CHAPTER 4

POETIC DICTION AND VERSE FORM
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Poetry is a special use of language, a condensed, compressed use of words marked by rhythm and cadence. However free verse may get, some semblance of recurring rhythm and some degree of heightening are both necessary for poetry to be written. Diction and verse form are therefore an inalienable part of poetry, and any examination of a poetic tradition requires a consideration of these two features.

This chapter attempts to indicate broadly some characteristic elements of native English diction and traditional verse-forms. This is done with special reference to the poems of Hardy, Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin. For the purpose of convenience, I divide the chapter into two sections. The first section discusses poetic diction, and the second, verse form. I also discuss, in passing, a certain English colouring and tone, both of which affect the diction.

What is poetic diction? Which types of words can create proper effects on the reader's mind? These are still contradictory questions. All poets accept words as a medium of expression. There are fashions in words for poetry, as in words for conversation, and out of the
words that are fashionable, every age constructs its own poetic diction. Minor poets may adopt these fashionable words without the acutest sense of meaning, while great poets adopt these words with an acute and precise sense of their meaning. An example of such a fashionable word, in our own time is 'improbable' - 'the trees are improbably green', or 'Islands improbably remote'.

Donald Davie in his book called *Purity of Diction in English Verse* defines good poetic diction and distinguishes it from the bad. He says:

> If bad diction is the result of selecting from the language as random, according to the whim of fashion, then good diction comes from making a selection from the language on reasonable principles and for a reasonable purpose."

All poets when they write have one purpose: they want to create an effect upon the mind of the reader. Good poets select the language on reasonable principles, to create some specific effect on the reader's mind. When the poets and critics are sure about what effects are legitimate, then they construct a very elaborate kind of poetic diction. Such an elaborate structure was outlined by George Puttenham in the sixteenth century. Puttenham told the poets what sort of words, images,
measures and rhymes they must adopt in order to produce legitimate effects. Since Puttenham's day this structure has broken down, as the poets in practice have blurred the distinctions upon which that structure rested. After Puttenham, Goldsmith in the eighteenth century, and Wordsworth in the nineteenth century talked about poetic diction. Coleridge, in the last chapters of *Biographia Literaria* attempted to rebuild the elaborate structure of Puttenham. He talks about different departments of language and different styles of working in these departments. But now-a-days the concept of diction has totally changed with changes in society and its cultural backgrounds. Poets to-day have a greater freedom of choice than the poets of the sixteenth century or even of the eighteenth. As Davie puts it:

The modern poet will not ask what words, arranged in what ways, are suitable for elegy; what other words and arrangements are proper to the ode. He will not ask whether his diction should be courtly and humanist, or heroic and pagan, or bourgeois and pious, or whatever else. He wants to know why he should use a diction at all, why he should exclude from his poetry any of the language with which he is familiar. For him it is axiomatic that 'there are no poetical and no
It is true that the poetic diction of every age is based on the society and its cultural background. Poetic diction is constantly changing and refining itself. The poet who undertakes to preserve or refine poetic diction is writing within a web of responsibilities. As Donald Davie in his book *Purity of diction in English verse* says:

The poet is responsible to past masters for conserving the genres and the decorum which they have evolved. He is responsible to the persons or the themes on which he writes, to maintain a consistent tone and point of view in his dealings with them. He is responsible to the community in which he writes, for purifying and correcting the spoken language. And of course he is responsible, as all poets are, to his readers; he has to give them pleasure, and also, deviously or directly, instructions in proper conduct.

These views of Davie clearly indicate that though the poet writes for his own pleasure, he is consciously or unconsciously responsible to the society, audience and to the nation in which he writes. He is not only a spokesman of his own feelings, but the spokesman of an
I turn now towards the discussion of English poetic diction in particular.

Before the Norman Conquest of 1066, the English people were a loosely-knit unity based on earlier Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The Anglo-Saxon period was rich in writings. The Anglo-Saxons were sons of sea-rovers, and at their best when they sang of war or of the sea; their lord was a man of war and a young hero. The lyrical impulse of the Anglo-Saxon people is well expressed in *The Seafarer*. It is the monologue of a sailor who expresses his conflicting feelings for the sea, his love and hate, fear and desires. The opening lines of the poem are full of energy, and are close to ordinary speech:

With a bitter breast-care
I have been abiding
Many seats of sorrow in my ship have known!

Frightful was the whirl of waves when it was my part
Narrow watch at night to keep my vessel prow
When it rushed the rock along.
These lines show that the diction of Anglo-Saxon poetry is ordinary, simple and appealing.

But the Norman Conquest created drastic changes in vocabulary and these inevitably influenced the literature that was written. Effective composition in English almost ceases soon after the Conquest. Now, no English but French became the language of the royal court and upper classes of the society.

English literature after the Norman-Conquest once again became important in the fourteenth century. England became once again an English-speaking and English-minded nation from king to commoner. In 1356 English became the language of the court of London and in 1362 of the parliament. Learning and art ceased to be monastic. Its culture extended to laymen like Chaucer and Gower. The anti-clerical spirit was felt in literature and English poetry. Vocabulary and verse forms were enriched by French influences.

The new poetry represented by Chaucer and Gower was written in English, coloured by the English temperament and character. Chaucer is the first major poet to use simple, lucid, and colloquial language in poetry. Chaucer's English was spoken by the community to which he belonged. There is nothing extraordinary or remarkable about his poetic diction. The Canterbury Tales shows the ordinariness and clarity which we have
come to associate with English diction. However, it has a very large proportion of French words, and it is clear that the homogenousness of the English language has vanished permanently. The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales begins with a description of Nature. Words of French origin are underlined:

When that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
of which vertu engendred in the flour;
whan Zephiro eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the young sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours-y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open eye

(Prologue to The Canterbury Tales, 1-12)

This famous opening provides an interesting example of the mixture that characterized Middle English diction. An Anglo-Saxon word like 'sweet' lies cheek by jowl with a foreign French (originally Latin) word like 'inspired'; and the flow of the verse (what Arnold
called Chaucer's divine liquidity of diction) holds all
the disparate elements and sounds smoothly together.
The 'purity' of English diction has gone forever. A
counter with an earlier, less Frenchified lyric will
establish the difference. I quote below a lyric from
the *Harley Lyrics*.

> Bytune Mersh and Averil
> When spray biginneth to springe
> The lutel foul hath hire wyl
> On hyre lud to synge.

> Ich libbe in love-longinge
> For semlokest of all thynge
> He may me blisse bringe
> Ich am in hire baundoum.

> Between March and April
> when branch begins to spring
> The little bird wishes to sing
> on high language to sing.

> l live in love longing
> for fairest of all thing
> She may be bliss bring
> I am in high power.
The poet of the Harley lyric establishes an effect of simplicity quite different from Chaucer's sophisticated opening. But Chaucer's sophistication seems simplicity itself when we place it beside T.S. Eliot's famous lines about April.

