CHAPTER 2
NATURE
English poets have had a changing and highly variegated relationship with Nature. A bird's eye-view of the scene from the medieval lyric 'Spring' in the 14th century to Philip Larkin's 'Cut Grass' in the 20th century will show, however, one particular stream to be continuously fed century after century, and that is the stream in which the poet relates to the natural world in a plain and yet loving away, seeing Nature as a background, a health-giving force in human life. In this tradition may be placed poems by Ben Jonson and John Denham. Jonson's 'To Penshurst' evokes a natural setting rich in fowl and fertile soil, yielding harvests to the human hand, always there and available. Denham's 'Cooper's Hill', a little later in the century, also expresses the sense of connection between human activity and natural phenomena. The poet addresses the Thames River and hopes that the theme of his poetry may be as clear as its streams. Crabbe in the (18th century) continues this strain, but focuses more specifically on particular natural details. The above-mentioned stream is one kind of relationship with nature.

The other is the deeply romantic stream of the English Romantic poets. Nature here is invested with a
high mystery and indwelling spirit is neither background nor essentially socially relevant, but is an autonomous force in 'her' own right. Wordsworth, while being the most important poet as far as this view of Nature is concerned, also relates to it in the earlier less romantic way. That is, he can focus on the highly particular (e.g. the lesser Celandine), and describe the close relationship between Michael and his natural surroundings without romanticizing the link as he does in other poems (e.g. the stolen boat episode in The Prelude). In other words, Wordsworth had both above-mentioned strains in his poetry, but is remembered chiefly for the high-romantic aspect.

Thus far, we have spoken of the 17th century (Jonson) and the 19th century (Wordsworth).

Between these two lies the 18th century and though Nature is, by and large, subordinated to the human world in the poetry of this period, it is this period that leads to the reaction of the Romantic Movement and the privileging of Nature that came with it. It is necessary therefore to trace the relationship with Nature from this point on in greater detail, for the poets under discussion of this thesis derive their own attitudes from what has gone before. The Romantic Movement, in particular, has had an immense effect on all poets writing about Nature after that period.
The roots of the Romantic Movement lie in the eighteenth century in a series of interlocking trends of cumulative effect. The decline of the Neo-classical system led to the questions of the Enlightenment and the formation of a new aesthetic in art. Although the title "Pre-Romantic" is generally reserved for certain writers and thinkers who were direct forerunners of the Romantics in ideas or style, in a wider sense the term is appropriate to the entire line of development in the eighteenth century which paved the way for the crystallization of the Romantic Movement. A major reorientation of critical standards and method was an essential pre-condition for the blossoming of romanticism and this takes place in the course of the eighteenth century.

It is a critical platitude that in England Neo-Classicism at its height in the eighteenth century notably advocates poetry based on mind, intellect, in short, reason. The famous Cartesian dictum, "Cogito Ergo Sum" (I think, therefore I am) deduced the very existence of man and his power of imagination from mind. In Germany the philosopher Christian Wolff conceived God and the world as a mechanism that functions logically according to set laws. In England Pope maintained in the Essay On Man that, 'Reason alone countervails all the other faculties'. In arts, politics, ethics and morals the Neo-classicists, following Newtonian scientific
method, attempted to discern universal truth and establish a standard of lasting validity. Hence they sought to formulate the standard basic laws of aesthetics governing their poetry. The poetry of this period is conceived as a "reasonable and reasoned imitation of reality and the artist as a skilful manipulator."

The Neo-classical conception of art as a rational and reasoned reality and its aesthetic based on intellect rather than imagination began to dissolve as men became conscious of the vast areas which Neoclassical poets had chosen to ignore completely. The English poets looked back to their Pre-Restoration heritage, to Shakespeare and the Elizabethans who provided models quite different from the classical tradition. A greater freedom of expression and a variety of subjects began to appear in the Pre-Romantic poets like Thomson, Gray and Crabbe. These poets sought natural and spontaneous effects not only in the inner realm of the emotions but also in the outer world. They developed a passionate interest in the rural areas opposed to the artificiality of urban and, more specifically, of courtly life. The Pre-Romantics turned to a lost simplicity in man and in nature. This 'return to nature' implied a totally new conception of the outer world, a fundamental change from a mechanistic to an organic view. From being a mere tool of man, Nature was
first granted an autonomous existence, and poets, instead of using vague standard phrases, began actually to observe and to describe what they had seen.

Nature's autonomous and sovereign existence was the main spring of Thomson's *Seasons*. Observation of Nature led to the recognition of its dynamic and organic character, as shifting in mood as man himself. The mood of Nature is seen more and more in relation to man's sentiments. The Pre-Romantic poet's new and original response to Nature, their emphasis on spontaneity and their use of lucid language foreshadow the poetic theory of the Romantics. All of this comes to a head with the publication of Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. After this point Nature, as experienced and projected by Wordsworth, becomes an inescapable background to English poetry, either to be assimilated and mimed (as in Victorian and Georgian poetry), or to be reacted to and modified (as in Post-War poetry). Wordsworth's deliberate programme is set out in the famous Preface:

The principal object, then, proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a
certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect: and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.
To propose a thoroughgoing application of this point of view to the writing of poetry brought about a total revolution in poetic theory. The preference for humble and rustic life followed naturally from the conception associated with Rousseau's idea of the noble savage. The rustic idyll was an accepted theme for painting and architecture and now it appears in the poetry of the era. The major and influential poetic voices, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and Byron clearly felt the dehumanizing role of mechanisation in society, and the consequent sense of the human. The characters of their poetry are solitaries; yet at the same time exhibit a peculiar strength of heart. The revolution brought about by these poets forms a tradition adopted and practised by almost all major Post-Romantic poetic voices.

The full impact of the Industrial Revolution on man's life and the above-mentioned growing alienation reaches a culminating point in the Victorian era. Capitalism, free market economy, urbanization, and class conflicts created loss and tension to an unprecedented degree. Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' is the most quoted and most poignant expression of that confusion:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world,
which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.
And we are here as on a darting plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and fight
were ignorant armies clash by night.

(Matthew Arnold, Poetical works p.210)

However over-exposed these lines may be, they still capture best the state of human uncertainty in a hostile world. The monster of alienation looms relentlessly and haunts 20th century poetry, notably that of Eliot. On the way to that point, it expresses itself in different voices. One of the most sustained articulations of the divorce between Nature and human mind is to be found in the poetry of Thomas Hardy. Edward Thomas moves around it, and through it, and sounds some few restorative notes, but cannot assert a complete wholeness. With Larkin we are once again in a patch of no man's land, with the urban scenes on one side, and mysterious, beautiful but aloof Nature on the other.

Thomas Hardy's poetry expresses an unusually hostile attitude to Nature; a frustration generated by a sense of Nature's indifference to man. V.R. Kanadey in
his book called *Nature in Modern English Poetry* discusses Hardy's attitude to nature. He remarks:

Agnosticism rises to its highest, and consciousness design, providence, benevolence and harmony vanish altogether from his concept of nature. Hardy's state of mind is torn by the conflict between the new scientific view of life (which he accepted) and the old view of life (of which he was acutely conscious).

His poetry expresses the ironical contrast between the aspirations of simple humanity and the unconscious cosmic ‘will’ which seems to control the universe.

