



Major Traits of Movement Poetry: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: The Movement as a literary trend emerged in Britain during the 1950s and its chief exponents included the writers like Kingsley Amis, John Holloway, D.J. Enright, Thom Gunn, Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings and Donald Davie. Each decade of this century has thrown up a poetic idiom to match the times. The twenties were the modernist years with an emphasis on experimentation with form and freedom of subject matter. There was a conscious appropriation of poetry to the uses of high culture during this decade. The thirties also called the Auden decade, threw up a different kind of poetry marked by urgent political and social concerns. The idiom of the poetry of the thirties was largely informed by Marxism which believed that the modern writer should be conscious of his social, political and economic milieu and should not fail to reflect it in his works. The poets of the thirties reacted against those of the twenties by assessing that they had no time to be difficult or experimental. Thus, the political and economic dream of Auden and Mc. Neice replaced the cultural and mythical nostalgia of Yeats and Eliot. The forties came out with a new poetic idiom. This was supplied by Dylan Thomas. Here the reaction to Auden took the form of anti-intellectualism because Dylan Thomas and his followers believed in emotional, rhetorical and metaphoric kind of poetry. There was a sort of reaction to Eliot and his school. They renounced the 1920s and 1930s in favour of a new romanticism. But poetry after 1945 changed and kept pace with development in society. In October 1954, an article called '*In the Movement*' published in The English Weekly magazine, The Spectator. It was a deliberately provocative, almost truculent account of certain tendencies which the writer of the article had noticed in the work of several young poets and novelists during that time. Since nobody was quite clear what it stood for, it was commonly referred to as 'The Movement' -- as J. D. Scott named it. The present paper is devoted to highlight the advent of the Movement and its various literary aspects.

Key Words: Movement, New Lines, ordinariness and commonsense, easy and colloquial language.



The Movement as a literary trend emerged in Britain during 1950s., and its chief exponents included the writers like Kingsley Amis, John Holloway, D.J. Enright, Thom Gunn, Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings, and Donald Davie. The trend that came into prominence after World War II was called the Movement, also called zeitgeist literature. One of the most influential forces behind this zeitgeist literature was the revolutionary political change that took place soon after World War II. In 1945 Clement Atlee from Labour Party came into power replacing Winston Churchill. For the first time in British history, the Labour Party took office with a parliament majority, a majority which enabled them to carry out, without any obstacle or interference, its socialist policies. Their top priority was the building of a Welfare state and the ultimate objective was the creation of a society based on social justice. This was possible only if the main factors in the economic system could be brought under public ownership and control. The Labour's enthusiasm to create a new society and to bring about democratic socialism/created a new mood in postwar British society. This new mood was markedly hostile to the emotional withdrawal of the 40s and to the Marxist political preoccupation of the 30s.

The outcome of such a changed temper was the Welfare state created by the Labour who believed in a society with a provision for full employment. All these policies changed the life of a mass of people and also affected the minds of literary personalities of the day. For one thing, the "new University Wits" as William Van O'connor, the first historian of the Movement, called these poets, "were witnesses to what seemed to be a breakdown of the class system and to the creation of a Welfare state with a pronounced working-class bias", a point noted by Harry T. Moore in his preface to O'Connor's book. These new writers were part of a more democratized culture.

Each decade of this century has thrown up a poetic idiom to match the times. The twenties were the modernist years with an emphasis on experimentation with form and freedom of subject matter. There was a conscious appropriation of poetry to the uses of high culture during this decade. The thirties also called the Auden decade, threw up a different kind of poetry marked by urgent political and social concerns. The idiom of the poetry of thirties was largely informed by Marxism which believed that the modern writer should be conscious of his social, political and economic milieu and should not fail to reflect it in his works. The poets of the thirties reacted against those of the twenties by assessing that they had no time to be difficult or experimental. The political, social and economic situation was too important to be kept out

of literature altogether. The literary works of this period were influenced by an important historical happening of the wall street-Crash of 1929, which brought the Decade of Depression, causing a lot of pain and misery. The question of culture and civilization becomes irrelevant when there are the problems of mass hunger and unemployment. The poets of thirties faced the grim realities of time, marked by the rise of unemployment and dictatorship. These young poets were naturally drawn to Marxism, which offered work for all as a solution to the mass employment, and a government of the common people as a solution to the rising dictatorship, and a dream for classless society free from exploitation and hunger. Thus the political and economic dream of Auden and McNeice replaced the cultural and mythical nostalgia of Yeats and Eliot. Forties came out with a new poetic idiom. This was supplied by Dylan Thomas. Here the reaction to Auden took the form of anti-intellectualism because Dylan Thomas and his followers believed in emotional, rhetorical and metaphoric kind of poetry. They reacted to Eliot and his school, renouncing the 1920s and 1930s in favour of a new romanticism. But poetry after 1945 changed and kept pace with development in/society.

Thus, a new generation of poets were appearing early in the 1950s, who appointed themselves as a "fire brigade to damp out neo-Romanticism...." The fire engine was manned by a new 'Oxbridge group' as Angus Calder called them.

