CHAPTER 1

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The purpose of this chapter is an attempt to define broadly the nature of the English poetic tradition. In order to do this, it seems necessary to take account of differences between, first, Indian and Western approaches to life; and thereafter, to place the English tradition within the larger Western framework, so as to highlight its essential characteristics. I am fully aware of the risks one takes in engaging in such broad generalizations; yet, they seem to me to be useful, for the definition of 'Englishness' is helped by an understanding of what is not English.

This chapter begins, therefore, with the broadest difference, by drawing distinctions between Indian and Western attitudes to life and nature. While Indian philosophy is based mainly on the Vedas and Upanishads, the single most influential and systematic work of philosophy is the Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta. The questionings begin with "Arjuna Vishad Yoga". Arjuna accepts Krishna as a guru and says:
Krishna explains the theory of karma and rebirth to Arjuna. According to Krishna, the soul is immortal and it takes rebirth repeatedly until it reaches the ultimate state. Death is not the end of life; it only changes the scene. While explaining the immortality of the soul Krishna says:

"He is not born, nor does he ever die; 
Nor, having come to be, will be 
ever more come not to be 
Unborn, eternal, everlasting, 
this ancient one 
is not slain when the body is slain."

"||

I am your disciple, show me the path."

Chap. II, verse VII

Chap. II, verse XX
As leaving aside worn-out garments
A man takes other, new ones,
So leaving aside worn-out bodies
To other, new ones goes the embodied soul.

The theory of rebirth brings hope and undercuts the finality of death. The cycle of birth and death will continue until salvation is attained. Krishna says:

"अतस्य बिः धृष्टो मृत्युं किभयं अन्नं मृत्युं द्वा"

[chap.II, verse XXVII]

[Those who are born must die, and those who die must be born again].

Here is a reassuring divine scheme.

Western culture too has a scheme, but a very different one. Hindu thought lays far more emphasis upon the individual's power to attain self-realization through his own efforts. The faith called for here is very different from faith in a redeeming, divine power from above which alone saves the Christian. The consolation offered by redemption through Christ, however, took a severe battering with the rise of modern
science; the old belief in promises which had been taken literally lay discarded, and the spiritual crises engendered in the process are too well-known to be gone into here. The fact is that death now becomes a cutting-off point, and the absence of the doctrine of rebirth makes for a distinctive kind of anguish and melancholy, especially now that the Christian consolation awaiting the ransomed soul seems a remote myth to most people in the Western world today. It must be reiterated that the Scientific and Industrial revolutions taken together have completely cut across the Western psyche and redirected its poetic energies along the banks of pessimism and bleakness in a way alien to a non-Western culture like the Indian, the religious basis of which remains relatively unaffected by scientific advances.

East and West differ not only in their philosophy of life, but also in their attitudes towards nature. Nature descriptions constitute some of the most attractive parts of Sanskrit poetry. In the plays and poems of Kalidasa, Nature is a replica of the human world. S.N. DasGupta rightly observes:

The same feelings and emotions, the same passions and sorrows, the same feelings of tenderness, love, affection and friendship that are found to reign in the human mind, are also revealed in the same manner for
Kalidasa in and through all the objects of Nature.

Nature as a separate, autonomous entity is rare in Sanskrit poetry; whereas in the literature of the West, Nature is not, on the whole, quite so intimately linked with human life. Since Descartes especially, a split has been effected between Nature and the human observer. Nature carries on, a thing apart. The relationship between the human and natural worlds [Wordsworth notwithstanding] is not intimate; they are not replicas of one another; they meet at many points, but from the Greeks to the moderns, they retain their independence of each other.

By contrast, in Sanskrit poetry, Nature is always subordinated to human feelings. In the Meghaduta, a poem by Kalidasa, the central character, a Yalsha, sends the cloud as messenger to his love-lorn lady in Alkapuri, and the cloud itself is the Yalsha's friend. Nature here speaks for the sorrow of a lover who suffers sharp pains of separation. Kalidasa describes his feelings of the human heart through the description of the seasons and its effects on human beings. The poem begins with the description of आषाढ़ मास [the rainy season].
That passionate one, bereft of his wife and having his wrist devoid of the golden bracelet, passed some months in that mountain and on the first day Cor part] of Ashara saw a cloud, struck to the peak there, and beautiful like an elephant giving side-blows with his tusks in his sportive butting.

Divided in two parts, the first part is devoted to the description of the scenes that the cloud must pass in his northward journey from Rangiri in the Vindhya mountains to Alka in the Himalayas. The second half is filled with an exquisite picture of the city of Alka. Throughout the first part of the poem Kalidasa projects the pain of the Yaksha through natural description. While accepting the cloud as a messenger, the Yaksha explains:
Where is indeed the cloud - a combination of smoke, luminary, water and air, and wherein lies the word of message to be conveyed by men of strong senses? Without considering this, through eagerness the Yaksha requested the cloud. For the love-stricken are by nature ignorant to distinguish between animate and inanimate objects.

The description of nature in the poem prepares the reader for the Yaksha's feelings.

