

Movement Poets/ Movement Poetry/The Movement (Part-1)

[BA (Hons.), Part-1, paper-1]

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The Eliotian evocation of the hollowness of the post-World War I milieu found its reaction in the Marxist exhortation of the poets of the Auden school, and the Auden school in turn found its reaction in the neo-romantic surrealistic and apocalyptic poetry of the school of Dylan Thomas. The ‘Movement,’ a term coined in 1954 by J. D. Scott, however, was not a well-organised group of poets writing with a clear and consistent programme of ideas. The poets can be grouped under this umbrella term only very problematically. But they do share a set of values and assumptions closely related to the moods and conditions of post-war England and her poetry. The Movement was made into a poetic body with the publication of three important anthologies: D.J. Enright’s *Poets of 1950s* (1955), Robert Conquest’s *New Lines* and G.S. Frazer’s *Poetry Now* (both in 1956) which contained a number of manifestos by these new poets of the 1950s.

‘... Nobody wants any more poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries or mythology or foreign cities or other poems’ (Kingsley Amis) and ‘[I] have no belief in ‘tradition’ or a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets’ (Philip Larkin): these two statements in Enright’s anthology mark the basic assumptions of the Movement. The Movement poets had in common ‘a little more than a negative determination to avoid bad principle,’ Conquest argues in his anthology. What was ‘bad principle’ to them was the influence of systems and theories of art, grandiose verbal formulations and elitism of poetry up to the World War II. The major figures of the Movement, Kingsley Amis, Conquest and Enright themselves, Donald Davie, Thom Gunn, Elizabeth Jennings, John Wain and Philip Larkin make use of wit and irony as prominent feature and their language is rational, comprehensible and urbane, with many poems looking like versified literary criticism. Some of the title even indicates a ‘bookish’ or ‘middle-brow’ attitude: Amis’ *A Bookshop Idyll*, Davie’s *Rejoinder to a Critic* and Wain’s *Reason for Not Writing Nature Poetry*.

The poet whom common consent has chosen as the leader of the Movement is Philip Larkin. His first published volume *The North Ship* (1945) has something Yeatsian about it, and the later *The Less Deceived* (1955) smells of Hardy. Yet it is the latter which established him as a significant member of the Movement. Subsequent volumes like *The Whitsun Wedding* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974) bypass Modernist experiments and high-flown language in favour of traditional metrical form and a precise and plain diction.

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