April is the cruellest month breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire stirring
Dull roots with spring rain
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

(The complete poems of T.S. Eliot 61)

The tone, the choice of words, the use of words in unexpected ways in the above, all indicate a progressive complexity. Complex diction is a matter of words thickly encrusted with associations and meanings. Of the three April excerpts quoted here, Chaucer and the medieval English poet seem to speak of ordinary things in a straightforward way, for example 'smale fowles maken melodye', in Chaucer, and 'The lutel foul hath hei wyl, in the medieval lyricist, whereas Eliot speaks obliquely, symbolically and paradoxically. In The Waste Land the line about April being the cruellest month expresses the disorder and lack of harmony in modern
The next signal change in the development of English diction is the flood of Latin terms that entered the language with the Renaissance and later enabled Milton to forge a highly Latinate, un-English poetic diction for his epics. The spirit of adventure and discovery, and the chance of a university education gave the poets an opportunity to read Greek, Latin and Italian literature. The literature of this period is tremendously influenced by Italian humanism and Latin literature. The simple language of the medieval lyric became more "poetic" and refined. Poets like Spenser enriched their vocabulary with loan words, dialect words, coinages and archaisms. The poetry of the period becomes more philosophical and allegorical. An excerpt from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* indicates the change.

Therefore where-ever that thou dost behold
A comely corpse, with beautie faire endowed,
Know this for certaine, that the same doth hold
A beauteous soule with faire conditioned thew;
Fit to receive the seede of vertue strewd;
For all that faire is, is by nature good;
That is a sign to know the gentle blood.

These lines reveal that, with the Renaissance, the old simplicity has gone; the language has become more
Latinized and poetic. The poet's learning of various subjects makes his language more refined and artificial.

The course of English poetry changed entirely with the rise of Milton on the English literary scene. There is now a deliberate Latinizing of the English language in terms of syntax and vocabulary. By his Latinate diction is usually meant the use of words of Latin origin, and also the use of Latin grammatical constructions. For instance, the line 'After the Tuscan Mariners transformed' instead of 'After the Tuscan Mariners had been transformed' is really an imitation of the Latin Ablative Absolute: 'The Tuscan Mariner having been transformed', the last three words of which would be contained in a single inflected Latin word. Milton similarly uses the single word transformed to stand for 'having been transformed', even though the English word cannot be inflected to indicate the use of the Ablative Absolute. To take another example, 'Nor flocks nor herds nor human face divine'. Here Milton places his noun 'face' between two adjectives, whereas the normal English word-order would place both adjectives before the noun. It is in the liberties that he takes with word-order that Milton is at his most Latinate. Latin, because it is an inflected language has a free word-order, whereas in English the word-order is fixed. When Milton rearranges the English word-order he achieves an effect which is wholly un-English.
Like Gray after him, Milton was a literary poet. He was immensely learned and his wide reading gave him an immense vocabulary, a vocabulary drawn from printed pages rather than from the common speech of ordinary people. With him poetry becomes a serious affair, almost a laborious and skillful task. He thinks that the writing of poetry requires a "high subject", a mental preparation, and above all knowledge of various subjects and extensive reading.

Milton's typical deviations from the usual word-order are to be found in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost*:

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Of Mans first Disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste Brought Death into the world, and all our woe, With loss of Eden, till one greater Man Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat, (and so on through several lines)
Sing Heav'ny Muse.
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This is a long periodic sentence, typical of Latin sentence construction with the verb, at the end: 'Sing, heavenly Muse'. The English word-order would have been: O heavenly Muse, sing of Man's first disobedience, etc.

Apart from standing English syntax on its head in
Imitation of the Latin, Milton used words of Latin origin to create grand effects; that is, he Latinized the vocabulary of English. For instance

Eccentric, intervolv'd yet regular
Then most, when most irregular they seem,

(V 623-4)

In these lines describing the life on the earth after creation, all the key words, 'eccentric', 'intervolv'd', 'regular', 'irregular', are of Latin origin.

Milton's tremendous influence checked the native English idiom. Not the simple and colloquial style but the pedantic and artificial style become the medium of poetic expression. After Milton English versification was never the same. Dryden, Pope, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Arnold—all of them show traces of Milton's Latinized style. The extent of this strong influence may be seen in Wordsworth's determination to break away from poetic diction, and write simple English. He says as much in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. He came to the conclusion that there was no special language for poetry.

"Poetry sheds no tears such as Angels weep", but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same
In contrast to the "gaudiness and inane phraseology of writers" he presented a "selection of the real language of men". By this he meant not to identify entirely the language of poetry with that of conversation among men to the people or of the middle class, but that one should use the language of everyday life, that is to say, the living and real language. The selection of this language has an intense forcefulness corresponding to the intense feelings of the heart.

Poetic diction in the 18th century had indeed become artificial to the point of inanity. The sea was always 'the main'; and sheep 'the shepherds' fleecy care'; and rats were (difficult to take seriously today) 'the whiskered vermin race'. Against this, Wordsworth offered a return to simplicity. His poem 'Michael' best illustrates his intention.

'Tis not forgotten yet
The pity that was then in every heart
For the old man — and tis believed by all
That many and many a day he thither went
And never lifted up a single stone.

The simple language of this heart-rending poem contrasts
startlingly with the Miltonic style.

Wordsworth's simple English diction could go to absurd extremes, as Helen Darbishire accurately notes in the Clark lectures on Wordsworth. She quotes from 'The Thorn' the following lines spoken by an old man about a pond:

I've measured it from side to side,
'Tis four feet long and three feet wide.

"What in the name of poetry, we ask" (Helen Darbishire goes on to say) "is this? This, Wordsworth, would reply, is a lyrical ballad!"

The return to traditional English verse-form and diction, sometimes landed Wordsworth in trouble! It is interesting to note, however, that even Wordsworth's poetry is not totally free of Milton's influence. 'Lines written above Tintern Abbey', parts of The Prelude, and certainly parts of The Excursion, show traces of Milton's heavy hand. Clearly, to write blank verse without being Miltonic was not easy. Keats gave up Hyperion because (as he said in one of his letters) there were too many Miltonic inversions in it.

After Wordsworth the poet who sustains a marked sense of English diction and verse-form is Hardy. He refuses to use philosophical, allegorical, poetic or
pedantic language, and somehow succeeds in escaping Milton's influence. Partly, this may be attributed to his refusal to write blank verse. English poetry now becomes completely colloquial, simple and vernacular with Hardy.

As a poet Hardy remains very particular; he portrays his own personal experiences in his poems. His own affinities with rural life and with Wessex make him a spokesman of "common humanity". His poetry flourishes from any trivial and particular experiences of his own life such as looking into a glass, visiting church, looking at a bird - all these personal poetic themes provide him an opportunity to remain plain and clear in his language. To him, poetry is a humble record of impressions. As he himself says:

Art is concerned with seemings only; the views in [my works] are seemings, provisional impressions only.

and again:

I hold that the mission of poetry is to record impressions, not convictions". The provisional character of these impressions means that there can be no final solutions.
His poems are a humble recording of his own views; feelings written down in widely different moods and circumstances. He believes that,

The poet's commitment is not to a sustained interpretation of life, but to moments of experience and to the accurate recording of them.

His commitment to "slices of life" makes him a poet of minute observation and of visual images. The careful noticing of the world from moment to moment creates a world of simplicity. The use of simple images, actual and graphic description, and picturesque effects created in words relates Hardy to the native English poetic tradition established by Chaucer and his contemporaries.