The other poet who shares common poetic characteristics and somewhat similar melancholic attitudes to Nature with Thomas Hardy is Edward Thomas -- the most original and significant Georgian nature poet. H. Coombes considers him as, "a poet of minute particularity and fidelity to nature." He is a remarkably fine poetic voice of his time showing a distinctively modern sensibility in his approach to rural themes. As John Wain remarks:

The countryside was his passion; he contemplated it with a calm yet visionary eye; he loved plant and animal, bird and
fish, leaf and stalk; he loved digging and weeding and planting.

While the raw material of his poetry is natural objects and the English countryside, a streak of melancholy and a certain wryness appear in his poems. As in Hardy (and in Wordsworth before him), the natural objects never exist in isolation but are scrupulously woven together in his haunted consciousness, so that they became subtle objective corollaries of his mood. While Georgians as a whole were looking backwards, Edward Thomas was looking to the future. V.R. Kanadey remarks:

His pre-occupation with the figure of the traveller, the lonely seeker and with the theme of journey on a quest anticipates Auden's quester-hero in a milieu that was unaware of even the war at the door.

Like Wordsworth's lonely seekers and solitary characters, Edward Thomas's poetic personas too exhibit strength and the vitality of the human heart. Both Hardy and Edward Thomas lament the beautiful countryside which is fast vanishing from England and they share common moods. Yet the basic difference between them lies in the handling of subject-matter. Hardy raises
his subject-matter to philosophic heights, while Edward Thomas is specifically a poet of particularities, English in a profound sense, almost insular. Edward Thomas is much quieter, and more sensitive towards the moods of Nature. While Nature and the countryside are intensely and exquisitely appreciated for their own sake in both the poets as said earlier, Hardy's poems are raised to the height of a universal appeal while Thomas's poems are limited to his own experiences.

Like Hardy and Edward Thomas, Philip Larkin, a significant, wholly urban Movement poet, is also nostalgic about the English countryside and tradition. Born and brought up in different ages and different socio-political climates, these poets share some common poetic characteristics which seem to be characteristically English. There is no glorification or generalisation in their poems but keen and acute observation, richness of details, fine actuality, simple yet thought-provoking subjects, and photographic description. Such fidelity to observed fact is indicative of the English cast of mind.

Broadly, the nature poetry of Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin can be classified for purposes of convenience as under:

Poems describing the English landscape
Poems of dejection in a natural background
Poems of joy and celebration
Poems describing the English landscape:

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution agriculture had ceased to be important in the life of England, yet there remained a deep belief in the supreme value of country life. A poet like Hardy thinks that rural communities were supposed to preserve the virtues of historic England and he looks backward nostalgically towards a farming society. Hardy's poems of landscapes and countryside manifest a concern for the preservation of landscapes fast vanishing in Britain.

Hardy's poetry on this subject shares some essential features with Wordsworth. Geoffrey Harvey remarks:

He writes in the tradition of Wordsworthian ruralism, displaying the same deep feeling for the rural sense of community and human solidarity, and indeed his suffering, stoical peasantry, wresting significance from their narrow lives, are direct descendants of Michael. Moreover, Hardy shares Wordsworth's profound love of landscape his conviction of the important part that places and objects play in people's lives, and his enduring commitment to ordinary experience.
'Domicilium' one of Hardy's very early poems dealing with tradition and the unspoiled English landscape, seems to have been written under the influence of Wordsworth. The poem is significant for it deals with personal experience very near to Hardy's heart.

It faces West, and round the back and sides
High beeches, bending, hang a veil of boughs,
And sweep against the roof. Wild honeysucks
Climb on the walls, and seem to sprout a wish
[If we may fancy wish of trees and plants]
To over top the apple-trees hard by.

Red roses, lilacs, variegated box
Are there in plenty, and such hardy flowers
As flourish best untrained. Adjoining these
Are herbs and esculents; and farther still
A field; then cottages with trees, and last
The distant hills and sky.

Behind, the scene is wilder. Heath and furze
Are everything that seems to grow and thrive
Upon the uneven ground. A stunted thorn
Stands here and there, indeed; and from a pit
An Oak uprises, springing from a seed
Dropped by some bird a hundred years ago.

In days bygone --
Long gone - my father's mother, who is now
Blest with the blest, would take me out to walk.
At such a time I once inquired of her
How looked the spot when first she settled here.
The answer I remember. 'Fifty years
Have passed since then, my child, and change has marked.
The face of all things. Yonder garden-plots
And orchards were uncultivated slopes
O'ergrown with bramble bushes, furze and thorn:
That road a narrow path shut in by ferns,
Which, almost trees, obscured the passer-by.

'Our house stood quite alone, and those tall firs
And beeches were not planted. Snakes and efts
Swarmed in the summer days, and nightly bats
Would fly about our bedrooms. Heathcroppers
Lived on the hills, and were our only friends;
So wild it was when first we settled here.

(CPTH., 3-4)

The first two stanzas carefully and precisely evoke the present situation and atmosphere of Hardy's home. From this point the poem describes "memory within memory." In the third stanza Hardy's grandmother is describing her childhood and how when they first settled there.

The poem starts with the present situation of Hardy's home and ends in a memory of the past; there is no concluding stanza with a return to the present. The
poem, though only a straightforward description, is remarkable for Hardy's fidelity to experience. The clear contrast between cottage garden with herbs and flowers and the uncultivated heath in the background is built up very effectively by the poet. The strong sense of time and history which Hardy shows in almost everything he wrote is in evidence here. The main description of the heath fifty years before he was born, and oats grown from a seed, "dropped by some bird years ago" projects the passage of time and history. Like most of Wordsworth's poems this is a serene piece of writing. Hardy's love for the rural unspoiled landscape is manifested in the love with which he lingers over the details of his home as it was before he was born. It is not commonplace expressions like "blest with the blest" which give it its calm and happy atmosphere; it is the whole conception of nature as a benevolently peaceful force, as one which can be humanized. The poem is also significantly different from his later poems where he shows his hostility and agnosticism against nature. We here find, as C.D. Lewis says:

"natural piety" and "lyrical tenderness"

marking his nature poems.

The poem is also relatively free from the awkwardness
and clumsiness which are essential traits of his later poetry.

While 'Domicilium', a very early poem, deals with a vanished natural purity, Hardy's 'Wessex Heights', written during a black period, deals with the soothing and strengthening effect of Nature. This philosophical poem characteristically describes Hardy's desire to "return to nature". Like Wordsworth Hardy likes to visit lonely heights where he can recover a purer and simple self:

I seem where I was before my birth and after death may be.

On the plains, which in the poem are associated with human involvement, he has lost touch with this essential self:

Down there I seem to be false to myself, my simple self that was,
And is not now, and I see him watching,
wandering what cause
Can have merged him into such a strange continuator as this,
Who yet has something in common with himself,
my chrysalis.
(CPTH., 319)
Recognising the continuity of his personal history, and his shared links with a pure and hopeful childhood blighted by mature experience, Hardy refrains from simple explanations of change and blight. It is easy to say that life gives only to take away, or that the passage of time brings a sense of "loss". The process of development is more curious and obscure. Hardy wants to discover why he is "false to his purer and more essential self."

The poem includes hints of persecution, to the effect that, being destined to be different, he was therefore misunderstood:

Down there they are dubious and askance; there
nobody thinks as I;
But mind-chains do not clank where one's next
neighbour is the sky.