John Wain's series of the reading school of Art, Oscar Mellor's Fantasy Press books and pamphlets, and the anthology springtime, edited by G. S. Fraser and Ian Fletcher (1953), were among the early manifestations of this new spirit. Then came the launching of the periodical called Listen, produced by George Hartley, who also published volumes by Philip Larkin and by John Holloway; and various articles appeared in The Spectator and The Times Literary supplement suggesting that a new literary movement was underway. In October 1954, an article called 'In the Movement' appeared in The English Weekly magazine, The Spectator. It was a deliberately provocative, almost truculent account of certain tendencies which the writer of the article had noticed in the work of several young poets and novelists during that time. The writer did not pretend that these tendencies had at that time formed a cohesive whole, but he gave the impression that the work he was discussing formed a part of something which could honestly be called a literary movement, with a common style, subject matter and general way of looking at, and writing about life. Since nobody was quite clear what it stood for, it was commonly referred to as 'The Movement' -- as J. D. scott⁶ named it.

Thus, the political and economic dream of Auden and McNeice replaced the cultural and mythical nostalgia of Yeats and Eliot. The forties came out with a new poetic idiom. This was supplied by Dylan Thomas. Here the reaction to Auden took the form of anti-intellectualism because Dylan Thomas and his followers believed in emotional, rhetorical and metaphoric kind of poetry. He has been held up as the antithesis of Eliot and his school, renouncing the 1920s and 1930s in favour of a new romanticism. But poetry after 1945 changed and kept pace with development in/society.

A few months later, an anonymous writer attempted to define the characteristics of the new lines 'poets like Mr. Donald Davie, or Mr. Thom Gunn are only less hostile to the political pre-occupations of the Thirties than to the lush, loose fashionable writing of the Forties and Fifties' (*In the Movement' The Spectator*). This article provoked a lively correspondence: and in a letter to 'The spectator' printed on 15 October Denis Donoghul argued "that the characteristic work of the new poets has, and deliberately sets to attain, the virtues of the late eighteenth. century poetry, in particular of Goldsmith, Denham, Johnson and Cowper." *In The Movement*, Jhon Press. (P 252-52)

"The effect of the Spectator (1954) article was reinforced in 1956. It was the time when Robert Conquest published an anthology, *New Lines*. It appeared to give consistency and unity to the Movement and established for its members a recognizable public image. "In his 'Introduction', Conquest recalled that the typical poets of the 1930s (Auden and his friends) and those of the 1940s (Dylan Thomas and his imitators) had been launched by anthologies that took up definite positions. He was consciously trying to do the same for 1956 and the years ahead he was presenting to the public a group of nine poets who wrote 'genuine and healthy' (*New Lines* Pg XI). poetry that belonged unmistakably to a new period. They were Philip, Larkin Elizabeth Jennings, Kingsley Amis, John Holloway, Thom Gunn, D. J. Enright, Donald Davie, John Wain and himself. At that time), six of them were university lecturers, two were librarians and one was a civil servant. Their poetry was intelligent, knowledgeable and polished". A.K.Weatherhead remarked, "Partly no doubt under the influence of the changed zeitgeist, a handful of poets in the fifties, thought to be sufficiently similar in their aims to be grounded together under the rubric 'The Movement' sought to create an ordinary brand of poetry: they eschewed sensation imagery, exotic settings and irrational reverberation."¹² Conquest introduced these poets by calling nine 'lesser talent',¹³ a group of poets whose work

provided evidence of a "general tendency"¹⁴ correcting the excesses of the neo-Romantic poetry of the forties. These poets discovered that their tastes coincided and they were united more by their dislikes than by their likes. Thus, a broad similarity emerged and began to show itself in their work.

While giving the introduction of the Movement and the poets of the 1950s, in his book 'A Map of Modern Verse', John Press writes, "To label them University Wits or Neo-Emersonians, to trace some common resemblances between poets as diverse as Elizabeth Jennings, Kingsley Amis, and John Holloway, would be a pointless exercise. The most one can say is that the nine contributors to the anthology shared a common tone, a suspicion of large rhetorical gestures, a belief that the intellect and the moral judgement must play a decisive part in the shaping of a poem" (253).

Thus, the anthology-based grouping of poets was primarily placed together as a reaction against the Id-focused verse of the 1940s and stressing intellectuality, compassion, and irony was a reaction against both the socially-engaged, politically committed poetry of 'Macspanday' poets of the 1930s and also the wild, loose, emotional, free-association work of Dylan Thomas. Dylan Thomas focused on everything they disliked: compulsive metaphorizing, metaphysical, pretentiousness, verbal obscurity, and self-indulgent romanticism. These Movement poets themselves aimed at communicating clearly and honestly their perceptions of the world as it was. These poets refused to say what they didn't mean. Their honesty very often expresses itself in terms of ordinariness and commonsense, in easy and colloquial language which was also part of Orwell's influences. The new generation of poets of the 1950s tried to present the contemporary scene with less obscurity than Eliot -- or even Auden - had done. The young poets set out to write poetry that had a more obvious sense of form, rhythms that were easier to recognize, and a meaning that was more precise and definite.

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