The second poet under consideration is the Georgian poet Edward Thomas—a genuine poet of the English landscape and countryside. Reviewing the subject matter of Georgian poetry, James Reeves observes:

The celebration of England, whether at peace or at war, became a principal aim of Georgian poetry. The English countryside, English crafts, and English sports offered suitable matter. Poems about country cottages, old furniture, rose-scented lanes, village inns,
are subject matter. Georgian poetry markedly English and rural in character, its appeal to a wide audience meant that it was unspecialized and easy to understand.

These general observations about Georgian poetry make it clear that Georgian poetry, and especially the poems of Edward Thomas are "unspecialized" and simple in the use of poetic language. Like Hardy, Edward Thomas is also a painter of life and Nature; while reviewing Edward Thomas's simplicity of language. H. Coombes, in his article, "Hardy and Edward Thomas" observes:

It is ultimately Thomas's complete lack of condescension, his openness to impressions, which give his language a certain easy breadth.

Though poetically Thomas's language is as simple as Hardy, Thomas fails to attain the philosophic height of Hardy. His poems are celebrations of his own moods. And it is this intense and exquisite celebration of the moment, and his faithful rendering of English life that places him squarely within the native English poetic tradition.

In moving from Edward Thomas [a Georgian poet] to Philip Larkin, it is worth noting that the latter was
highly appreciative of Georgian poetry, and specifically of Edward Thomas. These are signs of his consciousness of himself as belonging to an English tradition in which these are his forbears. Andrew Motion notes about Larkin:

"... he took every opportunity to repeat in public the names of plain-speaking poets who formed his pantheon: Hardy, Edward Thomas and Betjeman.

Asked to be editor of The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse, he wrote to the delegates at the press:

"It is not the business of an Oxford book of this character to be eccentric", he said, and indicated that his well-known feelings about modernism would be checked, and his affection for the native English tradition would issue in a fascinating display of neglected national treasures.

I am interested in the Georgians, and how far they represented an 'English tradition' that was submerged by the double impact of the great war and the Irish-American continental properties of Yeats and Eliot ... The major talents would be
displayed, but my intention would also be to diversify the anthology with pieces from less familiar writers to whom the tone of the particular period was perhaps more distinctly heard. Searching for these might be the most interesting part of the undertaking. In general, however, my guiding principle would be to produce a collection of pieces that had delighted me, and so might be expected to delight others.

Among the quotations he retained over the years, and kept even though his diaries were destroyed after his death, is a line from Edward Thomas:

How dreary - swift, with naught to travel to, Is time.

a line which, in terms of diction no less than thought, is close to Larkin.

The poetry of the Movement represented by Thom Gunn, Kingsley Amis, Elizabeth Jennings and Philip Larkin is a complete reaction against the Europeanizing influence of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. The Movement poets are against what they called the "myth-litty business" and "experimental writing" as popularized by Eliot or Pound. Philip Larkin expresses his disgust with modernism in his statements and critical writings.
The following remark quoted in the first chapter of this thesis bears repetition:

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 of literary understrappers letting you see they know the right people.

This clearly indicates that Larkin rejects the self-conscious and pedantic use of allusions as practised by T.S. Eliot in his poem *The Waste Land* and Ezra Pound in *Cantos*. We may note, however, as regards myth, that the 'ordinary chap next door' of Movement literature becomes a quasi-mythical figure in his own right. Larkin's Mr. Bleaney and Arnold, Amis's Jim Dixon and others in that mould create a new myth - the myth of 'the ordinary bloke'.

The Movement poets are not only against experimental writing and classical myth, but they are also against too much attention to the sub-conscious. They regarded the influence of Freud on English poetry as largely destructive. They felt that the subconscious had recently received an excessive amount of attention.
and that it was time to restore the virtues of conscious writing, reason, order and argument. In their poetry they placed their emphasis on "meaning, structure and syntax", and poetry that is unpretentious and direct. They have generally ignored Freud's theory in their poetry, being of the opinion that poetry should communicate directly.

Larkin's poetry reveals all these characteristics of Movement poetry. Salem K. Hassan observes:

Larkin is a remarkable craftsman: his insistence on clarity and directness in language earns him a confidence of vision and an ability to communicate this vision. His style has undergone a slow development. The North Ship shows obviously the predominance of Yeats, Yeatsian mannerisms and music. However the last poem in this book 'Waiting For breakfast', while she brushed her hair' marks an abrupt departure from Yeatsian influence. It is a noticeable transition from the vague symbolism of many of the earlier poems to a style based on the concrete details of actual experience and a conversational idiom.

Hassan notes here Larkin's movement towards directness.
and abjuration of "magic" (whether of symbol or rhythm) which we have established in Chapter 1 as being characteristic of the English tradition.

One may go on to speak of a colouring (created largely by diction and images) which is peculiarly English in its grey, white and black tones. This colouring is also pervasive in the poems of Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin. If one were to place Hardy's 'The Fallow Deer at the lonely house' beside Edward Thomas's 'Out in the Dark', the similarity of colour and imagery is startling. Hardy's poem is remarkable for its delicacy of language. The poet describes a situation shared by human beings and deer:

ONE without looks in to - night
Through the curtain-chink:
From the sheet of glistening white;
One without looks in to - night
As we sit and think
By the fender-brink.

We do not discern those eyes
Watching in the snow;
Lit by lamps of rosy dyes
We do not discern those eyes
Wondering, aglow,
Fourfooted, tiptoe.

(CPTH., 598)
The poem suggests that the men and the deer share something in common. Edward Thomas's poem 'Out in the Dark' also evokes, through precisely the same imagery, the same sense of a shared situation. This is the poem:

Out in the dark over the snow
The fallow fawns invisible go
With the fallow doe:
And the winds blow
Fast as the stars are slow.

Stealthily the dark haunts round
And, when a lamp goes, without sound
At a swifter bound
Than the swiftest hound,
Arrives, and all else is drowned;

And I and star and wind and deer
Are in the dark together, — near,
Yet far, — and fear
Drums on my ear
In that sage company drear.

How weak and little is the light,
All the universe of sight,
Love and delight,
Before the might
If you love it not, of night.

(CPET., 375)

There are, no doubt, some shades of difference. Thomas's speaker and deer seem more and more vulnerable and naked, but the juxtaposition of light and dark and deer is strikingly similar. Perhaps what gives it a peculiarly 'English' colouring is the Old English evocation (referred to in Chapter 1) by The Venerable Bede of Life as a sparrow, that flies from the black night into a lighted hall and out again into the darkness. That very 'English' picture is the backdrop for these two poems.

A similarly coloured world (a sense of juxtaposed light and dark) is to be found in many poems by Larkin. An example would be section II of 'Livings' from the volume High Windows - where a lighthouse keeper (possibly) offsets the illuminated room he inhabits against the wild wet dark outside, concluding with the following:

Keep it all off!
By night, snow swerves
(O loose moth world)
Through the stare travelling
Leather - black waters.
Guarded by brilliance
I set plate and spoon,
And after divining cards.
Lit shelved liners
Grope like mad worlds westward.