(CPTH., 319)

Yet the people on the plains are not "stout upstanders" mocking him for his honesty; rather they are dubious and look askance and in their midst he seems out of place. He has no confidence in his own superiority. His view of himself as a man haunted by detective phantoms who know precisely where to find him in order to sneer and
disparage, suggests a deep inner uncertainty and a lack of faith in his essential self.

In order to escape these memories of his shortcomings and accusing voices, perhaps even to escape the memory of his mother, he seeks Wessex heights. The high places are a refuge from the painful recognition of his own inadequacy, and from the complicated involvement of life. He can rise above the involvement, but never achieve ultimate freedom. That ultimate freedom of soul seems almost impossible for human beings.

This philosophical poem uses the natural setting of hills and plains to express the conflict between self and purer self. Disturbed and disappointed in his quest for perfection, Hardy finally returns to Nature for solace, and seeks refuge there and freedom from the limitedness of life. Nature at this point appears to be the only solace for human beings in the terribly "unhopeful condition". Though the descriptions and language of the poem are simple, it has its philosophical undertow. Hardy's manner of raising his subject matter to a philosophical height through very simple language, his steady refusal to be grand, places him in the native English poetic tradition established by Chaucer and Wordsworth in English poetry.

The next poem to be considered 'A Bird Scene at 'a Rural Dwelling' establishes a contrast between past and
present England. The poet's nostalgic harking back towards the past is strongly present in this poem. Hardy here establishes a contrast between a city dweller whose sensibility has been dulled, and a bird which, full of life and joy, sings its heart out in praise of Nature. The poem contrasts man and nature.

In the first stanza the bird is frightened by the city dweller's voice and asks pardon:

For shouting so near before
In their joy at being alive:
Meanwhile the hammering clock within goes five.

(CPTH., 701)

The images of the bird's shouting and clock's hammering are juxtaposed here to suggest the contrast between the free life in Nature enjoyed by the bird and the mechanical time oriented life of the modern city dweller. In this little lyrical poem, Hardy yearns for a joyful and free life in harmony with Nature, a prospect which now seems to him impossible.

The three poems discussed in this section, though different, are expressive of Hardy's Wordsworthian attitude to nature, that is, Nature as refuge, as the source of purer being, and as full of a joyous freedom denied to human beings. Hardy, disturbed by the spectre of apparent human progress, yearns for what Larkin might
call "unfenced existence".

Like Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas also turns to rural England. C.H. Sisson observes:

Edward Thomas was interested in the anonymous life of the country, animal or human, and the weather and vegetation which belonged to the same nature. He was not a refugee from town, but someone exploring the country because it gave him life.

Edward Thomas's 'Manor Farm', a pastoral poem, is a beautiful study in contrast between 20th century industrially developed England and an agricultural England of the past. The poet, with sharp touches, revives the manor farm as a peaceful place for musing:

... I came down to the old Manor Farm,
And church and yew-tree opposite, in age
Its equals and in size. Small church, great yew,
And farmhouse slept in a Sunday silence
The air raised not a straw. The steep farm roof,
With tiles dustily glowing, entertained
The midday sun; and up and down the roof
White pigeons nestled. There was no sound but one.
Three cart-horses were looking over a gate
Drowsily through their forelocks, swishing their tails
Against a fly, a solitary fly.

(This description lingers lovingly on rural details.
Midday sun, roof, pigeon's nest and the sound of the
cart horses successfully create an atmosphere of quiet
and repose. As in many of his poems natural objects are
beautifully displayed here. The poet does not say
anything directly about the dehumanizing effect of war
on human life, but his desire to 'return to nature' is
implicit in the carefully observed details which seem
to be cherished for their own sake. The poem ends with
a recognition of the continuity of the countryside in
the midst of change:

"This England, old already, was called Merry").

As fully simple as Hardy's poem 'Domicilium', Edward
Thomas's 'Manor Farm' conveys even more successfully the
poet's sense of the importance of rural and agricultural
England. Both the poems are beautiful pieces of serene
writing.

Edward Thomas's 'The Lofty sky', though not as
philosophical as Hardy's 'Wessex Heights' [the second of
the three poems by Hardy discussed earlier] deals
similarly with the soothing and strengthening effects of
natural objects. The sight of the sky gives him an
opportunity to express his desire:

Today I want the sky,
The tops of the high hills,
Above the last man's house,
His hedges, and his cows,
Where, if I will, I look
Down even on sheep and rook,
And of all things that move
See buzzards only above:
Past all trees, past furze
And thorn, where naught deters
The desire of the eye
For sky, nothing but sky

(CEPT., 79)

The speaker of the poem, disappointed by progress and mechanization, desires the lofty sky. He wants to observe the earth and the activities of human beings from the lofty sky. If the speaker in 'Wessex Heights' saw himself as a disappointed, depressed creature of the plains, the speaker of Thomas's 'lofty sky' considers himself thus:

I am like a fish that lives
In weeds and mud and gives
What's above him no thought.

(CEPT., 79)
The poem expresses the desire of a speaker to find out an eternal and harmonious relationship between man and Nature. The final line:

and I
Would arise and go far
To where the lilies are.

(CPET., 79)

clearly displays poet's desire to go away from the bustle of mechanical life and find a "lofty sky" where he can ponder in peace and be at one with Nature.

Hardy's 'Wessex Heights' philosophically expresses the dichotomy between the natural and human worlds and the poet's desire to seek solace from worldly pains in the absolute pure freedom with which Nature is invested by the speaker. Edward Thomas's poem uses the sky as symbol of eternity and perfect freedom from worldly pains. Here too, the speaker establishes a contrast between unbounded lofty sky (nature) and existence below bound by weeds and mud (human life). The difference is in the handling: Hardy's is larger in scope, more categorical in statement; Edward Thomas's is a smaller piece, full of particularities quietly noted. The latter's sensibility is more finely tuned; the former's more passionate.

A companion poem to Hardy's 'A Bird Scene at a
Rural Dwelling' (the third poem by Hardy discussed earlier) is Edward Thomas's 'Over the Hills'. Both poems establish contrast between past and present. Like Hardy, Edward Thomas too desires to return to rural England. The poem, like many of Thomas's poems, begins with the memories of past:

often and often it came back again
To mind, the day I passed the horizon ridge
To a new country, the path I had to find
By half-gaps that were stiles once in the hedge,
The pack of scarlet clouds running across
The harvest evening that seemed endless then
And after, and the inn where all were kind,
All were strangers. I did not know my loss
Till one day twelve months later suddenly
I leaned upon my spade and saw it all,
Though far beyond the sky-line.

(CPET., 77)

The speaker had spent an evening in an inn with strangers. This simple incident paved the way for thinking about the unspoiled rural England that has disappeared with the passage of time. Images such as "scarlet clouds", "harvest evening" are reminiscent of the English landscape. Though the poet desires to
recollect the golden days of the British Empire he fails:

Recall

was vain: no more could the restless brook
Ever turn back and climb the waterfall
To the lake that rests and stirs not in its nook,
As in the hollow of the collar-bone
Under the mountain's head of rush and stone.

(CPET., 77)

The poet yearns to preserve the time, the sweet memory,
a joyful life in the company of Nature, which seems now impossible.

Larkin's 'Here' echoes in its own way the sentiments of Hardy's 'Domicilium' and Thomas's 'Manor Farm'. Usually, Larkin chooses the contemporary British background for his poems. Bruce Martin observes:

Larkin chooses to specify a demonstrably British and demonstrably contemporary background for his poems. His settings are usually those of the large town or city: heavily trafficked streets, urban parks filled with mothers and playing children, the hospital in the midst of a business district, the discotheque, the tawdry rooming house, the
pet shop, and even the interiors of the semidetached houses making up much of British suburbia.