Natural objects in the plays of Kalidasa are not merely objects, but they exist almost as living beings, who share the feelings of the human beings in their midst. The most remarkable Sanskrit play Abhijñāna Sakuntala beautifully establishes this point. In Act IV Kalidasa describes Sakuntala as a "prārūti tanya" [a girl of nature like Wordsworth's Lucy or Michael]. He describes her infinite love for nature in the following most famous verse:
Act IV: Verse IX

She, who does not proceed to drink water first, when you are not watered, who, though fond of decoration, holds a festival at the time of the first appearance [lit. birth] of your flowers, - that 'Sakuntala is here going to her husband's abode. Let her be permitted to go by [you] all.

Nature not only establishes a harmonious relationship with 'Sakuntala, but like a mother, gives blessings when she is going to her husband's home:

Act IV: Verse XII
May her path where the intervals are pleasant with lakes that are green owing to lotus-beds, where the heat of sun's rays is moderated by shady trees and where the sand is soft like pollen of lotuses, be of a gentle and favourable breeze and [altogether] auspicious.

The descriptions of Nature in Kalidasa are remarkable for imagination, verbal melody, beauty and enchantment, while the natural description of Valmiki and Bhavbuti [the important poets of Sanskrit literature] are remarkable for their realistic and sombre effects.

The examples quoted above from Sanskrit poetry indicate that Nature to the Indian mind serves wholly as a background to express human emotions and that Nature's harmonious relationship or affinity with man is a main pre-occupation of Sanskrit poetry. English poetry presents a marked contrast. The autonomous existence of Nature is taken for granted, especially after the Enlightenment in Europe.

The difference in these world pictures is highlighted by the use of verse form. The use of rhyme scheme depends upon the society in which the poem is produced. Indian philosophy puts a stress on the cyclical movement of time; while Western philosophy has a concept of time as a beginning, middle and end. These
differences in their thinking are revealed in their use of verse form. Ms. Shama Futehally in her keynote address on *Aesthetics: India and the West* makes very pertinent remarks in this matter. She remarks:

The writer's social universe is reflected not only in the words and images he uses, but in deeper structure of which he and the reader are themselves unaware. Even minute structurings like rhyme are intimately linked to the nature of society in which those rhymes are sung.

She explained this point by examining the rhyme pattern of an Indian poem by Meera and an English poem by George Herbert; each was produced by entirely different societies. I quote the first stanza of both the poems to examine the difference between the use of rhymes in both poems. Here is an English poem:

*The Tempter*

How should I praise thee, Lord! How should my *rhymes* - a
Gladly engrave they love in steel -  b
If what my soul doth feel sometimes -  a
My soul might ever feel - b

Here is an Indian poem by Meera:
Both the poems are about submission and the love of God. In the English poem, though the poet desires to submit 'eternally' and indefinitely, the entire poem (through its rhyme scheme) unconsciously assumes a structured universe. It also assumes that the entire universe, though huge, is measurable.

On the other hand the images, metaphors and rhymes used by Meera suggest something entirely different from Herbert's poem. We notice here that Meera's poem uses the same rhyme throughout, but it changes slightly in each line (ath/aath/bath). These rhymes give one the feeling that they would go on and on forever. By comparing these two poems Ms. Futehally makes it clear that the rhymes in an Indian poem maintain a circularity expressive of the Indian philosophy that time is eternal and continuous; the endless cycle of rebirth does not promote a sense of closure or finality.

One may perhaps point to a large overall difference between East and West in their world-pictures. The Indian mind, specifically, has seen the world as an ordered, patterned figure into which everything may be fitted. The social life, accordingly, has been arranged
with an intricacy and elaborateness that leaves even the medieval concept of degree far behind. The cosmic picture of the soul's progress through its cycle of rebirth sustains the social ordering and gives it a sense of inevitability. In such an ordered universe, the human person also is borne along by the pattern. He does not stand out from it to look at it critically, or to conquer it, or to exploit it. All this partly explains the famous fatalism/passive resignation usually attributed to the Indian response.

The Western response has been quite different. From the Greeks onwards the human being's scrutiny has been a critical one. And after the Enlightenment, particularly, the separation of the thinking mind from the physical world, and the subjection of the second to the first are processes that developed in intensity and depth.

The point one is attempting to make is that the problems, the questions and issues that trouble the Western poet are only ripples in the Indian consciousness, and if they surface in Indian writing today, this is because, willy-nilly, India has moved into the Westernized post-modern scene.

I turn now to the even more vexed and complicated matter of Englishness within the European context. The broad stereotyping of national characteristics - the
reserved English, the excitable Spanish, the intellectual French, the romantic German, the patient Dutch—all these, while difficult to maintain in all seriousness, still point to perceived differences in sensibility and temperament.

One may begin by emphasizing the difference between the Northern [Teutonic and Germanic] and the Southern [Mediterranean/Latin] flowerings; the first sad and gloomy; the second warm and more sensuous. The Venerable Bede's comparison in the seventh century A.D. of life to a sparrow that flies in from the darkness into a lighted hall, and out again, illustrates the Anglo-Saxon's innate melancholy and pervasive gloom.

The Germanic genius (from which the English derives) tends towards gloom. Even while borrowing a form such as the sonnet from Mediterranean countries the differences that emerge in the handlings are striking. A comparison of Wyatt with Petrarch will at once reveal the austerity that comes naturally to the English poet. Wyatt translated a number of Petrarch's sonnets into English. The changes introduced help us to understand some of the differences between the Northern/Germanic/English and the Southern/Romance/Italian that I have mentioned above.