(HW., 14-15)

The above remarks make no absolute claims for the
Englishness of such light/dark juxtapositions. I
suggest only that a certain starkness or bleakness of
colouring expresses itself naturally in poetry
descending from the Venerable Bede's tradition. It is
worth remarking that all the three poets use stanzaic
forms, though Larkin here has (unusually for him)
avoided rhymes. The luxuriance of colour and imagery,
that Eliot permits himself in *Little Gidding* (fire and
rose, for example), the rich colours that mark even the
late Yeats (and suffuse his earlier poetry) are
conspicuous by their absence here.
All three poets, Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin, are primarily concerned with everyday life and man's relation to it. The greatness of these poets lies in their rendering of things and experiences in the exact terms of their existence. It is worth noting at this point that English philosophic thought has tended to be exact and analytical as contrasted with the idealistic tendency of European philosophy. The imagery and diction of the poets under consideration in this thesis fit in (on the whole) with the English intellectual background. A close study of their poems from the point of view of the language emphatically establishes their relationship with the English poetic tradition. The poems are selected on their use of various kinds of poetic diction and images.

'Domicilium' (discussed in the second chapter 'Nature' under the section of 'Poems of Landscape and Countryside') is once again mentioned here because it is Hardy's first poem written under the influence of Wordsworth, both in terms of theme and language. The poem describes Hardy's home—a dwelling place:

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 overtop the apple-trees hard by.

Red roses, lilars, 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.

(CPTH., 3)

Here Hardy describes the location, the surrounding
natural scene of his ancient home. The images such as
wild honeysuckles, red roses, herbs, trees and, above all,
"a seed dropped by some bird hundred years ago" create
an accurate impression of an ancient home. The poem
describes the "memory within memory". In the following
stanzas Hardy's grandmother describes her memories
associated with this home:
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'er grown 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. Heatheroppers
Lived on the hills, and were our only friends;
So wild it was when first we settled here'.

(CPTH., 3-4)

This poem uses diction that is as homely and simple as even Wordsworth might wish. The main verbs are brief, often monosyllabic: climb, sprout, stands, dropped, looked, passed, blest, fly, lived, swarmed. More significantly, nine out of the ten listed above are derived from Old English (pass is the single exception
One may usefully contrast them with verbs from Milton's Latinized style to establish the point that English diction has a directness all its own. I quote below lines 633-643 from Book IX of Paradise Lost, lines in which Satan in the form of a serpent, leads Eve to the tree:

Hope elevates, and joy
Brightens his crest. As when a wandering fire,
Compact of unctuous vapours, which the night
Condenses, and the cold environs round,
Kindled through agitation to a flame
(Which oft, they say, some evil spirit attends),
Hovering and blazing with delusive light,
Misleads the amazed night-wanderer from his way
To bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool,
There swallowed up and lost, from succour far:
So glistered the dire Snake ...

The verbs here are: elevates, brightens, condense, kindled, attends, misleads, swallowed, glistered. All are polysyllabic and as many as three out of the eight are of Latin origin: 'elevates' (Latin elevare); 'condenses' (Latin condensare) and attends (Latin attendere). And misleads bears a Latin prefix.

Another important poem which is remarkable for Hardy's use of diction is 'The Darling Thrush'. The
poem is written in a romantic mood. The poem is divided into four stanzas. In the first two stanzas the poet describes the landscape and in the rest of the poem the poet recollects its effect upon him. The poem opens with an acute and precise description of nature:

I LEANT upon a coppice gate

When Frost was spectre-gray,

And Winter's dregs made desolate

The weakening eye of day.

The tangled bine-stems scored the sky

Like strings of broken lyres,

And all mankind that haunted nigh

Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to bo

The Century's corpse outleant,

His crypt the cloudy canopy,

The wind his death-lament.

The ancient pulse of germ and birth

Was shrunken hard and dry,

And every spirit upon earth

Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among

The bleak twigs overhead

In a full-hearted evensong

Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

(CPTH., 150)

The diction is plain to the point of oddity. Hardy coins a word 'outleant' to mean standing or leaning out, a coinage which is simple and a little awkward. He prefers a coinage out of native English elements to a Latinized word like 'obtrudes'. This is not to say that there are no words of Latin origin in the poem. Clearly there are (e.g. desolate, century, spirit, carol, ecstatic, lyres, terrestrial), but the majority of the words (e.g. leaned, gate, dregs, day, stern, scored, sky, mankind, haunted, household, land, cloudy, death, birth, hard, dry, bleak, twigs, gaunt, small, blast, fling, written, think, through, blessed) are English
i.e. derived from Old Norse/Germanic, from the Northern group of European languages to which English belongs.

Worth noting also (for purposes of convenience though meters are discussed later) is the use of traditional English rhymed stanzas characteristic of English lyric till the iambic pentameter blank-verse line changed it profoundly. Nursery rhymes indicate the native rhythm; and very few of them have five feet. Hardy in this poem uses alternating tetrameter (4 feet) and trimeter (3 feet) lines, and in doing so is reverting to traditional English verse form. The nursery rhyme given below makes the point:

```
And shall / Trela / wy die / my men?/
And shall / Trela / wy die?/
Here's fif / ty; thou/sand Corn/ish men/
Will know / the reas / on why/
```

This may be compared with Hardy's lines:

```
I leant / upon / a cop/pice gate
When frost / was spe/ctre grey/
And win /ters dregs / made des /olate
The weakening / eye / of day.
```

The scansion is identical in both cases. Even the extra syllable in 'weakening' is actually elided over.

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Plain in language, personal in tone and honest in vision, the poetry of these three poets is very different from the depersonalised poems of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. The tone in all three cases is conversational, and this affects the diction used. All three studiedly avoid the grand manner; this may be attributed to the tendency towards understatement that is usually associated with the English.

Edward Thomas affords many good illustrations of conversational diction governed by the conversational tone. The speaker of his poem 'The Unknown Bird', for instance, describing the melodious whistling of an unknown, unseen bird, goes on to say:

I never knew a voice,
Man, beast, or bird, better than this, I told
The naturalists; but neither had they heard
Anything like the notes that did so haunt me ...

(CPET., 85)

Nothing could be more plain than the diction here; only the word 'haunts' is on a slightly more poetic level. Coupled with the plainness is the conversational idiom, the spoken rhythm of such lines as:
I never knew a voice,
Man, beast, or bird, better than this. I told
The naturalists; ... 

(CPET., 85)

It might be any person talking to a neighbour over the fence.

Philip Larkin carries the habit of using the diction and rhythm of conversation to a high point, astonishing the reader by accommodating this diction and rhythm effortlessly within a complex rhyme-scheme: The hard-hitting opening stanza of 'The Old Fools' from High Windows is a good illustration of this skill:

What do they think has happened, the old fools, 
To make them like this? Do they somehow suppose
It's more grown-up when your mouth hangs open
and drools,
And you keep on pissing yourself, and can't
remember
Who called this morning? or that, if they
only chose,
They could alter things back to when they danced
all night,
Or went to their wedding, or sloped arms some
September?
Or do they fancy there's really been no change,
And they've always behaved as if they were
crippled or tight,
Or sat through days of thin continuous dreaming
Watching light move? If they don't (and they
can't), it's strange:
Why aren't they screaming?