In 'Here' Larkin focuses on the rootlessness and purposelessness (without any hint of condescension) brought about by mechanization. The poem moves in one direct flowing movement from country to town and out again to even more open country. Though the speaker does not express any desire to travel away from the twentieth century urban scene to an untouched rural one, the language and images used to describe the natural setting have a beauty, tenderness and expansiveness that quite clearly suggest Nature's power and the speaker's preference for this. Like Wordsworth he suggests that in the company of Nature he can ponder the development of the unique self. As Kuby says:

The speaker thinks that the development of self needs peace and solitude in which he can meditate on the beauties of nature. But the speaker can find no Lake district, no semi-monastic natural haven in which he can escape.

The poem begins with the description of a journey from the industrialized city:
Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows
And traffic all night north; swerving through fields
Too thin and thistled to be called meadows,
And now and then a harsh-named halt, that shields
Wor! men at dawn; swerving to solitude
Of skies and scarecrows, haystails, hares and pheasants,
And the widening river’s slow presence,
The piled gold clouds, the shining gull-marked mud,

Gathers to be surprise of a large town:

(Wh., 9)

As he swerves from industrial city he finds only vestiges of ruralism remaining “too thin and thistled to be called meadows.” Larkin in this poem accepts twentieth century life with its "mixers" and "toasters", with resigned affection and he evokes it with marvellous precision, nowhere showing condescension to the cut price crowd; instead, identifying with it. Finally, in the last stanza the speaker comes to the "here" of the title, which is a Wordsworthian setting, "isolated villages" in which distinctively Wordsworthian responses can be expressed. This is "Here"

Where removed lives

Loneliness clarifies. Here silence stands.
Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,
Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,
Luminously-peopled air ascends;
And past the poppies bluish neutral distance
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach
of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:

Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.

(WW., 9)

The journey of the speaker begins with "swerving east" says Kuby, "searching for escape from the omnipresent 'here' of this century, the speaker is pushed to a last small arm of land where still 'silence stands.'"

This is solitude, a peaceful place which is required for the expansion of the spirit. In 'Wessex Heights' Hardy was looking for a lonely place where he could ponder about his pure essential self. Larkin in this poem desires to find a mode of unfenced existence free from the traces of mechanical civilization. Both poets find solace in the rural idyll of country life.

Like Edward Thomas in 'Manor Farm', Larkin in 'Going, Going' laments a disappearing rural England and mounts a bitter attack on increasing encroaching industrialization. The poem begins with the description of a rural landscape that has disappeared from England:
I thought it would last my time --
The sense that, beyond the town,
There would always be fields and farms,
Where the village louts could climb
Such trees as were not cut down;
I knew there'd be false alarms

(HW., 21)

From this point, the poem moves towards the description of contemporary England which is totally urban and polluted. The poet thinks that with advancements in the field of science and technology we have, :

More houses, more parking allowed,
More caravan sites, more pay.
On the Business Page, a score

Of spectacled grins approve
Some takeover bid that entails
Five per cent profit (and ten
Per cent more in estuaries) : move
Your works to the unspoilt dales
(Grey area grants)!

(HW., 21-22)

All these picturesque details of the poem, as Bruce Martin observes:
In this poem Larkin envisions England becoming the "first slum of Europe" due to growing population, spreading towns and suburbs, and pollution. Instead of accepting England with its "mixers and toasters" (which we find in 'Here') 'Going, Going' shows his disgust with the England which inevitably come. He says with the sadness:

And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.
There'll be books; it will linger on
In galleries; but all that remains
For us will be concrete and tyres.

(HW., 22)

Another poem which underlines the friendly fellow feeling between human and natural world is 'To The Sea'. Here Larkin uses the symbol of the sea which is an unconfined and limitless as Edward Thomas's lofty sky. The rituals of sea-bathing offers an infinite pleasure to human beings, and for that reason it is
still going on all of it, still going on

(HW., 9)

In his childhood the poet has enjoyed the miniature gaiety of the sea-side. The ritual of going to the sea is a tradition, a heritage preserved and continued by generations for it provides an opportunity to live in the company of nature.

In the second stanza the poet describes the importance of such rituals in human life. The rituals such as sea-bathing offer us mental liberty, satisfaction and a sense of relief from our routine life. Man loves and preserves such natural rituals because they offer a free and gay life:

To lie, eat, sleep in hearing of the surf.

(HW., 9)

For the children the pleasure lies in "grasping at enormous air". To the young it is, "half an annual pleasure", and to the old it gives an ability to perform, "half a rite". It makes them feel the profound gaiety of nature in summer though it may probably be a "final summer".
In the final stanza the poet says that we should celebrate and welcome such natural rituals warmly for they give meaning to our life. They are all good and valuable educative experiences. The poet experiences an infinite delight in the sea bathing rituals which is performed and continued by generations for it provides him pleasure in the harmonious company of nature.

All the poems discussed in this section clearly manifest the desire of Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas, and Philip Larkin to preserve the English landscape and countryside. All the three poets are disturbed by the dehumanizing effects of the Industrial Revolution and world wars, the destruction of the green meadows, and fields and the consequent alienation from nature. Man is terribly disappointed by the horrors of industrial society and yearns for an "unfenced existence" where he can recover a lost wholeness.

Poems of dejection in a natural background:

The Industrial Revolution brought a total change not only in the external world but also in the inner personality and mental landscape of sensitive men. The introduction of machines in place of men, broken villages, the disappearance of rural England, loss of faith in human values, and above all, decline of faith in religion brought a sense of loss and melancholy to the human mind. Reviewing "Nature in Victorian Poetry"
V.R. Kanadey observes:

The spousal relationship between man and nature as Wordsworth called it in his poem, 'The Excursion' has vanished altogether from the English literary scene.

Hardy's attitude to nature is marked by a characteristic change after the influence of The Origin of Species. The Hardy of 'Domicilium' and 'Wessex Heights' had considered Nature a strengthening and powerful force for mankind, but after this milestone in Victorian thought, Nature is no more benevolent, harmonious, nor is it a source of bliss and inspiration in his later poems. Nature is totally indifferent, cruel to man, a blind force with no regard for human beings. Man's alienation from Nature leads the poet to such questions as the existence of God, the conflict between cosmic will and human will, the indifferent nature of external world to internal self. All these brought a sense of agnosticism and a note of melancholy to the poems of Matthew Arnold and the later poems of Thomas Hardy. There is a total absence of faith in God's scheme, and his justice and cosmic will are set against human will in Hardy's poems such as 'Nature's Questioning' and 'New Year's Eve'.

'Nature's Questioning', one of Hardy's most famous
nineteenth century poems, deals with the purposelessness of life and the irremediable disorder of the cosmos. The speaker regards a gloomy landscape which he compares surprisingly to the faces of school children:

When I look forth at dawning, pool,
Field, flock, and lonely tree,
All seem to gaze at me
Like chastened children sitting silent in a school;

Their faces dulled, constrained, and worn,
As though the master's ways
Through the long teaching days
Had cowed them till their early zest was overborne.

(CPTH., 66)

This image shows how in their attempts to educate and sharpen the "early zest" of their children, human beings dull and suppress them. The metaphor of school children suggests, as

Paul Zietlow observes, "men's partial responsibility for their own sorry condition."

