PREFACE

Donald Davie is a poet-critic. In fact, his critical writings have tended to overshadow his poetic achievement. He was among the first few poets who launched a blistering attack on the modernist distortions of the poetic syntax and pleaded for a new prosaic approach to the diction and technique of poetry. His 1952 book, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* has been rightly regarded as the manifesto of the new poetry of the fifties. Partly, the book was written in reaction against the poetry of Dylan Thomas and his followers in the late 1940s. But the book also articulates Davie’s dissatisfaction with the modernist allusive and mythic technique. Davie pleaded for the regular poetic syntax, the revival of traditional verse form and the rehabilitation of reason in poetry. He refused to accept the current notion that there was any permanent connection between poetic vocation and exhibitionism and egoism. The Movement received its most whole-hearted defence from the critical writings of Davie who asserted that the Movement was no dogma but embodied the poets’ desire for discipline and decorum. His dominant theme as a poet is the search for discipline in poetic language. The gravest sin, that a poet might commit is the sin against language by cheapening it and by using it in an imprecise manner. Davie also revived Thomas Hardy for his generation. Davie is Augustan in the sense that he pleads for a poetry which is rational address to a reading public. Poetry for him is not a turning loose of emotions, it is a statement of fact which has a precise meaning for the poet as well as for the reading public. He is primarily a poet of places
and his poems on English districts and countries are his unique contribution to English poetry.

Kingsley Amis is a confirmed debunker. He debunks every kind of authority, every kind of idealism and his technique is a mixture of Alexander Pope and W.H. Auden. He is a writer of social verse but not socialist verse. Most of his poems are concerned with the concept of authority as his novel *Lucky Jim*. He looks at every kind of authority as legitimatizing power and he was not alone among the poets of the fifties to concern himself with such matters. He is also a poet of provincial realism. Though a close associate of Philip Larkin, Amis avoids his elegic approach but a deep strain of pessimism runs through his poems. This pessimism arises out of the awareness that nothing in contemporary British life has any sanctity. He cannot be didactic because the British sensibility has degenerated so much that it has no ear for sanity Amis, however, shares with Larkin a passionless despair. He is acutely aware of a spiritual and moral vacuity which cannot be filled by any kind of attitudinizing. Amis has been called an entertaining poet but this is a misconception based on a superficial reading of his poems. The hillarity and tone of gay abandon which one notices on the surface of his poems conceal within their patterns a profound sense of disturbance and meaninglessness.

Thus Larkin, Davie, and Amis who form the core of the Movement appealed to the ideals of clarity and ordinariness in literature. They tried to rectify the excesses and extravagances of the modernist tradition. There were other poets also in the fifties who were sympathetic to the ideals of the Movement but in course of time they
found these ideals a little too restrictive and narrow and denounced them in no uncertain terms. But these three poets continued to be Movement poets and though they allowed several other influences to work upon them they preserved the basic ideals of rationality, commonsense and clarity in their poems. Their vision of limitation which has been singled out for derision and critical attack was a deeprooted spiritual necessity at a time when English poetry desperately needed a new direction, a new vocabulary if it was not to be redundant and repetitive. These poets, though their individual achievements vary from one another, together addressed themselves to this task and accomplished it eminently.