(HW., 19)

The questions that need no answer, the parenthetical
phrases, the occasional run-on line catch very
accurately an angry tone of voice using homespun words.
The unexpected poetry of 'thin continuous dreaming' only
reinforces the plain idiom, and the rhythms of speech
with all its usual turns and interruptions. With some
effort the reader recognizes that the stanza's rhyme
scheme is ab ac b de df ef. This extremely complex rhyme
scheme is kept up through four stanzas, all of which
beautifully maintain the spoken idioms. Wordsworth's
dictum in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads about the
language of poetry as not essentially different from the
language of prose is, one may say tentatively,
illustrated better by Larkin than by Wordsworth!
Wordsworth remarks:

It may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor
can be, any essential difference between the language of
prose and metrical composition. We are fond of tracing
the resemblance between Poetry and Painting, and,
accordingly, we call them Sisters: but where shall we
find bonds of connection sufficiently strict to typify
the affinity between metrical and prose composition?
They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in
which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the
same substance, their affections are kindred and almost
identical, not necessarily differing even in degree:

Neither Eliot, nor Yeats, nor Pound, nor Dylan
Thomas (Anglo-American, Anglo-Irish, American and
celtic) (offer) diction of this kind. On the whole, Eliot is
stately; Yeats (despite the occasional line in the later
poetry) is magnificent; Pound is certainly not plain;
Dylan Thomas is extremely poetic in the bardic manner.
None of these are usually conversational in this way in
verse.

Larkin actually acknowledges the relief with which
he shec Yeatsian influences and discovered Hardy and a
kind of poetry that required no jacking up. As he said:

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.

In the introduction to the re-issue of The North Ship
Larkin refers to the power of Yeats over his early writing, there for every one to see. Referring to the last poem (in a plainer style than the rest) in that volume he indicates the difference. He says:

As a coda I have added a poem, written a year or so later, which, though not noticeably better than the rest, shows the Celtic fever abated and the patient sleeping soundly.

Larkin has also commented on Hardy's rhythm and diction. He says:

Immediately you begin a Hardy poem your own inner response begins to rock in time with the poem's rhythm, I think that this is quite inimitable. There are no successful imitators of Hardy. I think Hardy's diction is often quaint - one has to concede that, ... but often in Hardy I feel that the quaintness, if it is quaintness, is a kind of striving to be accurate. He might say, 'I lipped her, when he means 'I kissed her', but after all, that brings in the question of lips and that is how kissing's done. When Hardy says that a tower is 'roof-wrecked', I don't know whether 'roof-wrecked' is thought to be quaint but it means precisely that the
roof is wrecked. It's a kind of telescoping of a couple of images. I think people are a little unfair — to Hardy on that. He can often be extremely direct. 'I should go with them in the gloom hoping it might be so'. "Not a line of writing have I, not a thread of her hair". Donne couldn't be more direct than that.

It is clear from all this that Larkin, at a crucial stage of his poetic development, dropped the rhetoric and romanticism which he had borrowed from Yeats. The poem 'Waiting for Breakfast', the last in The North Ship, interestingly shows traces of his mentors though the presiding genius is Hardy. In this poem Larkin uses two different kinds of language: homely colourless phrases and monosyllabic words on the one hand, and unexpected polysyllabic words on the other. A single line contains both, as in "the lights burn on/ Pinpoints of undisturbed excitement". In terms of structure, development of thought and language, this poem looks forward to the strength and variety of his later work.

After the publication of 'Waiting for Breakfast' a clear-eyed, unillusioned view of life, honesty to experience, and plain and ordinary language become cardinal virtues of Larkin's
His antiromanticism and resolutely 'less deceived' mentality is beautifully revealed in the poem 'I Remember, I Remember'. In this poem the poet and his companion are travelling by train, pass through the city where the poet born. Larkin being an anti-romantic poet, avoids sentimentalizing his childhood. His antiromanticism is brought out by the allusion to (and direct contrast with) the nostalgia and sentimentality of the famous nineteenth century poem by Thomas Hood which shares the same title as Larkin's poem. The companion asks him about his home town and its roots. He characterises his childhood in a series of non-events:

Our garden, first: where I did not invent
Blinding theologies of flowers and fruits,
And wasn't spoken to by an old hat.
And here we have that splendid family

I never ran to when I got depressed,
The boys all biceps and the girls all chest,

(L.D., 38)

This irony turns into a more serious note of disenchantment in his own thoughts of reply:
"No, only where my childhood was unspent". The word "unspent" carries a world of disillusionment. His honest recognition of the ordinariness of his childhood is a deliberate defiance of all the romantic gestures of the artist and his fawning public. In the final stanza the personal experience moves towards generalization. The poet describes the lives of thousands of ordinary people who cannot escape from ordinary life. P.R. King remarks about the final line:

"Nothing like something, happens anywhere" stands isolated and apart from the body of the poem, as an honest response to life which takes on the tone of authority of a proverb -- a summary of a whole way of looking at life and not just a passing comment.

A comparison with the 19th century poem of that name, by Thomas Hood illustrates at once Larlin's 'plainness' of diction. Thomas Hood's lines, though one must admit, the words used are relatively simple, produce an entirely different effect altogether. A sample stanza is given below:

I remember, I remember,
Where I used to swing
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing.
My spirit flew in feathers then
That is, so heavy now,
And summer pools would hardly cool
The fever on my brow.

The singing quality of these lines is the result partly of the alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines. Larkin, by contrast, uses a more leisurely iambic pentameter line which allows him to reflect, and modify his thought. He also introduces conversational interjections, as he and his travelling companion exchange remarks:

Their comic Ford, their farm where I could be 'Really myself'. I'll show you, come to that,
The bracken where I never trembling sat, ...

Larkin's poem is clearly written in the tradition of the plain diction Wordsworth recommended, and achieves an overall effect of plainness. Thomas Hood's sentimental sighing is nowhere in sight, and serves only as an ironic reminder of 'poetic' postures.

Larkin's final volume High Windows marks not so much a striking departure from The Less Deceived and The Whitsun Weddings, as a startlingly confident
development. The poems of the volume are built up on contrasts, conflicts and paradoxes. The use of form and diction deals with these themes in appropriate ways. An outstanding example is 'Vers de Société'. Attacking the conventional notion that being sociable is one of the highest virtues, it explores the tension between solitariness and sociability, truth and hypocrisy, in language and rhythms that sharply alternate between the swings of the speaker’s moods. The poet has received an invitation to attend a party. The poet’s revulsion against the hypocrisy of the party is expressed in his scornful and deliberate misreading of the host’s invitation:

My wife and I have asked a crowd of craps
To come and waste their time and ours: perhaps
You’d care to join us? In a pig’s arse, friend.
Day comes to an end.

(CHW., 35)

The language here is scornful. Like the traditional "sensitive" poet, he appears to cherish his solitude and his "higher" refinement, and properly considers the party as a waste of time for both guests and host. But this sense of superiority (nicely balanced against the superiority of the hosts who are "virtuous" because they are sociable) is gradually undermined. In the second
A stanza of the poem the poet finds it difficult to be alone and seeks companionship even when he knows it to be a charade. As a man of sensitivity he would prefer to remain alone, but as a middle-aged man he lacks the courage to remain alone. The invitation to the party gives him an insight into society's attitude towards solitariness. At the beginning of the poem he thinks that to remain alone is a virtue, but as the poem progresses he finds that though the man knows the benefits of solitariness, he does not have the courage to remain alone. At the end of the poem he has accepted the invitation he began by criticising and scorning. Middle age has brought with it fear of solitude. The poet says:

Only the young can be alone freely.
The time is shorter now for company,
And sitting by a lamp more often brings
Not peace, but other things.
Beyond the light stand failure and remorse
Whispering Dear Warlou—Williams: Why, of course.