The overlap between the landscape and children, natural and human, appears suppressed and devitalized as if by some superior power.
Later in the poem the metaphor of the classroom becomes odder and even more complex when 'the school children, i.e. the features of the landscape, ask unanswerable questions. They wonder why they are there:

'Has some Vast Imbecility,
Mighty to build and blind,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?'

'Or come we of an Automaton
Unconscious of our pains? ...
Or are we live remains
of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?'

(CPTH., 66)

Here the metaphorical structure of the poem becomes complex. As Paul Zietlow observes:

The elements of nature become the dulled, questioning school children, who, in a tentative moment, metamorphose themselves into the lower parts of a dying God.

Though the dull landscape remains the central subject of the poem; the metaphor of the classroom acquires a life of its own. It is indicative of a sullen unhappiness deep in the heart of nature, and a sense of
meaninglessness. Only a 'vast Imbecility' (and no kind God) could have created nature and thus abandoned it, giving it no raison d'être. Nature's question seems to be: 'Why am I here? Why should I be rather than not be?'

The poem ends characteristically on a note of realistic vision:

No answer I...

Meanwhile the winds, and rains,
And Earth's old glooms and pains
Are still the same, and Life and Death are neighbours nigh.

(CPTH., 67)

The first three stanzas of the poem suggest the brooding stillness which precedes a storm. The initial silence stirs into "lipping mere" (Hardy's characteristic coinage) and finally we are given the fact of rain and wind. The first stanza has crept into the gloom of the last. The speaker unwittingly advances closer to the sharp intimation that, "life and death are neighbours nigh" for him. The frame of the poem, observation, perception, interruption and return to initial scene are richer than the children actually say.

As mentioned earlier, Hardy never thinks of Nature in isolation, but, like Wordsworth, always considers it in relation to man. As David Perkins observes:
Nature is however almost never the subject of a Hardy poem. It is present only as context or background.

This remark of Perkins applies to Hardy's personal lyrics where he uses Nature to express his personal feelings and moods. *'Neutral Tones'* is the first of his tragic lyrics where he describes his personal crisis through the complex and intensifying images of nature. Tom Paulin in his book *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception* compares this poem with a section of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Wordsworth describes a particular scene - a wall, a single sheep, a hawthorn hedge - which he saw a few days before his father's death.

And afterwards, the wind and sleety rain
And all the business of the elements,
The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
The noise of wood and water, and the mist
Which on the line of each of those two roads
Advanced in such indisputable shapes,
All these were spectacles and sounds to which
I often would repair and thence would drink
As at a fountain.

*Prelude*, Book XI 245-54)

Wordsworth here repeats his description of the wall, sheep and hawthorn, and so charges them powerfully
with the significance of what he is saying. This is just what Hardy does in 'Neutral Tones', one of his earliest and finest poems:

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;

— They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles of years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro
On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth was the dimtest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird-a-wing ...

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

(CPTH., 12)

The first stanza builds up a melancholic mood. The images of 'winter day' and 'fallen gray leaves' successfully express the poet's feelings of personal
crisis and suffering. The poet's feelings of loss and
deception in love have destroyed his youthful idealism,
and, at the same time, released a remarkable power of
tragic vision.

In the final stanza the poet presents the ashen
scene as a total picture. The poem moves from
melancholy to the tragic vision of life. Nature
reflects the dreary sadness of human relationships.
Leaves, pond, sun all give back the speaker's sad
colourless gloom. These are stark images. Tom Paulin
observes:

The lesson that time and experience have
taught Hardy is presented visually, not
conceptually, and like Wordsworth he repeats
his description of the scene. Because both
their scenes are so starkly delineated and so
sternly expressed it would be wrong to
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dismiss them as pathetic fallacies.

Another poem under consideration in this theme is
'At Day-close in November'. It is a beautiful little
lyric about Nature's sadder mood. Here the poet
minutely describes the beauty of natural objects with
accuracy and graphic details. The poem begins by
describing the calm and peaceful atmosphere of the
evening:
The ten hours' light is abating,
And a late bird wings across,
Where the pines, like waltzers waiting,
Give their black heads a toss.

Beech leaves, that yellow the noon-time
Float past like specks in the eye;
I set every tree in my June time,
And now they obscure the sky.

And the children who ramble through here
Conceive that there never has been
A time when no tall trees grew here,
That none will in time be seen.

(CPTH., 334)

The quiet atmosphere of the evening leads the poet to think about his childhood. The trees which were small in his childhood are now so tall as to obscure the sky. The children playing there today cannot imagine a time when there were no such tall trees - they seem so permanent. Only the speaker in the poem knows that they were not there once, and that in time they will disappear. Nothing lasts.

Hardy's sense of melancholy is caused by his awareness of the passage of time. There is also a hint
that with the advances of the modern world the natural beauty of England is gradually disappearing. The England which Hardy had observed in his childhood is now become only a memory. The central feel is one of inevitable change - even within the cycles of nature.

Hardy's poems mentioned in this section are agnostic, compassionate towards the human world, and sadly aware of the human lot in a hostile and indifferent universe ('Nature's Questioning'). They also reflect feelings of personal loss and suffering ('Neutral Tones'). All these poems together build up Hardy's melancholic attitude towards nature.

Turning to Edward Thomas's poems, we find notes of melancholy, but they are not as powerful and philosophical as Hardy's, and there is a notable absence of anger. Edward Thomas is more quiescent than Hardy; sad but not rebellious. Hardy's tremendous love for suffering human beings makes him agnostic and indifferent to God. Thomas's poems, though full of an exquisite sympathy for human beings, are expressive of a quieter and more accepting mood, something which Hardy totally lacks. They suggest even as they evoke natural phenomena and scenes with great precision, a loss of joy from human life and that gives them a melancholic undertone, but there is no revolt against any cosmic vista in his poems. His poems simply deal with his personal experiences, while Hardy raises larger
philosophical, quasi-religious issues in his poems. In this sense, while Hardy is a complex poet, Thomas is simple. But from another angle, Edward Thomas's focussed particularity, his leisurely lingering and detailed observation display the complexity of patterns in nature, while remaining simple and lucid in exposition. Hardy, on the other hand does not stop to examine the minutiae of designs in Nature; for him there are simple, large facts; it is his exposition of underlying philosophical assumptions that twist and turn in more complex ways.

Edward Thomas's 'The Owl' is a characteristic poem, for the voice of the owl brings a sense of sorrow to the poet's mind. The poem expresses a feeling of compassion for poor and unsheltered people on a cold night, a sense of community between a sheltered individual and a mass of unknown people less fortunate than he. The poem begins with the description of a journey:

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved:
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof
Against the North wind: tired, yet so that rest
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

At this point the speaker hears a cry:

An Owl's cry, a most melancholy cry.
Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,
But one telling me plain what I escaped
And others could not that night, as in I went.

(CPET., 119)

In this poem Edward Thomas gives no details of the sufferings of the poor and of soldiers. He says simply that they sleep under the stars and not, like him, in a warm and hospitable inn. Moreover he is concerned, not to expand in sympathy towards the suffering of others, but simply to record the feelings aroused in him by the melancholy cry of the owl. The owl’s cry is the intrusion of inescapable reality. The great cold outdoors, the natural world by night, is projected as hostile and indifferent, and wholly separate from the human world of indoors, of warmth and fire. The owl’s cry is a reminder to the insider of what lies outside — beautiful but inhospitable. The owl’s cry reminds him of all those who are without comfort and shelter in the cold night. The poet considers the owl’s cry as “speaking for all who lay under the stars.”