Though I do not have any knowledge of the Italian language, I have sought the help of a scholar who does
I now Italian. I quote the Italian and its translation with his help. Here is a sonnet by Petrarch.

Perch' io t'abbia guardata di menzogna
a mio podere et Onorato assai,
ingrata lingua, gia pero' non m' ai
renduto onor, ma fatto ira et vergogna;

Che' quanto piu' / tuo aiuto mi bisogna
per dimandar mercede, allor ti stai
Sempre piu' fredda, et se parole fa;
Son imperfette et quasi d'uom che sogna!

Lagrime triste, et voi tute le notti;
m'accopagnate ov'io vorrei star solo,
poi fuggite dinanzi a la mia pace!
Et voi, si pronti a darmi angoscia et duolo

Sospiri, allor traete lenti et rotti!
Solo la vista mia del cor non tace.

[ Rime - 49].

I give below the translation of the poem by Robert M. Durling.

Although I have kept you from lying, as far as I could, and paid you much honor, ungrateful tongue, still you have not brought me honor but shame and anger;

for, the more I need your help to ask for mercy.
the colder and
colder you stay, and if you say any words they are
broken and
Like those of a man dreaming'
Sad tears, you also every night accompany me, when
I wish to
be alone, and then you flee when my peace comes!
And you sighs, so ready to give me anguish and sorrow,
then
You move slow and broken! Only my eyes are not
silent about
my heart!

Here now is Wyatt's translation of Petrarch's sonnet:

Because I have thee still kept from
Lies and blame
And to my power always have
I thee honoured,
Unkind tongue right ill hast
thou me rendred
For such desert to do me
wreath and shame.
In need of succour most when
that I am,
To aske reward, then standes
thou like one afraid
Always most cold, and if thou speak toward,
It is as in dream unperfect and lame
And ye salt tears against my will each night
That are with me when fayn I would be alone,
Then are ye gone when I should make my mone;
And you so reddy sighes to make me shright,
Then are ye slake when that ye should outestert;
And onely my joke declareth my heart.

Though Wyatt has translated Petrarch's sonnet, he exhibits the English spirit in his selection of words. Petrarch uses 'glorious' words, while Wyatt is more realistic and earthly in his translation. In the above quoted sonnet, in line six, Petrarch uses the word 'broken' while Wyatt selects the word 'lame'; which seems more English, homely and realistic. The 'sad tears' in Petrarch has been translated as 'salt tears', words which are sharper and more English. The Italian sonnet ends mildly and quietly, with complaining notes: "only my eyes are not silent about my heart". The
English sonnet ends on a more emphatic note. The Renaissance spirit of man's importance in the universe stand revealed in the English sonnet. Wyatt's translation is marked by greater realism, sharpness and bleakness, contrasted with Petrarch's copious and warm grief. Petrarch dissolves in tears'; Wyatt retains a gloomy sense of himself. Discussing the difference between Petrarch and Wyatt, Michael R.G. Spiller in his recent book The Development of the Sonnet remarks:

Wyatt was quite untouched by Italian Neoplatonism, and his desire is not for any kind of transcendent goal, for the self as it were to rise above itself, but simply for the self to be securely positioned in the matrix of tangled forces surrounding it. He gets from Petrarch the sense of the sonnet as a moment of psychic instability, to be worked through; but the instability is social, not cosmic, and the great metaphor of light and air and water are beyond him.

It is clear from this comparison that though the English poets borrowed the form from Italy, the content remains stubbornly and inevitably English. The emotional warmth of the original has, according to Lever, been transmuted by Wyatt into something much more austere. Lever remarks:
The English sonnet was rational rather than imaginative, empirical rather than transcendental, and in matters of love it replaced romantic ardour by Tudor egotism.

Belief in a fundamental rapport between Nature and the human spirit, and in woman as the mystic channel through which this passed is at the core of the Southern [Cor Mediterranean] tradition. The Southern poets established the reciprocity between spirit and Nature, hence correspondence between courtly love and divine love is possible. In their allegorical romances they have employed images drawn from Nature to represent the condition of the soul. J.W. Lever remarks:

In this tradition the medium of inspiration was a modified lyric, speaking with the simple lyric's immediacy and poignancy, yet so serious and premeditated that it would set forth a total attitude to life.

The Petrarchan sonnet underwent a process of radical modification in English. Lever goes on to say:

The English sonnet tradition, however, with its roots in experience, was to militate against the philosophical and religious preconception of the Italian tradition.
In the hands of Wyatt and Surrey and Shakespeare the sonnet retained few of the deep-rooted tendencies of the Southern climate. Shakespeare made the sonnet an expression of his personal feelings, and the correspondences that come naturally to the Italian poets are rare here. The subject matter also turns personal; supernatural elements do not abound and the whole texture changes with the Elizabethan sonnet. The Elizabethans not only changed the themes of the Petrarchan sonnet but they modified the form technically and revised the rhyme scheme. As a result there exists a different type of sonnet from Petrarch known as the "Shakespearean" or "Elizabethan" or English sonnet.

While the English poetic tradition has derived some of its heavy pessimism from German poetry, and its forms of expression from Southern countries, it may be said that it got "its turn for style, melancholy and natural magic from Celtic sources".