(HW., 36)

The extremely different language and rhythm of this closing stanza from those of the first indicate the development of the attitude from snarling anger to sad meditateness and resigned acceptance.
The strength of this poem lies in its careful manipulation of tone. The poem begins in a satirical tone, the middle part of the poem reveals the self-critical mind of the poet, and finally, it becomes a penetrating analysis of a common human situation. The speaker clearly shows how, lacking courage to endure the pains of disillusionment, he must perforce comfort himself with illusions of warmth and cheer.

The poems discussed here by Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin are remarkable indications of their conversational language and masterly management of tone. The revival of English poetic diction begun by Wordsworth develops in the poems of Hardy and reaches its climax in the poems of Philip Larkin. With Movement poetry, and especially with Larkin's poems, there is a return to native English poetic diction.

As mentioned earlier, I have divided this chapter into two sections - diction and verse form. The first section discussed the poetic diction, (including colouring and tone) of Hardy, Edward Thomas and Larkin. I turn now to verse form - another important aspect which relates them to the native English poetic tradition.

II

All literature is divided according to spirit into
prose and poetry and according to technique into prose and verse. It is generally accepted by critics as well as readers that poetry is something written in verse. When we look at poetry, we can recognise it as a poem for it is written in verse. While creating a poem, the poet organises his thought in a particular form, he uses a rhyme scheme and a stanza pattern to express his thought. The concept of rhyme scheme and stanza pattern is deep rooted in the English poetic tradition. In Section I it was noted that basic forms like nursery rhymes invariably used rhymed stanzas and regular rhythmic patterns. Poets like Chaucer, Langland and Gower expressed their thought with regular rhyme schemes and ordered stanza forms. Despite the overpowering influence of blank verse in drama after Marlowe and Shakespeare, lyric poetry in English has continued to favour rhymed verse and stanzaic forms down to the present day. Milton's influence was also overpowering, but poets who, in several of their longer pieces could not escape it (Wordsworth, Keats, Arnold, Tennyson), still wrote their shorter lyrics in traditional rhymed verse forms.

The point to be made here is that, on the one hand, iambic pentameter blank verse was a very powerful medium, and a great deal of the late English poetry after Marlowe was written in it; on the other hand, rhymed stanzaic forms continued to be used, especially
for shorter lyrical poems. The poets under consideration in this thesis use both, on the whole, but the balance is in favour of rhymed stanzaic verse. Hardy is the great example here. The influences from Europe and America in the matter of free verse (Baudelaire and Whitman, for example) touched the English mainstream only superficially. T.S. Eliot imported the effects of the French Symbolists into poetry written in English, but English poets like Auden wrote in traditional verse-forms, and ensured that the tradition flowed on to poets like Larkin.

The rise of Hardy on the English literary scene led to a revival of older verse forms. His refusal to write blank verse marks a definite stage in the history of English poetry. He uses regular stanza form, rhyme schemes, and simple forms like the Ballad. Hardy's use of these forms makes for a directness and simplicity utterly different from the effect of modernist poets. He himself said in the conversation with the young Robert Graves that:

All we can do is to write on the old themes and in the old styles and try to do a little better than those who went before us.

These views of Hardy suggest that he saw himself as working within the great continuum of English poets and
their poems which we usually refer to as 'the tradition'.

It is important to note here that the verse-form chosen determines, to some extent, tone and approach. Rhymed quatrains will not have the effects of complexity, qualification and meditiveness as longer stanzas. And the rhymed stanza (even when fairly long, as with Keats or Larkin) communicates a greater degree of regularity and pattern than blank verse. This in turn makes for a sense of a hold on whatever it is that is being said. The non sequiturs and logical gaps that characterise Eliot's poetry are expressive of their obliquity or difficulty partly because the directness of rhymed stanzas has been abandoned.

Hardy's habit of using stanzaic forms is carried on by Edward Thomas, who was also, it must be acknowledged, influenced by Robert Frost. Edward Thomas, like Larkin after him, uses both short meters and iambic pentameters, but he invariably uses rhyme. Between Edward Thomas and Larkin stands the figure of W.H. Auden, another very English poet who preferred rhymed stanzas.

Edward Thomas' poems are English both in terms of theme and technique. And this Englishness in theme and structure relates him to Hardy.

A complete return to traditional verse form in the
modern age can be observed by The Movement Poets of the fifties. The Movement poets like Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn, D.J. Ennright and Philip Larkin are provincial, conservative and write as if modernism had not occurred. The English literary scene changed after the Second World War. T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound used myth, experimental writing and free verse to express modern man's boredom and aimlessness. Eliot and Pound seemed to think that only free verse can be an effective medium for the modern age. As against Eliot's free verse, the Movement poets used iambic stanzas and regular rhymed schemes in their poems.

The English poets decided to "stay small and particular". Instead of discussing global problems they discuss their own problems, hence they use logic, content and simple stanza forms. Consequently their poetry, and especially the poetry of Larkin, represents a complete return to traditional English poetry. Relating Larkin to traditional English poets, Kuby observes:

For the most part, however his poems are basically iambic, basically rhymed, and basically stanzaic.
All the three poets accept traditional verse forms to establish their relationship with the continuation of English poetic tradition. I select some poems to establish this point more emphatically.

Hardy's 'The Voice' is a beautiful illustration.

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I
knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
   And the woman calling.
   (CPTH., 346)

This is a very famous and beautiful poem. It is written in quatrains with alternate lines that rhyme. The extra syllables, and anapaestic modulations sweep the reader along the wave of the speaker's emotion, in three tetrameter (four foot) lines and a final trimeter line:

I scan the first stanza:

\[
\text{Woman much missed / how you call / to me,}
\]

\[
\text{call / to me}
\]

\[
\text{Saying / that / now / you are not / as you were/}
\]

\[
\text{When you / had changed / from the one / who was all to, the}
\]

\[
\text{But as / at first / when our day was fair/}
\]

The feminine endings (feet of unstressed syllables) of the first and third lines introduce a light and floating effect in keeping with the content and feeling, as the speaker strains after an image and voice out of sight and hearing. This pattern continues, with slight variations, over the next two stanzas. In the final stanza, the metrical pattern is reversed sharply to focus attention on a final image. We get here two trimeter lines (the first, and second); one tetrameter line, (the third); and a final dimeter line.
Thus l'd faltering forward
Leaves around me falling
Wind owing thin through the thorn from
nor ward,

And the woman calling

Dactyls and anapaests predominate to a point where it is difficult to establish the base. The final stanza, with its truncated lines (truncated, that is, when compared with the longer lines of the earlier stanzas), very accurately captures the faltering sense of a finish despite the impression still of a woman calling.

Another remarkable poem in quatrains is 'The Oxen', also written in four line stanzas, the first line of each stanza rhyming with the third; and the second line rhyming with the fourth. Here is the poem:

CHRISTMAS EVE, and twelve of the clock. a

Now they are all on their knees b
An elder said as we sat in a flock a
By the embers in hearth side ease, b

We pictured the meek mild creatures where a
They dwelt in their strawy pen, b
Nor did it occur to one of us there a
To doubt they were kneeling then. b
of the longing for faith; no tortured reflection here. The speaker does not believe; he wishes he could; he attests to the power of the Christmas story over him, cattleshed, manager and all. The base metre is iambic (e.g. So fa^Lr / a^fa^i/cy fiw / v^ouli, w§av4) with plenty of spondees (e.g. come, see), and trochaic modulations (e.g. Christmas / Eve and etc.). The first and third lines of each stanza have four feet, and the second and fourth have three feet.