The poem is the sincere record of a truly felt and disturbing experience. Its tone is quite restrained and yet earnest; it avoids falseness and exaggeration.
"Rain" another significant poem, presents rain not as a source of life and vitality but of destruction. The image of midnight rain inspires the poet to think about death:

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been
Since I was born into this solitude.
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon;
But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain,
Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
Like me who have no love which this wild rain
Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be towards what is perfect and
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

(CPET., 259)

The effect of the rain's wildness on the poet's mind is so powerful that he cannot think that rain purifies and
washes our life. He wishes no one whom he knows to face the destructive forces of this wild rain. The poem ends by expressing the inevitable disappointment associated with the rain. The usual associations of rain with fertility and pleasure are replaced by a new set associations: rain here speaks of destruction and death.

Another poem full of rain and wind is one entitled 'Melancholy'. The poem begins with the description of rain:

The rain and wind, the rain and wind, raved endlessly. On me the Summer storm, and fever, and melancholy Wrought magic, so that if I feared the solitude Far more I feared all company: too sharp, too rude, Had been the wisest or the dearest human voice What I desired I knew not, but whate'er my choice Vain it must be, I knew. Yet naught did my despair But sweeten the strange sweetness, while through the wild air All day long I heard a distant cuckoo calling And, soft as dulcimers, sounds of near water falling, And, softer, and remote as if in history, Rumours of what had touched my friends, my foes, or me.

(CPET., 193)

The poet experiences the violent effects of rain and storm that fail to provide him pleasure and company. Being a contemplative poet of Nature, he desires the
company of Nature on the one hand and, on the other, he fears the company of Nature, "too sharp, too rude". The destructive power of rain brings a note of melancholy and solitude in his mind.

The sounds of the cuckoo and waterfall are juxtaposed against the wildness and destructive forces of Nature. Nature's destructive and creative forces are simultaneously taken in by the poet. The images of rain and storm bring sadness and the cuckoo's voice and water falling purifies the melancholy.

Edward Thomas's 'October' is one of his most exquisite nature poems. The poem begins with a beautiful and careful observation of natural objects:

The green elm with the one great bough of gold
Lets leaves into the grass slip, one by one,-
The short hill grass, the mushrooms small milk-white,
Harebell and scabious and tormentil,
That blackberry and gorse, in dew and sun,
Bow down to; and the wind travels too light
To shake the fallen birch leaves from the fern;
The gossamers wander at their own will.
At heavier steps than birds' the squirrel scold.

The late year has grown fresh again and new
As Spring, and to the touch is not more cool
Than it is warm to the gaze; and now I might
As happy be as earth is beautiful,
Were I some other or with earth could turn
In alternation of violet and rose,
Harebell and snowdrop, at their season due,
And gorse that has no time not to be gay.
But if this be not happiness, who knows?
Someday I shall think this a happy day,
And this mood by the name of melancholy
Shall no more blackened and obscured be.

(CPET., 247)

The minute and precise observation of the natural objects creates an atmosphere of utter quiet and beauty at the beginning of the poem. The earth is made beautiful by all these various and ever-changing natural objects (the green elm, leaves, mushrooms all these objects).

But lovely as the scene is, the poet recognizes that his mood is darkened by disquiet, he does not know why. He is unable to rejoice in a given moment; worse, he recognizes that he never has so rejoiced; and that, just as this time is not entirely happy, so too perhaps earlier times also were not entirely joyful, and only seem to be so in retrospect. In short, he draws a distinction between poised, utterly beautiful Nature, and his tormented consciousness that is more unhappy.
because he is aware of the gulf between Nature and himself.

All the poems mentioned in this section reveal Edward Thomas's inherent qualities as a nature poet, such as his quiet and precise response to Nature, his photographic observation of natural details, and his calm and accepting mood. Though the poems ('Rain' 'Melancholy' and 'October') are melancholic in tone, they are remarkable for their beauty. All these poems successfully create a visionary effect on the reader's mind. As in Hardy's 'Neutral Tones' the photographic analogy between mind and a camera is also apparent in these poems.

Philip Larkin, a melancholic poet like Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas, deals with his subject in a very different, yet also very English way. Commenting on Larkin's nature poems Bruce Martin very pertinently establishes the difference between Thomas Hardy and Philip Larkin in their attitudes to Nature. He says:

In his poems Larkin does not talk about Nature very often. His difference from Hardy in this regard reflects a difference in background and era. Where in Hardy we see a poet regretting that Nature is not as Wordsworth promised, with Larkin we find a
man so removed from the nineteenth century debate over Nature that he has never thought to take seriously the notion of Nature as imminent or benign. That Nature, especially in the spring, can be outwardly beautiful he would not deny. But that man can derive any consolation from the patterns and cycles of the natural world he regards as a foolish notion.

This remark of Martin suggests that Larbin, being a totally urban poetic voice is no more interested in Nature and its relation to human beings. Instead of Nature, ordinary man’s routine problems are at the centre of his poetry. Earlier, in his first volume called The North Ship, we find a handful of nature poems written under the influence of either Arnold or W.B. Yeats. ‘Poem-I’ in the North Ship begins with an acute description of spring:

All catches alight
At the spread of spring:
Birds crazed with flight
Branches that fling
Leaves up to the light—
Every one thing,
Shape, colour and voice,
Cries out, Rejoice!

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A drum taps: a wintry drum.

Gull, grass and girl
In air, earth and bed
Join the long whirl
Of all the resurrected,
Gather up and hurl
Far out beyond the dead
What life they can control—
All runs back to the whole:

A drum taps: a wintry drum

What beasts now hesitate
Clothed in cloudless air,
In whom desire stands straight?
What ploughman halts his pair
To kick a broken plate
Or coin turned up by the share?
What lovers worry much
That a ghost bids them touch?

A drum taps: a wintry drum.

Let the wheel spin out,
Till all created things
With shout and answering shout
Cast off rememberings;
Let it all come about
Till centuries of spring—
And all their buried men
Stand on the earth again.

A drum taps: a wintry drum.

(NS., 11-12)

The first stanza celebrates the world of Nature animated by the coming of spring. The spring brings a new vitality and power in the natural world. Nature as well as human beings rejoice in the liveliness of the spring.

In the middle part of the poem the poet describes the effect of the passage of time on Nature. The refrain 'A drum taps: a wintry drum' which recalls Yeats's 'The withering of the Roughs' is suggestive. It suggests that winter is there to destroy the beauty of spring. This shows, as Philip Gardner observes:

Larkin's early awareness of sadness at the back of things, of the passing of time and the inevitability of death.

Moreover, the refrain closes the poem, and consequently the cycles of seasons, as it implies that spring alternates with winter: "Let the wheel spin out." This brings out themes which are to concern Larkin in his later books: the seasonal cycle and natural recurrence.

Another poem in The North Ship bears unmistakable
signs of resemblance to Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach' is Poem-III. The poem begins with the description of Nature:

The moon is full tonight
And hurts the eyes,
It is so definite and bright.
What if it has drawn up
All quietness and certitude of worth
Wherewith to fill its cup,
Or mint a second moon, a paradise?
For they are gone from earth.