We attempt at this point to establish a shade of difference between Anglo-Saxon melancholy and Celtic sadness, in order to clarify further the qualities inherent in Englishness. This is a very thin distinction and it must be stated straightaway that the Celtic strain has been assimilated by the English poets to a very great extent. However, when one places Dylan
Thomas and James Joyce beside, say, Wordsworth and Hardy, the phrase "Celtic magic" becomes slightly more comprehensible.

Arnold, in his article, "On the study of Celtic Literature" points to Celtic poets as masters of style, and claims that Celtic poetry creates an effective influence in the world of poetry by expressing ideas with intensity, elevation and effect. It may be helpful to see the Celtic sensibility as relatively more inclined to the fey, to the "Land of faerie", to magical and inexplicable appearances and vanishings, to whatever it is that eludes critical and empirical scrutiny. The witchery that haunts the Irish landscape, for instance, and its effect on the imagination may be guessed at even though Spenser's unfinished Mutability fragment from The Faerie Queene. Spenser was as English as possible, but when he chooses Ireland for the setting of his unfinished Book VII, another note enters, something touched by the sad beauty of the landscape with its greenness and mists, Ireland of the Sorrows, so pervaded by a sense of the futile and unstable. This is qualitatively different from the gloom of Wessex [Hardy], or the fenceless region around Lincolnshire [Larkin's 'Here'] or even 'Adlestrop' of Edward Thomas [who has a Welsh streak]. Yeats's poems are full of the Celtic magic mentioned above.

Arnold further singles out 'Titanism' - by which
he seems to mean powerful, passionate, rebellious energy — as characteristically Celtic? If the English poets have it [Byron, Coleridge], it comes to them, Arnold would maintain, from Celtic sources. Passion and energy are then not characteristically English. When one thinks of Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin, the figures studied in this thesis, Titanism is conspicuous by its absence. What one has attempted to do is to isolate the peculiarity of the English sensibility from surrounding, allied tempers.

Thus far we have said that 'Englishness' is characterised by gloom [a Germanic feature], by the absence of the passionate and sensuous [a Mediterranean feature], and by the absence of magic and energy [a Celtic feature]. What remains? The answer may be clearer if we contrast it with yet another category — the American. The American tradition — based on the American response of pioneering, pushing forward — has been one of experimentation, both in verse and prose. This has something to do with the need to find forms and idioms to accommodate larger landscapes, farther horizons, and more bizarre experiences than Europe, most especially England, had knowledge of. Bernard Bergonzi's first two chapters in *The Situation of the Novel* are titled interestingly 'The Ideology Of Being English' and 'The Ideology of Being American'. He makes the following remarks: "Though his remarks are about fiction, they
apply equally to the two poetic traditions:

Many modern English novels are parochial and inward looking and deal with questions that are trivial and unintelligible to the outsider. Modern American fiction on the other hand, communicates directly and forcefully and deals with the universal problems of the human situation.

Bergonzi states the cultural and historical reasons for the inward looking tendency of British literature. He comments:

The global unimportance of Britain is the cause of many current national neuroses and traumas.

This comment is best illustrated by the insularity and narrowness of range that characterise Larkin's poetry. Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas lived, it cannot be denied, in the hey-day of empire. Yet they reinforced the tendency of English poets to look inward and inhabit local, provincial spaces. This suggests an inward-looking strain innate to the English temperament and not altogether to be explained by the historical changes mentioned by Bergonzi.
From, roughly, the late 18th century until the fifties and sixties of the present century, Britain was considered to be one of the most important nations of the world. Apart from the World Wars and the consequential trauma, Britain has not undergone foreign invasions and the totalitarian rule that many other European countries have suffered, and, till recently, has known nothing of the pervasive violence that ethnic differences can generate, splits that are so noticeable in American society. Yet Britain has witnessed drastic economical and political changes after the World Wars. This meant that up to the point of the World Wars, England rested securely in its tradition and turned a superbly confident face to the world. This confidence has been reflected in the realistic modes favoured by the writers of English fiction and the traditional verse form favoured by English poets. God is an Englishman is the interesting title of a book published early this century.

After the World Wars Britain emerged stunned and exhausted; ready to return to its own borders and limits, glad to be inward-looking and parochial, grateful for the decency and continuity of its past tradition. Both prosperity and disaster, therefore, contributed to the reluctance to strike out in bold new directions. Bergonzi remarks:
The incompetence and dishonesty of politicians, combined with the knowledge that the country has little real sovereignty, has produced a generally depressed state of mind. In these circumstances many English writers, have exhibited the classical neurotic symptoms of withdrawal and disengagement, looking within themselves, or back to a more secure period in their own lives or the history of their culture, making occasional guesses about a grim and apocalyptic future.

Hergonzi's observations are related to the "little Englandism" which we find in the poems of Larkin, a parochialism explicitly expressed in Amis's novel, *I Like It Here*. The hero of this novel hates the thought of 'abroad'; is reluctant to travel in Europe, and completely convinced of the value of England and Englishness. The exhaustion that overtook the country after World War II (from which it emerged victorious but stunned) manifested itself in a narrowing of interest and vision; a looking inward to the smaller pieces and decent pieties of 'home'. Larkin's poetry belongs to the English tradition in this even more specific sense.