Hardy's partiality for four foot and three foot lines rather than pentameter accounts for the air of rustic simplicity he would like to convey. He expresses the feelings of the common man through his elegies and ballads. A characteristic ballad is 'On
Martock Moor' which uses ballad quatrains to tell the story of a prosperous husband, a poor lover, and an unfaithful wife. The action is characterised by the simplicity and violence of traditional ballads, a tryst discovered by the husband, the death of a lover.

I

My deep-dyed husband trusts me,
He feels his mastery sure,
Although I leave his evening hearth
To walk upon the moor.

II

-- I had what wealth I needed,
And of gay gowns a score,
And yet I left my husband's house
To muse upon the moor.

III

O how I loved a dear one
who, save in soul, was poor!
O how I loved the man who met
Me nightly on the moor.

IV

I had feather-beds and couches,
And carpets for the floor,
Yet brighter to me was, at eves,  
The bareness of the moor.

Yet do I haunt there, knowing  
By rote each rill's low pour,  
But only a fitful phantom now  
Meets me upon the moor.

(CPTH., 816-17)

The morality of the poem is the primitive masculine  
ethic of retribution, the wife's penalty for infidelity  
is to be called "whore"; the lover pays with his life.  
As in many traditional ballads, the ethic reflects the  
inevitabilities of human emotion rather than an  
objective moral system. The simple form aptly reflects  
the clear outlines of these inevitable situations. There  
is an objective tragic purity in the presentation of  
situation and action, a quality common to traditional  
ballads. Paul Zietlow observes: 
The ballad quality is presented in the controlled rhythms, the austerity of language, the balance and symmetry the economy of exposition, and the stabilizing repetition of the word "moor" at the end of each stanza.

The first four stanzas set up the dichotomy: the trust, comfort, prosperity and security of husband, hearth and home as opposed to the wife's love expressed in stanza three, for the poor man. The fifth stanza, very typical of the old traditional ballad, focuses on the key moment describing it in terms of a few selected facts, things heard and seen rather than felt. The last stanza conveys the wife's passion and longing only indirectly. The word "haunt" turns her into a ghost; though living she is no more alive in her emotional life. Paul Zietlow observes:

In this poem Hardy demonstrates his mastery of the techniques necessary to achieve in narrative verse the effects of control, economy, balance, distance, and objectivity.

The poems discussed by Hardy indicate that Hardy unpretentiously and faithfully renders the feelings of common people in his poems.

Edward Thomas, like Hardy, uses a variety of
meters and regular stanza forms in his poems. A close look at his poems establishes his relationship with native English tradition.

His well-known poem 'The Gallows' uses a ballad-like rhythm and alternate rhymes, but not the usual ballad quatrains. Instead, each stanza has eight lines. The first stanza is given below:

```
There was / a wea/se\ lived / in the sun/
With all / his fa/mily /
Till a ke/eper shot / him with / his gun /
And hung / him up / on a tree /

Where he swings / in the wind / and the rain/
In the sun / and in / the snow /
Without / pleasure / without / pain, /
On the dead / oak tree / bough /
```

(CPET., 347)

The base is iambic with a number of trochaic inversions (eg. pleasure), anapaestic feet (eg. in the sun) and feet which consist of a single stressed syllable (eg. pain or bough). The point to be made is that, with all these modulations, the verse form still works within the constraints of an eight line stanza, with rhymes. The rhyme scheme is a a b c d c d. In the case of 'snow'
and 'bough' in the sixth and eighth lines it must be noted that the rhyme is more visual than auditory, but it is a half-rhyme, nevertheless.

One of Edward Thomas's most famous poems 'Words' is notable for the delicacy with which it uses lines with two feet (dimeter) - an extremely difficult feat to manage with the lightness and tentativeness accomplished by the poet. I give the first stanza initially, and then scan it thereafter:

Out of us all
That make rhymes
Will you choose
Sometimes --
As the winds use
A crack in a wall
Or a drain,
Their joy or their pain
To whistle through --
Choose me,
You English words?

(CPET., 217)

This extraordinary stanza, when scanned, reveals a marvellous mixture of iambic, trochaic and anapaestic feet. Here it is below, scanned.
Out of us all
That make rhymes
Will you choose
Sometimes ---
As the wind use
A crack in a wall
Or a drain,
Their joy or their pain
To whistle through
Choose me,
You English words?

The rhyme scheme a b c b c a d e f g.
The poet has freely resorted to fresh rhymes at the close of the stanza after an initial delicate and close interlacing.

Finally, the example of his most famous and justly celebrated poem, 'October,' will show how Edward Thomas handles iambic pentameter with the same control and ease as the shorter metres. I quote the poem in full, while noting that both in terms of theme and mood, it is 'English' to the core. It lovingly records details of the natural landscape, introduces the characteristic English melancholy, and stays within the demands of a rhyme scheme, though not absolutely.

I scan only the first few lines so as to enable an
The green / elm with / the one / great / bough / of gold / lets leaves / into / the grass / slip, one / by one, -- / the short / hill grass, / the mush/rooms small, / milk-white, / harebell / and scabious and / tormentil / that black / berry / and gorse / in dew / and sun, / bow down / to and / the wind / travels light, /

To shake / the fallen / birch / leaves / from / the fern; / The gossamers wander at their own will / At heavier steps than birds' the squirrels 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 alteration 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? / Some day 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 rhyme scheme is abcd be b da, efcfghijikk.

This poem of twenty one line has only eleven rhymes. That the base is iambic pentameter gets established only in the seventh line:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\times / \\
\times / \\
\times / \\
\times / \\
\end{array}
\]

To shake / the fall / on birch / leaves
from / the tree / —

and even in this line, the second to the last foot has a trochaic inversion (leaves from).

Edward Thomas, it is clear, can use the simplest metres and stanza forms, and the more complex iambic pentameter with equal subtlety. The discipline of rhyme and rhythm seems important to him, though he works with great freedom within those constraints.

Edward Thomas writes sonnets also with great confidence. For example, "Some eyes Condemn" is a successful Petrarchan sonnet. The first part of the poem describes the poet's general observations; in the last six lines the tone of the poem becomes personal. The poem is written on a simple subject - the beautiful eyes of the beloved:

Some eyes condemn the earth they gaze upon:
Some wait patiently till they know far more
Than earth can tell them: some laugh at the whole
As folly of another's making: one
I knew that laughed because he saw; from core
To mind, not one thing worth the laugh his soul
Had ready at waking: some eyes have began
With laughing; some stand startled at a door.
Others, too, I have seen rest, question, roll
Dance, shoot. And many I have loved watching. Some
I could not take my eyes from till they turned —
And loving died. I had not found my goal.
But thinking of your eyes, dear, I become
Dumb: for they flamed, and it was me they burned.

