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The Mysterious Ailment of the 'Other': Reading Philip Larkin's Poetry

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The poetry of Philip Larkin (1922-1985) has always been the subject of intense critical controversy. Like John Donne, critics even argued on Larkin's status as a poet. The prime objection to his writing was that it was dominated by a spirit of melancholy and futility, and it was overtly pessimistic in tone. According to Colin Falck, Larkin identifies himself "with the drab, fantasy-haunted world of the waste Land" (410), and by doing so he has "downgraded the whole of real existence against an impossible absolute standard" (410) that can never be achieved in reality.

Larkin's vision was undoubtedly shaped by the contents of life he saw around him. And, it is in this context that the paper seeks to probe into one of the vital urges of life, that is, the instinct to bond with the opposite sex, to form a relationship, and here comes the unraveling of the poet's attitude towards 'women' as expressed in his poems. Quite keeping with the spirit of disheartenment and lacuna, his poetic personae (who are mostly men) are shown as wounded by sexual impotence, incompetence, anxiety or distress. This simple reading is however problematized as there is ambiguity in the treatment. Overcoming the cliché-ridden terminology and language of morality, the paper tries to formulate an intelligible process in understanding Larkin's development as an artist vis-à-vis his ever evolving attitude towards women and the creation of 'female space' that undercuts the stereotypical definition of a woman or the space of a woman against men and society. The paper takes into consideration the poems from his collections *The North Ship* (1945), *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* and *The Last Poems* (1974-79).

The North Ship poems are soaked in Yeatsian flavour, and they deal with the

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