It is interesting to note that the parochial, non-experimental, conservative poetic - the features that
Bergonzi attributes to political change [the Wars and Britain's loss of power] characterise the earlier poets of this study too. I suggest that a degree of insularity and a dislike of poetic experiments are to be explained as much by an inward-looking streak in the British character as by external changes in society at large. Bergonzi's remarks, however, illuminate the shaded, nuanced differences between Hardy's pessimism and Larkin's. The changes mentioned by Bergonzi have turned pessimism into melancholy.

Returning to the differences between 'English' and 'American', the British poetic tradition has, on the whole, given importance to Nature and its effect on the human mind, but in a manner quite different from the close interlinking noted in Sanskrit poetry earlier. Nature occupies the centre-stage along with the human person, even when the relationship is problematic [as with Hardy]. In the American creative mind, however, Nature does not have quite that central position. Bergonzi remarks of the American scene:

Man is basically alone, living in a problematical relationship with fellowmen, and at odds with society and his physical environment.
Robert Frost notwithstanding, the emphasis in American poetry has generally been on man and human problems. Quasi-mystical communication with objects in Nature, and tender poring over the minutest natural objects (both fairly common in British poetry after Wordsworth) are not a feature of American poetry. When Emily Dickinson draws attention to a certain "shaft of light", it is to underline its effect on her; whereas for the English poet (Edward Thomas for example), the great bough of gold in the 'October afternoon' lets fall its leaves into the grass one by one and is itself out there, separate from the poet's consciousness. This is actually the theme of a poem by Larkin ['Absences']. There are very fine expressions of such reverence commonly expressed by even minor English poets. The Georgian poet John Freeman's 'Than these November skies nothing lovelier' can stand as a typical example. American poetry (with a few exceptions) does not offer such homage to Nature. The interest shifts quickly to the human; 'the attitude turns quickly critical (Eliot); metaphysical (Dickinson); symbolic (Macleish). The American poetic mind seems concerned primarily with existential issues, with the problem of existence and meaning.

By contrast, English poetry, secure in its tradition and centrality, looks at the natural world with more curiosity and gentleness. This is a partial
Another clear difference between the English and American poetic traditions is the smallness of scale that characterizes the former. Many critics have dismissed it as "academic, parochial, or small-scale, and, inevitably, unexciting." As a result, they dismiss the work of Philip Larkin or Kingsley Amis whom they regard as preserving middle-class social and literary values, and turn to American writing to find spiritual refreshment in such writers as Carl Sandburg and Wallace Stevens.

There is no doubt that with such poets as Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin the horizon seems to shrink, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. Two factors may be noted to account for the smallness of scale. One is geographical peculiarity (it is a small island; by contrast, the American landscape is huge, varied). The other factor is the particularity of the English eye, its readiness to focus on detail rather than the grand sweep. Even Hardy's poetry with its philosophical dimension never loses its hold on the small particulars. We may reasonably infer that, when compared with the Americans, English poets lower their sights and limit their range. With this narrowing, however, they still deal with the universals of age and death.
The regard for native values and traditions, and the parallel suspicion of experiment and the pursuit of newness for its own sake can be seen in the critical writings of Philip Larkin, Graham Hough, Robert Conquest and C.P. Snow. The English spirit and regard for traditional values is well summed up by novelist Margaret Drabble in the course of a radio interview:

I do not want to write an experimental novel, to be read by people in fifty years, who will say, ah, well, yes, she foresaw what was coming. I'm just not interested. I'd rather be at the end of a dying tradition, which I admire, than at the beginning of a tradition which I deplore.

Drabble's remark clearly suggests that modern English writers are (or were till very recently) against experimentation and the use of myth and allusions in their work. Philip Larkin also echoes the feelings of Margaret Drabble when he says:

As a guiding principle I believe that every poem must have its own sole freshly created universe, and therefore, have no belief in "tradition" or a "common myth - kitty" or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets which I find unpleasantly like the talk
Larkin is here obviously reacting against T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Pound's *Cantos*. Larkin and some other contemporary poets think that modernism is nothing but the exploitation of style and technique. Compared with American poetry, modern British poetry is simple in language and talks about the personal problems of middle class people, rather than about universal problems.

It has seemed easier to pin-point specific English characteristics by starting with what is 'non-English'. We may now tentatively suggest some of the following characteristics that mark the English poetic tradition:

- Clarity of intention; reasonableness; avoidance of extravagance
- A deep relationship with Nature
- A deep seated pessimism
- Traditional verse forms and diction
- Provincialism

These are broad categories, but the ensuing chapters will undertake a detailed study of these characteristics.
that constitute 'Englishness'. I consider below each these characteristics in turn.

**Clarity of intention; reasonableness and avoidance of extravagance**

As mentioned earlier, English poets are, on the whole, against the use of 'myth' in their poetry. Compared with American and Irish poetry, mainstream English poetry is simple, reasonable and logical in the development of thought. The standard poem usually begins with the description of any personal experience; then the poem moves towards generalisation (for e.g. Hardy's elegies are written out of personal agony and loss, and from that personal agony, the poem speaks about the general human condition). The poetic personas of the English poetic tradition are simple, ordinary, middle class people (for e.g. Larkin's Arnold, or Mr. Dineane, or Dockery). In Irish poetry and in American poetry on the other hand, the poetic personas speak about universal problems (e.g. Eliot's Prufrock). To speak about man's problematical relationship with the world, the American poets use symbols, dense allusions, experimental style, and free verse in their poetry. T.S. Eliot's use of myth in *The Waste Land* is very remarkable in this sense. American poems generally begin with some non-personal events or experience which may not be related to the main theme. For instance, the opening of *The Waste Land* with its description of the
month of April. American poetry tends as a result to emerge as more complex.

