Point*.

> And how remote that bare and sun scrubbed room,
> Intensely far, that padlocked cube of light
> We neither define nor prove,
> Where you, we dream, obtain no right of entry (Thwaite, 1990, 49).

As Swarbrick states (1997, 55), "The poem yearns to escape from desire itself as a condition of our lives, to escape into emptiness and solitariness, a 'bare and sun scrubbed room… that padlocked cube of light." This poem describes an alienation not only from the other members of the society but a personal estrangement of a human being to himself. *Wants* is another poem in which Larkin's view of alienation became obvious. "In 'Wants', Larkin takes refuge from the torments by converting the wish which lies beyond them all, the 'wish to be alone'" (Motion, 1993, 189). To express his wish of being, the poet ends the poem by the words "… desire for oblivion" (Day and Docherty, 1997, 37). Larkin draws a pessimistic picture of life in *Wants*. In this poem, the life is taken into consideration in limited way. "Life is starkly reduced to a few tableaux of sex and society – 'the invitation cards', 'the printed direction of sex' – from which the speaker seeks to exclude himself" (Swarbrick, 1997, 60). At the end of the poem, it becomes clear that the poet sees the way of excluding himself from all limited ways of life by the help of death.

There are also some Larkin's poems, which includes the sources of his view of alienation. One of his negative views is autobiographical. "In so far as any of his poems is specifically autobiographical, we can assume from 'I Remember, I Remember' that he had an unremarkable childhood" (Schmidt, 1979, 330). The poet says " 'Was that,' my friend smiled, 'where you "have your roots"?' / No, only where my childhood was unspent, / I wanted to retort, just where I started..." (Haffpair, 1995, 263) by which it becomes obvious that the poet wanted to have a different childhood. In the poem there is something more than his unspent childhood. It not only describes the poets pessimistic memories in a sense of alienation but "'I Remember, I Remember', which in mocking Lawrentian and Dylan Thomas-ish ideas of childhood creates a distinct and consolingly disillusioned adult persona" (Motion, 1993, 236). Larkin's another poem in which his bad childhood memories, as the source of his view of alienation, described is 'Coming'. "'Coming' looks forward to the spring with an image which might look back to Larkin's own childhood ... The speaker disowns his own childhood so as to feel its pathos all the more" (Swarbrick, 1997, 67).

> And I, whose childhood
> Is a forgotten boredom,
> Feel like a child
> Who comes on a scene
> Of adult reconciling,
> And can understand nothing
> But the unusual laughter,
> And starts to be happy (Thwaite, 1990, 68).

In the poem, Larkin defines his childhood as 'a forgotten boredom'. "This poem is about what he relies on in place of that missing personal heritage. This very ordinary, shortsighted, stammering boy, who did not like other children very much and whose parents were shy, awkward, and "not very good at being happy" (Haffpair, 1995, 269). His dissatisfaction with his friends and the society where he lives causes a sense of alienation in his maturity years.

Larkin's autobiographical descriptions as the source of alienation not only based on his childhood memories. In his poems as *The Old Fools* the influence of his parents, especially his mother is seen. "Eva's final illness stands behind 'The Old Fools' in more than just the obvious ways" (Motion, 1993, 427). Because of his mother illness, the poet deals with the view of being old and death. This is not only the imagination of his mother's being old and her death but it is the image of the poet's being old and death. "Their nearness to death means they have lost the defining human characteristic Larkin valued most" (426). The poet begins the poem with a question "What do they think has happened, the old fools" (Thwaite, 1990, 68). In the first lines, the poet expresses the answer of the question.

Larkin's personality and his feelings were the other sources of his dealing with the theme of alienation. One can conclude that the negative tone observed in Larkin's poems stems from his personality, his socio-cultural background, his relationship with his family and his friends as well as the society where he lived. The poems described above shows that there is always a sense of alienation in Larkin like the other people of 1950s. This sense is a result of his negative feelings as estrangement, loneliness, solitude, nihilism, absence and unhappiness. His poems, which reflect his dilemmas, have a negative meaning but they are meaningful and they hurt the sensitive reader.

Conclusion

Literature and as a genre, poetry engages with common experience of life; it reflects and affects values, structures, mythicizes and dramatizes individual and collective experiences. Through language, it explores the role and value of the individual in changing community and takes hold of the outer world with a personal, subjective and imaginative manner. As the Modern representatives of the Romantic line in English Poetry Wyston Hugh Auden, William Butler Yeats, Dylon Thomas, and Philip Larkin reflect how they observed and interpreted the world and how they acted as a humane influence in it. Besides, they expressed the values that come from a discernible context in the society where they lived. The poetry of the postwar era holds a mirror to the inner world of the individual as well as of the turmoil of the outer world. The poet himself is subjected to the same social forces where traditions, customs, norms and values have great impact on routing life.

As it is illustrated in numerous poems, Philip Larkin gives messages of pessimism, negative nostalgia, and melancholy, which are the basis of the theme of alienation that he used in his poems. One of the sources of this negative tone is autobiographical. Because in *I Remember, I Remember* and *Coming* it is obvious that he had a pessimistic childhood which he described as "a forgotten boredom" and in *To The Sea, Love Songs in Age, Aubade, The Building, Reference Back* and *The Old Fools* it is clear that he was not contented with his family and parents. The influence of his parents, especially his mothers' can be seen in these poems directly. Actually, the influence of his mother is seen not only in Larkin's poems but also in his life.

Another source is social, because to Larkin the outer world is a reason of feeling as an alienated person. The poet always feels himself as an outsider rather than a member of the society where he lives. "To dramatize his disappointment, Larkin casts himself as an outsider – not only outside the current of developing taste, but also outside the time in which he feels it appropriate to speak of such things" (Motion, 1993, 397). The sense of personal alienation is caused by the outer world as in *Reasons for Attendance, Dublinesque, Strangers, The March Past, Bridge for the Living, Livings, Two Guitar Pieces, Here, Out of Reach, Dockery and Son, Best Society, Single to Belfast, The Importance of Elsewhere, High Windows, Deceptions, Dry Point* and *Wants*. It is explicit that Larkin's life is not satisfactory and causes him to feel alien. Larkin's personality and his feelings were the other sources of his dealing with the theme of alienation. One can conclude that the negative tone observed in Larkin's poems stems from his personality, his socio-cultural background, his relationship with his family and his friends as well as the society where he lived.

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