(NS., 14)

Here, Larkin by using the images of full moon evokes a beautiful but disturbing night. As Arnold hears the note of melancholy in human life, so, in Poem III Larkin too is troubled by an undertow of anxiety. Poem III and 'Dover Beach' share a common theme, mood and images. Both the poets are disappointed and disturbed by the modern world and mourn the absence of light and joy in human life in a melancholic way.

The poem 'Going' from The Less Lived projects the melancholic mood of Nature in a very characteristic way. The poem begins with the description of an evening:
There is an evening coming in
Across the fields, one never seen before,
That lights no lamps.

Silken it seems at a distance, yet
When it is drawn up over the knees and breast
It brings no comfort.

Where has the tree gone, that locked
Earth to the sky? What is under my hands,
That I cannot feel?

What loads my hands down?

(LD., 21)

Though the sight of an evening looks 'silken'
from the distance, it brings no comfort to the poet's mind. The evening light oppresses the speaker. In the final lines the poet mourns a tree that has disappeared. The poet is unaware of the power (probably death) which loads his hand down. Commenting on this poem Bruce Martin observes:

In The Less Deceived we find at least two poems, 'Absences' and 'Going', devoted to death. In the one the speaker imagines what the natural scenes he observes will be
without him to observe them. ('Going') while in the other, he disbelievingly questions his experience as he becomes one of the dying, in a manner reminiscent of Emily Dickinson.

The poems discussed in this section by Larkin are evocative of his melancholic mood. Not unlike Edward Thomas, Larkin's poems about Nature point to a central dissatisfaction and separation in the midst of beauty. After the publication of his first volume The NorthShip Larkin shifts to the problems of ordinary man rather than simple natural description.

Hardy's, Edward Thomas' and Larkin's poems mentioned in this section are similar in mood, though different in their handling of theme. There is no magic, no use of supernatural in their natural descriptions. Their melancholy arises from a response to the human situation. All the three poets use Nature as a background or a setting to speak for human emotion. Earlier, the juxtaposition of man and nature can be found in Wordsworth. Their use of nature as a background to express human emotion relates them to the romantic poetic tradition established by Wordsworth and Coleridge.
Poems of joy and Celebration:

Though Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin have thus far in this chapter come over as melancholic and pessimistic poets, they have also written poems of joy celebrating Nature. These poems rejoice in the continuation of natural life; the immortality of Nature stands as a significant backdrop to the mortality of man. These poems establish the superiority of Nature, and suggests that man's harmonious relationship with Nature can be a healing one.

Hardy's 'Lying Awake', 'Growth in May' and 'Last week in October' are full of brightness and joy, and convey no sense of brooding.

In some of his death poems Hardy thinks of places, objects and landscape in terms of living things. In 'Lying Awake' Hardy thinks even of a graveyard as much with joy in its unique beauty as in the morning star and beech trees:

You, Morningtide star, now are steady-eyed,
over the east,
I know it as if I saw you;
You Beeches, engrave on the sky, your thin
twigs, even the least;
Had I paper and pencil I'd draw you.
You Meadow, are white with your counterpane
cover of dew,
I see it as if I were there;
You Churchyard, are lightening faint from
the shade of the yew,
The name creeping out everywhere.

(CPTH., 863)

The poem builds quietly on Hardy's imaginative power. The images reflect the faint beginning of a dawn. The poet, an old man, visualises the world by living in the darkness. He makes still and dead things come alive through his seeing eye. The meditation on lifeless things becomes a recreation of life. Hardy bridges a final gap and death seems not the end but the beginning of a "new life".

Hardy's 'Growth in May', one of his most characteristic poems, begins with a very precise and minute description of Nature. The poet rejoices in natural beauty and reacts to it in a quiet mood:

I enter a daisy-and-buttercup land,
And thence thread a jungle of grass:
Hurdles and stiles scarce visible stand
Above the lush stems as I pass.
Hedges peer over, and try to be seen,
And seem to reveal a dim sense.
That amid such ambitious and elbow-high green
They make a mean show as a fence.

Elsewhere the mead is possessed of the neats,
That range not greatly above
The rich rank thicket which brushes their teats,
And her gown, as she waits for her love.

(CPTH., 626)

The poem is a simple narration full of beautiful images.
The images such as 'daisy-butter cup land', jungle of grass, and mead possessed of the neats, create a scene alive with bright colours and full of freshness. Calmly and quietly the poet enjoys the reposeful mood of Nature. The human figure of the last line comes as a culminating point of natural riches and blends imperceptibly with the glad scene.

'Last Week in October' is a short lyric with a positive note. In marked contrast with 'At Day Closing in November', Hardy's faith in the continuation of natural objects is exquisitely revealed in this poem. The poem is full of a celebration unusual in Hardy. It begins with a joyful mood. The trees scatter their leaves everywhere. An autumnal scene (usually
associated with sadness) is an occasion here for gladness:

The trees are undressing, and fling in many places—
On the gray road, the roof, the window-sill.
Their radiant robes and ribbons and yellow laces;
A leaf each second so is flung at will
Here, there, another and another, still and still.

A spider's web has caught one while downcoming,
That stays there dangling when the rest pass on;
Like a suspended criminal hangs he, mumming
In golden garb, while one yet green high yon,
Trembles, as fearing such a fate for himself anon.

(CPTH., 709)

Usually, the fall of leaves connotes change and death. Hardy makes it seen like a carnival— the bright red and gold colour, the gay movement of the wind, the tossing of branches— all contribute to the dominant festive note. One great gold leaf is caught in the delicate tracery of a spider's web, and is beautifully presented to the reader's eye as a player or actor "mumming in golden garb." (Mummers were entertainers who went around at Christmas acting and delighting people). The gold of this leaf is a contrast with a trembling green one still left on the tree. The overall impression is a splash of colour and joyous movement. Not only is this unusual in
Hardy, the use of autumn to communicate celebration and joy itself very unusual.

Edward Thomas's poems 'After Rain', 'Hollow Wood' and 'March' compare the immortality of nature with the mortality of man, and, as said earlier, dwell on continuous growth in Nature. His poem 'March' begins with fresh and hopeful notes:

Now I know that Spring will come again,
Perhaps tomorrow: however late I've patience
After this night following on such a day.

While still my temples ached from the cold
burning
Of hail and wind, and still the primroses
Torn by the hail were covered up in it,
The sun filled earth and heaven with a great light
And a tenderness, almost warmth, where the
hail dripped,
As if the mighty sun wept tears of joy
But 't was too late for warmth. The sunset piled
Mountains on mountains of snow and ice in the west:
Somewhere among their folds the wind was lost.
And yet 't was cold, and though I knew that spring
Would come again, I knew it had not come,
That it was lost, too, in those mountains cold.
What did the thrushes know? Rain, snow, sleet, hail,
Had kept them quiet as the primroses.
They had but an hour to sing. On boughs they sang,
On gates, on ground: they sang while they
changed perches.

(CPET., 15)

The first stanza describes the coming of spring. The poet waits for the spring which brings new hope and spirit in nature as well as in human life.

The second half of the poem follows on a vivid rendering of a bitterly cold day of hail and wind, with the sun now near the end of the day filling earth and heaven with a great light but not warmth.

In the third stanza the feelings and perceptions and thankfulness that overcome the distress of cold, and the exquisite way the silence comes into his consciousness prepare us for the happiness of spring.