The overall difference being emphasized is that English poets write poetry (or at least did, till 20 years ago) that is continuous, less experimental and more accessible. The reader understands more readily; there are fewer demands made on the reader to jump from one symbolic crag to another over an abyss of logical non-comprehension.

**A deep relationship with Nature**

In English poetry, we find Nature's sole and autonomous existence, unlike in Sanskrit poetry. During the Renaissance and Romantic ages the relationship with Nature is the main preoccupation of the poets. The Romantics are worshippers of Nature; all human existence is placed against the powerful background of Nature. One may put it more strongly: Nature is almost a character in Romantic poetry, larger and more powerful than the human characters. For a poet like Wordsworth, Nature was a moral nurse and the guardian of all his being.

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution and advancements in the field of science and technology, England's external as well as internal landscapes changed. English landscapes lost their former beauty and purity, and became polluted and defiled. Nature is
now no more benevolent and kind to human beings, but is
totally indifferent, cruel and blind as depicted in the
poems of Hardy. Nature is in some cases the cause of
human suffering and pain, and is reduced to the
qualities of man in many of Hardy's poems such as
'Nature's Questioning', 'God's Education', and 'God-
Forgotten'. In contemporary British poetry, instead of
Nature glorified we find diminished, melancholic nature.
Not Nature's harmonious relationship with man, but man's
alienation from Nature is the subject of contemporary
British poetry.

**A deep seated pessimism:**

English poetry's pessimism is derived, as has been
already remarked, from its Germanic origin. A sense of
melancholy is a recurrent theme of English poetry,
though it is handled differently in the different poetic
ages. Poets like Spenser and Shakespeare handled this
theme in a way that permitted a resolution and
affirmation; the richness of the period allowed that.
The eighteenth century, a period of rational optimism,
is different from the Elizabethan age. Poets like Pope
and Dryden were writing about courtly manners and social
customs. The tone of their poem is satirical rather
than melancholic.

After the Industrial Revolution and World Wars,
the British experienced drastic changes in their lives. Victorian poets like Arnold and Hardy, and modern poet like Philip Larkin describe this sense of brooding pessimism in a more realistic and appealing way. The poems of Hardy, Arnold and Larkin are melancholic, for they accept human life realistically. In their poems they exhibit the unavoidable realities of time, death and old age in a very honest way. Hence their poems project a note of pessimism rather than a glorification of human realities. The pessimism in their poems may be traced to its roots in the economic and social changes in England, and to the decline of religious belief, as well as to the innate sadness of the English temperament.

During the fifties and sixties of this century Britain experienced defeats in war and underwent crucial political and economic changes. Such problems as the status of woman in society, the existence of a new middle class, and the emergence of a 'welfare state' in England gave rise to new levels of aspiration and comfort. Englishmen now valued peace and ordinary happiness as never before. The Welfare state provided compulsory free education, new houses and National Health Services to all people. The expansion of the universities and increasing number of government scholarships gave an opportunity to all classes to become university graduates. In this society education
was revered as a means of acquiring technical knowledge and power. A degree from one of the major and prestigious universities gave a man a passport to an interesting job. Poets like Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest were writing for an academic audience.

The outstanding feature of the Welfare state was that the size of the cake was growing. During this period hunger, cold and inadequate clothing were more or less banished for the first time in history. Scientific inventions, industrial expansions, nationalisation of industries and changes in welfare services were the most important events in the social history of Britain in this period. The government passed The Education Act [1944], The National Insurance Act and National Health Service Act [1946] to provide unemployment benefits, pensions and free national medical services to the people. All these socio-political circumstances forced the poets to change their poetics and way of life. And as a result of all this, a new kind of poetry came to be written which portrayed human life as it is. Though literally it was an age of peace and a time of considerable material comforts, it displayed an increasing sense of aimlessness and boredom. Writers had seen and experienced the violence in world politics after the Second World War and these experiences left them bored. They were in no mood for either the easy
The poems of Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin, the subjects of this thesis, record in their different ways, the problems of human powerlessness and suffering. Their understanding of the human plight brought a heavy and brooding sense of pessimism into their poetry. They are mentally depressed by the changes they have experienced and witnessed in Britain.

**Traditional Verse form; refusal to experiment:**

English poets like Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin have generally accepted traditional verse forms as a medium of expression in their poems. They are reluctant to use the experimental verse forms of Eliot or the free verse of Pound. Consequently, their poetry is in marked contrast with the American experimental poetry. Clear content, organised rhyme scheme, stanza form, order and the logical development of thought are important characteristics of traditional verse form; while experimental verse is free wheeling in the matter of content, rhyme scheme, stanza pattern and order. A comparative study of Larkin's 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album' and T.S. Eliot's 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' clearly establishes the
difference between traditional verse form and experimental verse form. Larkin's 'Lines On a Young Lady's Photograph Album' is written in a five line stanza with a regular rhyme scheme:

At last you yielded up the album, which
Once open, sent me distracted. All your ages
Matt and glossy on the thick pages
Too much confectionery, too rich:
I chock on such nutritious images.