(CPET., 317)

The octave describes the people's various reactions to earthly beauty: some condemn while others wait patiently. After this, the sestet describes the poet's personal feelings. Though the poet remembers many people's loving eyes, nothing can be so beautiful as his beloved's eyes.

Edward Thomas clearly reveals that he can write with equal ease the Italian Sonnet and the stanzaic English forms.

Philip Larkin, the third figure under consideration in this thesis, was deeply interested not only in Hardy (this influence has been widely and openly acknowledged), but also in Edward Thomas. He kept a volume of his poems among the twelve books nearest at hand in his study in his home in Hull. One area in
which he seems to have learned from Edward Thomas is that of versification. The daring with which Edward Thomas uses the imabic pentameter line (eg. in 'October' discussed above) seems to have set a precedent for Larkin.

One of the most impressive features of Larkin's poetry is the ease with which he accommodates the rhythms and turns of colloquial speech within the demands of the most taxing rhymed stanzas. One may begin, however, by looking at a lyric in which he uses not iambic pentameter, but lines, of shorter length like those of Edward Thomas's 'Words'. Larkin's lyric 'Coming' is a poem with a basic five syllable line and three rhymed pairs, two of them widely separated in a poem of nineteen lines. Of this poem P.R. King notes:

It is the brief and beautiful lyricism of 'Coming' that is perhaps the most delicate expression of Larkin's 'rare' "epiphanies".

The poem is a perfect evocation of mood in which every aspect of the poem contributes to its articulation. The momentary grasp of delight at the re-affirmation of spring allows the poet to enjoy the scene and season without fully understanding the reason for his unexpected delight. The poem is in two parts which
revolve on the pivot of the repeated middle lines. The first part of the poem describes the mood and feeling of the speaker, and the second part catches up that mood and sweeps it through the commentary explaining its quality and importance in relation to that speaker:

On longer / evenings,
Light, chill / and Yellow
Bathes the / serene
Fore heads / of houses
A thrush / sings,
Laurel—/ surrounded
In the, / deep bare / garden,
Its fresh / peeled voice
Astonishing the / brick work
It will / be spring soon,
It will / be spring soon,
And I, whose childhood
Is a / forgotten / boredom,
Feel like / a child
Who comes / on a scene
Of adult / ceiling,
And can / understand / nothing
But the / unusual laughter
And starts / to be / happy.

(LD., 17)

This poem uses lines of two feet and three feet in a
manner similar to Thomas’ ‘Words’ (though that poem used lines of two feet throughout). In the description of the lengthening evening and the bird song, as P.R. King suggests:

the emphasis falls on the light and sound refreshing the senses – the houses are bathed in a cool serenity of light which suggests a washing clear of winter and the old moods of care being surrendered to the naked, open, raw, new mood of joy suggested by ‘fresh-peeled’.

This sense of newness and surprise caught in the middle lines suggests the speaker’s astonished mood.

The unexpectedness and the transitoriness of the experiences are expressed in the final image. It links the speaker’s mood to his childhood moments of brief and inexplicable encounters with adult happiness. The final image of “adult reconciling” retrospectively throws a hesitancy over the earlier mood. It leaves an increased impression of the fleeting nature of this whole experience.

The tender feeling has been caught by the falling rhythm, and by the presence of a larger number of unstressed syllables than expected. The shorter lines
are more lyrical (and less reflective) than the pentameter line of five feet; and the variations Larkin has introduced with his stressed and light syllables all combine to produce the fine lyricism that delights P.R. King quoted above.

Larkin's 'Church Going,' one of the most important poems of the nineteen fifties, is written in a nine line stanza in iambic pentameter. This poem is thematically as well as structurally very important. It recognises man's seeming rootlessness and the predicament of isolation in a hostile and meaningless world. At first reading the poem seems to be entirely an expression of loss of hope in the modern world, but finally, the poem half affirms the presence of the spiritual.

In 'Church Going' Larkin describes the twentieth century problem of God's death. Through the action and reaction of one single voice Larkin describes the problem of God and religion in our age. Though the speaker of the poem expresses the Western world's cynicism and disbelief as experienced in his own life and thought, the cumulative effect of the poem is to cast doubt on the validity of atheism as a creed or as an attitude. The changing tone and attitude of the poet's persona constitutes one of its greatest strengths.

The first stanza of the poem begins with a
concrete experience which lends an air of personal conviction to the whole poem through its details of scene and behaviour:

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Drewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle - clips in awkward reverence,

(LD., 28)

Almost every Larkin critic has dealt with the thematic subtleties of this poem. In this chapter the concern is to point to Larkin's astonishing ability to use an intricate rhyme-scheme to project an ordinary, conversational tone. The rhyme-scheme is ababcad ed. It could have been ab ab cd cd(d) - that is, essentially twoquatrainstw an additional ninth line. This would have been easier for the poet. Instead Larkin chooses to make the sixth line rhyme with the first and third (ab abc a, instead of an expected d). In the stanza quoted, 'organ' in line 6 echoes 'stone' in line three and 'on' in line one. This introduces a technical
complexity into the stanza, but Larkin maintains it through the seven stanzas of the poem. It serves equally well for the conversational and meditative tone. An example of the first is stanza three, where Larkin allows himself to think in the manner of colloquial speech. The rhyme scheme ababcaded is maintained. Wondering why he stopped to look into the church he says:

Yet stop I did; in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

(LD., 28)

The sixth line is often a half-rhyme with the first and third as above ('show' is a half-rhyme with 'do' and 'too'). The conversational tone is achieved by the use of run-on lines, where the sense flows straight from the end of one line into the next, while the eye picks up, and the ear hears, the rhyme. For instance:
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show etc.

The stanza also works for the entirely different and serious effect of the famous final stanza:

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose benth air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

(LD., 29)

Here too, 'serious' in line six is a half-rhyme for 'destinies' in line three, and 'is' in line one. The use of that rhyme in the sixth line has the effect of binding together the entire stanza which might otherwise fall into two halves.

Larkin's most important contribution to English verse-form and poetic diction may well be his ability to accommodate prose rhythms and turns of daily conversation (eg. 'I often do' or 'I wonder') in demanding and formal rhymed stanzas. His poem, 'Here'
in the volume The Whitsun Weddings, and the title poem of that volume, as well as 'The Building' in the volume High Windows demonstrate his skill in this area as effectively as 'Church Going’ discussed above.

Though 'Church Going' begins with an expression of religion's decline, the poem unobtrusively moves towards the "holy end", which the poet had scoffingly spoken of at the beginning. From the personal experience of the poet the journey of the poem moves towards a generalization about man as a spiritual creature. Both levels are maintained with equal ease in the chosen stanza form.

The poem 'Church Going' is remarkable for Larkin's ability to organize thought. The movement from the poet's personal experience towards the reader's general experience recorded here is a characteristic feature of many of his remarkable poems.

The study of Hardy's, Edward Thomas and Larkin's poems reveal the fact that they are plain, clear, simple and ordinary in their use of poetic diction and traditional in their choice of verse form. All the three poets represent a tradition - the native English poetic tradition going back to the Britain of the Anglo-Saxons and passing through Chaucer in the middle ages. Their poetry communicates directly, and is written in the language of the common man; hence it establishes an

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immediate relationship between the poet and readers. Though their poems deal with the modern world they represent an anti-modernist stance in the matter of poetic expression and verse form.