In the final stanza the poet muses on the expectancy always latent in nature. The birds sing though all they have experienced is rain, snow and hail. Yet, like the primroses and the poet himself, they know that spring is round the corner. This moment of waiting for spring is as full of exquisite joy as the spring itself.

'After Rain' beautifully exhibits Edward Thomas's
faith in the continuum of natural forces. The rain purifies the earth and gives life and joy to all natural objects and human beings. The poem starts with the description of rain which washes and cleans the earth:

The rain of a night and a day and a night
Stops at the light
Of this pale choked day. The peering sun
Sees what has been done.
The road under the trees has a border new
Of purple hue.

Inside the border of bright thin grass:
For all that has
Been left by November of leaves is torn
From hazel and thorn
And the greater trees. Throughout the copse
No dead leaf drops
On grey grass, green moss, burnt-orange fern,
At the wind’s return:
The leaflets out of the ash-tree shed
Are thinly spread
In the road, like little black fish, inlaid,
As if they played.
What hangs from the myriad branches down there
So hard and bare
Is twelve yellow apples lovely to see
On one crab-tree,
And on each twig of every tree in the dell
Uncountable

Crystals both dark and bright of the rain
That begins again.

(CPET., 35-37)

The rain brings new hope and life to the natural objects. The poet very minutely and effectively describes the rain as a life giving force to Nature as well as human beings. The cycle of rain continues every year and brings new life to Nature. The timelessness and immortality of nature are exquisitely evoked in this poem. In a manner at once tender and sharp, Edward Thomas makes the reader see grey grass, green moss, small yellow apples, and bright crystal raindrops. Accuracy and delicateness are miraculously balanced in this truly marvellous poem.

Edward Thomas's 'The Hollow Wood' is a little lyric with a positive note. Like 'After Rain', this poem considers nature as a life giving and ever young. The poem begins with the description of a hollow wood:

Out in the sun the goldfinch flits
Along the thistle - tops, flits and twits
Above the hollow wood
Where birds swim like fish -
Fish that laugh and shriek -
To and fro, far below
In the pale hollow wood.

Lichen, ivy, and moss
Keep evergreen the trees
That stand half-flayed and dying,
And the dead trees on their knees
In dog's - mercury, ivy, and moss:
And the bright twit of the goldfinch drops
Down there as he flits on thistle tops -

(CPET., 59)

'Forest' 'rain' and 'wood' are recurring symbols in Edward Thomas's poems. H.Coombs considers, "these symbols as invariably a spontaneous and unforced item of the experience he is describing."

In the first stanza a goldfinch flits and lets its dropping fall on thistle tops at the edge of a wood, while other birds pass to and fro inside the wood.

In the second stanza the process of nature's dying and its regenerating process is carefully described. The poem beautifully expresses the capacity of nature to
Philip Larkin also has written a handful of poems in which the tone is vibrant, alive and glad. 'The Trees', 'Solar', and 'Cut Grass', all three nature poems, express a sense of hope and fulfilment.

'The Trees' is a poem with a positive note. Bruce Martin considers this poem "unusual, if not unique among Larkin's writing." The poem begins with the regenerating capacity of the trees:

The trees are coming into leaf
Life something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too.
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May.
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

(HW., 12)

In the second stanza the poet compares the trees' growth with human life. Like human beings, trees also

renew itself after death.
grow old ("they die too"). As with human beings autumn and spring are realities of tree's life. The example they set is in their capacity to start afresh again and again; they begin their new life with vitality and confidence.

'The Trees' sends out a message, more, a command to enjoy life. Awareness of mortality has been turned into a reason for rejoicing in the gift of the moment.

The other positive poem in which Larkin expresses unequivocally positive note is 'Solar'. This poem is a brief hymn to the sun. According to Roger Day:

the poem is a 'paean' — that is a song of praise to the sun, full of awe and wonder.

There is no poem in Larkin's work more visionary than 'solar' for it celebrates the life-sustaining sun. The poet describes the sun with beautiful images:

Suspended lion face
Spilling at the centre
Of an unfurnished sky
Now still you stand,
And how unaided
Single staidless flower
You pour unrecompensed.
The eye sees you
Simplified by distance
Into an origin,
Your petalled head of flames
Continuously exploding.
Heat is the echo of your
Gold.

Coined there among
Lonely horizontals
You exist openly.
Our needs hourly
Climb and return life angles.
Unclosing like a hand,
You give for ever.

(HW., 33)

The sun here is an emblem of an overflowing flood of
energy and light - a source of purity and sublimity.

The second stanza of the poem tempts us to
consider Larkin as a poet of Nature. His description of
the sun with its sense of nature's vitality and
sublimity has echoes of Wordsworth. He says of the
brightness of sun, "Heat is the echo of your gold". In
the final part of the poem, the lion-faced sun becomes a
source of both delight and awe, two responses very
unusual to Larkin.

'Cut Grass' is a brief lyric set in summer. It touches on death and the ephemeral nature of life:

Cut grass lies frail.
Brief is the breath
Mown stalls exhale
Long, long the death.

It dies in the white hours
Of young-leafed June
With chestnut flowers,
With hedges snowlike strewn,

White lilac bowed,
Lost lanes of Queen Anne's lace,
And that high-built cloud
Moving at summer's pace.

(HW, 41)

By using the emblem of cut grass the poet celebrates the sensuous beauty of the natural world. Here there is no message; instead, a quiet response to the exquisiteness of the moment; a total response to the fragrance exhaled by the cut grass.

The poems mentioned in this section have indicated that Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin are poets of Nature. They are only representative of many more such
poems, especially in the case of Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas. In Philip Larkin's *oeuvre* there are not quite as many nature poems as with the other two but the entire body of his published work is less. Also, he is essentially a poet of the urban scene. But that does not prevent him from relating deeply and intensely with Nature, as illustrated by his nature poems. In a poem from his last volume *High Windows* called 'Forget What Did' he turns from the pain of life to Nature's cyclical returns for restoration. About the blank pages of a diary, he says:

**And the empty pages?**
Should they ever be filled
Let it be with observed

Celestial recurrences,
The day the flowers come,
And when the birds go.

* (HW., 16)

It is worth noting that earthly recurrences like the appearance of flowers and migration of birds are called by the poet 'celestial recurrences'.

Nature's various forms and everchanging moods are dealt with beautifully by Hardy, Edward Thomas and
Larkin. They have used Nature as a background to describe the complexities of human life. Like Wordsworth, these poets think of Nature in relation with man. Sometimes, Nature is a benevolent and strengthening force in their poems, and sometimes Nature is cruel, unconscious, blind and indifferent to human beings.

Though Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin treat Nature in different ways, there are certain characteristics in their poems which relate them to the native English poetic tradition. Keen and acute observation of natural objects, fidelity to observed details, attention to the particularities, photographic precision, no over-glorification of subject matter—all these characteristics make their poems profoundly English.

Disturbed and disappointed by the Industrial Revolution and World Wars, these poets desire to preserve an unspoiled England which is fast vanishing from British landscape. Though all the three poets have accepted the importance of science and technology for human progress, they are shocked by the destruction of the English landscape and countryside. On the one hand, they mourn for the loss of natural beauty and consequently of joy in human life; on the other hand, they have faith in immortality and continuation of Nature's cycle. These poetic voices express a romantic
desire to 'return to nature"; or they wish to find out an "unfenced existence" or a "Wessex Heights" where they can think to recover a lost purity. There are enough echoes of Wordsworth here to indicate that modern poetry is a continuation of a tradition long established.