My swivel eyes hungers from pose to pose
In pigtails, clutching a reluctant cat;
Or furred yourself, a sweet girl-graduate;
Or lifting a heavy-headed rose
Beneath a trellis, or in a trilby hat

(Faintly disturbing, that, in several ways)—
From every side you strike at my control,
Not least through these disquieting chaps who loll
At ease about your earlier days:
Not quite your class, I'd say, dear, on the whole.

But O, photography! as no art is,
Faithful and disappointing! that records
Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds,
And will not censor blemishes
Like washing-lines, and Hall's-Distemper boards,

(LD, 13)
The rhyme scheme is abbab.

The most remarkable features of traditional verse (as revealed by the above-quoted stanzas) are — order in the organisation, clarity in the use of images. Symbols are relatively open and comprehensible. As the poem progresses we can identify the theme of the poem, far more easily than in experimental poetry. In traditional verse there are clues to the interpretation of the symbols used by the poet. The example of Larkin's poem 'The Building' explores this point more clearly. The poem begins with the description of a building:

Higher than the handsomest hotel
The lucent comb shows up for miles, but see,
All round it close-ribbed streets rise and fall

Like a great sigh out of the last century.
The porters are scruffy; what keep drawing up
At the entrance are not taxis; and in the hall
As well as creepers hangs a frightening smell

There are paperbacks, and tea at so much a cup,
Like an airport lounge, but those who tamely sit
On rows of steel chairs turning the ripped mags
Haven't come far. More like a local bus,
These outdoor clothes and half-filled
shopping bags
And faces restless and resigned although
Every few minutes comes a kind of nurse.
(HW, 24)

At first reading the reader thinks that the description is that of some hotel but the use of phrases such as "restless and resigned faces", "frightening smell" clearly provides the suggestion to the reader that the description is not some hotel building but it is a description of some hospital.

As against 'Lines On a Young Lady's Photograph Album' and 'The Building' I mention Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' to distinguish experimental verse form from traditional. The poem begins with the description of the evening. The poem clearly indicates that in experimental verse there is no established order for the unfolding of content, no conventional stanza pattern or rhyme scheme. The reader cannot easily identify the theme of the poem; neither is there a hint or clue to the interpretations of symbols; hence it is open to multiple interpretations.

Provincialism:

Provincialism is a feature shared by all three poets studied in this thesis. A remarkable characteristic to be found in the poems of Hardy, Edward
Thomas and Larkin is their use of English landscapes. All three poets are against the idea of 'cosmopolitan' or 'broad' literature. Their landscapes usually bear the marks of external changes that England has witnessed. In the poem 'Manor Farm' Edward Thomas mourns for the loss of certain loved features of the British landscape after the war. The poet considers ancient England to be wonderful. He says:

'This England, old already, was called Merry'

The landscapes of Larkin bear the marks of industry and pollution. Larkin talks about an industrial town (probably Hull) in his poem called 'Here'. In this poem Larkin, instead of escaping to a rural Arcadia, accepts this England with her industry and inventions.

All three poets focus on particular English locations and characterize them even to the point of providing place-names. Hardy's 'Beeny Cliff', Edward Thomas's 'Adlestrop' are examples. Larkin, too, specifically names Coventry (in 'I Remember, I Remember') or Lincolnshire (in 'The Whitsun Weddings'). The point to be stressed is that English poets, on the whole, are proud to be provincial and rooted in their countryside. Whether such provincialism at the geographical level restricts their mental horizons is a debatable point. In Hardy's case, the localised and
provincial become universalized; in the case of Edward Thomas, they remain regional, and consequently restricted; Larkin makes a virtue out of provincialism, both geographical and mental, by deliberately refusing to take on the grand and large.

This chapter has attempted to establish that a relationship with nature, deep seated pessimism and traditional verse form are marked characteristics of the native English poetic tradition. To this has been added provincialism as a striking feature of the poetry of Hardy, Thomas and Larkin. The provincial note goes back as far certainly as Wordsworth (the Lake District) and before him, to Sir John Denham (Cooper's Hill) in the 17th century. To explore these poetic characteristics in a more profound sense, I have selected Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin - three important English poetic voices. The purpose of selecting these poets is to demonstrate, tentatively, that 'Englishness' is revealed in their poetry though they belong to slightly different periods in the history of English literature.

Donald Davie in his book, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, clearly establishes the influence of Thomas Hardy on modern British poets when he says:

In British poetry of the last fifty years [as not in American] the most far-reaching
influence, for good and ill, has been not Yeats, still less Eliot or Pound, not Lawrence, but Hardy.

This remark of Davie indicates that Hardy is the main source of influence in modern British poetry. Modern poets took Hardy rather than Eliot and Pound as their model for his poetry because they found that unillusioned and realistic approach to life, rendering of personal experiences into poetry and use of simple and moderate language can bring them closer to the reader than Eliot and Pound's highly specialized poetry.

Larkin openly confesses:

... Hardy gave me a sense of relief that I didn't have to try and jack myself up to a concept of poetry that lay outside my own life.

As a poet, Larkin has a clearer sense that the English poetic tradition (of which he and Betjeman are the continuations) is mediated for modern poets primarily through Hardy. In an interview with Anthony Thwaite on the publication of his critical anthology, *All What Jazz* Larkin put it like this:

... I had in my mind a notion that there might have been what I'd call, for want of a better phrase, an English tradition coming from the
nineteenth century with people like Hardy, which was interrupted by the Great War, when many English poets were killed off, and partly by the really tremendous impact of Yeats, whom I think of as Celtic, and Eliot, whom I think of as American.

This remark by Larkin clearly indicates that modern poets like Larkin, Betjeman, and Kingsley Amis accept Hardy as an influence rather than Eliot or Yeats.

As a poet, Hardy continues the poetic tradition that was established by Wordsworth and Coleridge in the ‘Preface to Lyrical Ballads’. In his article, ‘Poetry of equipoise’, Geoffrey Harvey considers the comprehensive influence of Wordsworth on Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin. He remarks:

The influence of Wordsworth is concerned not solely with moments of vision, or with matters of language or poetic technique — Donald Davie’s ‘Purity of diction’ or Yvor Winters’s ‘plain style’ — but with the basic interrelated issues of what constitutes the appropriate subject-matter of poetry, its proper audience and its modes of communication — in other words its rhetoric.
As with Wordsworth, the poetry of Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin celebrates moments of vision. In their poems we discover profoundly sensitive responses to the muddle and drama of ordinary everyday human life. Their poetry describes both the frightening features of daily existence, and, sometimes, the moments of transcending freedom which give life meaning, a response which includes both an affirmation of life's worthwhileness and a stubborn refusal to be deceived. According to Harvey,

"Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin's poetry is a poetry of sanity, and it constitutes a tradition that includes not only Larkin and Wordsworth, but also stretches back to Chaucer."

Since Hardy has decided to talk about human life in a simple and realistic way there is an honest and direct response to experience in his poetry. Both Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin similarly write from their personal experiences of living in the ordinary world. Edward Thomas, being a nature poet, renders the natural landscape very acutely and precisely in his poetry, while Philip Larkin, being an urban poet, exhibits urban landscapes very graphically in his poems. All the three poets choose actual landscapes. Geoffrey Harvey rightly observes:
At the heart of Larkin's poetry, as in the poetry of Wordsworth, Hardy and Betjeman, is the relation between the physical world and the world of human spirit; between the environments within which we live and our capacity for love and growth.

Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin are 'Wordsworthian' not only in their selection of theme but in their use of language also. Wordsworth proposes in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads that the real language of poetry is a language really used by man, and that the language of poetry should be very close to that of prose. Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin follow Wordsworth in this matter and use a moderate tone of voice and accessible language. They use simple words, plain narratives and lucid language in their poems, but the poems are not, for that reason, in the least trivial; the real charm of their poetry lies in their capacity to speak of the complexities and absurdities of life in a simple and convincing way. Larkin's closeness to this ideal is aptly reflected in the title of Lolette Kuby's critical study of him: Philip Larkin: An Uncommon Poet For the Common Man.

The poetic aesthetic on which Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin's poetry is based has been effectively
described by C.K. Stead. Writing about what constitutes good poetry, he says:

A poem may be said to exist in a triangle, the points of which are, first, the poet, second, his audience, and third, that area of experience which we call variously 'Reality', 'Truth', or 'Nature'. Between these points run lines of tension, and depending on the time, the place, the poet, and the audience, these lines will lengthen or shorten .... There are infinite variations, but (in so far as such a metaphor can be exact) the finest poems in any language are likely to be those which exist in an equilateral triangle, each point pulling equally in a moment of perfect tension.

Hardy, Larkin and Thomas consciously and explicitly attend to this fundamental aim of equalising the tension between the three points of the poetic triangle in Stead's phrase. This poetic aesthetic is most clearly rooted in Wordsworth who in his 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' was the first major poet to articulate fully and urgently the necessity of a clear, unambiguous and trustworthy relation between the poet, his audience and reality. In addition Wordsworth addresses himself to
the question 'what is a poet' and proclaims that he is essentially no different from his readers. Larkin echoes the same feeling of Wordsworth when he remarks:

Poetry must regain a wider audience and at bottom, poetry, like all art, is inextricably bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet loses his pleasure-seeking audience he has lost the only audience worth having.

Larkin's emphasis on the pleasure-giving principle of poetry indicates his faith in as large and non-specialised a readership as possible. In this sense, Hardy and Larkin are a contrast to Eliot and Pound who believed in a specialised and selected audience for poetry.

Hardy's debts to Wordsworth are evident in his pursuit of moments of vision, his commitment to the rural community and the particular experience of loving kindness and human solidarity that it represented. Wordsworth's influence is also apparent in the integrity and simplicity of Hardy's detailed observation and language, and he is Wordsworthian too in his intense desire to achieve in his poetry an accommodation between his subjective impulse to gain some sense of transcendence and his absolute need of the preservation of scientific rationality.
The foregoing pages have attempted to establish that Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin are very English in their response to life and nature, and in their use of language and traditional verse forms; in their acute, precise and detailed observations, and in their faithful rendering of personal experience into poetry. Their poetry is down to earth, plain, ironic, unambiguous and democratic in sympathy. Like Wordsworth's, their poetry is a poetry of 'solitary contemplation'. They have seen ordinary life "through empty silent air".

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