THE TREATMENT OF NATURE IN THOMAS HARDY'S
SIX MAJOR NOVELS

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THE TREATMENT OF NATURE IN THOMAS HARDY'S SIX MAJOR NOVELS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE NATURAL WORLD OF THOMAS HARDY</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. NATURE AS FATE</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. NATURE AS CHARACTER</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. DELINEATION OF CHARACTER AND MOOD THROUGH NATURE</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE SYMBOLIC USE OF LANDSCAPE, BIRDS, AND ANIMALS</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Thomas Hardy's treatment of nature in his major works. His interpretation of nature was sharply divergent from the traditional viewpoint regarding the natural world, and it was the direct antithesis of those interpretations of nature made by the writers who had preceded him.

Hardy was a product of the philosophic and scientific rebellion of the nineteenth century. His aesthetic response to this realistic view of nature and the universe was a sensitive, lyric response but one in which Divine Providence played no part. Hardy spoke contemptuously of "Nature's holy plan" and stressed in his view of nature those features of the natural world that are antagonistic to man.

In Hardy's novels nature is employed in four significant ways. First, nature functions as Fate or Causation. Second, nature is personified as one of the characters in the drama. Third, nature is used to interpret or delineate character and mood in the novels, and, lastly, landscape, birds, and animals are used as symbols in his work.

In the examination of Hardy's treatment of nature, it soon becomes apparent that he was guilty of an addiction to
the pathetic fallacy. However, for him nature was not
divine but malign, not gentle but harsh, not benevolent but
malevolent and cruel in her relationship with man.

Most of the examples and conclusions in the last four
chapters of this thesis come from a close reading of
Hardy's six major novels: *Far from the Madding Crowd*
(1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of
Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the
D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895).
CHAPTER I

THE NATURAL WORLD OF THOMAS HARDY

At the outset of this study of Thomas Hardy's view of nature it would be profitable to examine John Stuart Mill's definition of nature:

Nature, then, in this its simplest acceptation, is a collective name for all facts, actual and possible; or (to speak more accurately) a name for the mode, partly known to us and partly unknown, in which all things take place. For the word suggests, not so much the multitudinous detail of the phenomena, as the conception which might be formed of their manner or existence as a mental whole, by a mind possessing a complete knowledge of them: to which conception it is the aim of science to raise itself, by successive steps of generalization from experience.

Such, then is a correct definition of the word Nature.\(^1\)

Mill's essay on nature was published in 1874, and in it he divested the word of its illogical connotations.

Mill said at the beginning of the essay,

The words [nature, natural, and the group of words derived from them] have . . . become entangled in so many foreign associations, mostly of a very powerful and tenacious character, that they have come to excite, and to be symbols of, feelings which their original meaning will by no means justify; and which have made them one of the most copious sources of false taste, false philosophy, false morality, and even bad law.\(^2\)


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 3.
This essay was the bombshell that exploded the myth of "God in Nature" that had been the characteristic view of nature writers prior to Hardy.

At almost the same time that Mill was specifying his concept of the natural world and when Thomas Hardy was still a young man, Hardy too discarded the pantheistic view of nature envisioned by the Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century.

We must bear in mind, that from nineteen years of age to thirty Hardy witnessed and reacted to an intellectual ferment at work in England of such far-reaching results that we still inadequately measure the strength of that ferment. Ideals which had sprung and flourished during unscientific centuries were sent reeling to their graves by the vigorous ideas of men who inductively sought the truth and faced it unflinchingly when they encountered it. The rapid social changes affected by the industrial revolution and the spirit of inquiry fostered by the French Revolution stimulated the young men of the Victorian Age to examine all phenomena with relentless diligence.³

It was under the impact of ideas distilled by men such as Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Sir Leslie Stephen, and George Lewes that Hardy abandoned his traditional beliefs. Darwin was demonstrating that seeds, insects, and animals lead precarious lives at the mercy of accidents. John Stuart Mill had shown that nature is indifferent to man and his welfare and that nature is neither moral nor immoral. Thus it was that the full flood of positivistic and naturalistic

thinking in the Three Essays on Religion and in the Origin of Species washed from Hardy's view all concepts of "Nature's holy plan." Darwin opened Hardy's eyes to natural selection, or "crass Casuality." Hardy believed that nature cares as little for the race as it cares for the individual and for human aspirations. Hardy was convinced that nature cares for nothing but the perpetuation of life and in its very lack of aim and purpose reveals itself as a meaningless process.

The scheme of Nature regarded in its whole extent, cannot have had, for its sole or even principal object, the good of human or other sentient beings. What good it brings to them, is mostly the result of their own exertions. Whosoever, in nature, gives indication of beneficent design, proves this beneficence to be armed only with limited power; and the duty of man is to co-operate with the beneficent powers, not by imitating but by perpetually striving to amend the course of nature.4

Hardy was not a nature worshiper in the Wordsworthian sense. "He was the first great Victorian poet to break away from this optimism and deny the eclectic assumptions on which it rested."5 As Cowper did, Hardy's characters never seek nature for peace and inspiration. Hardy saw no mysticism in nature as did Wordsworth and Clare. "Unlike the poets of the eighteenth century, he did not dwell on the majestic progressive scale of life ascending to

4 Mill, p. 65.

perfection, nor did he share in Browning's joy of seeing all inferior creatures point up to man. Even more vigorously than Tennyson he denied the benevolence of nature. Thomas Hardy introduced "the disappearance from English poetry of Nature with a capital N." The cheerful aspects of nature, the gentle and sublime, were superseded by the severe and sombre in his vision of landscape, season, and weather.

Thomas Hardy as a novelist presents an entirely unprecedented treatment of nature in his work. The novel as an art form had been slow to reflect the Romantic love of external nature. Fielding, who has been called the first English realist, treated nature in a completely detached manner in his interpretation of character and situation. Nature was also used only as an embellishment in the novels of Jane Austen, Thackeray, and Dickens. In Scott description of nature assumed merely a decorative function. However, with the advent of the social novel stressing the importance of environment, description of nature began to serve an intrinsic function beyond the purely pictorial. It was in the novels of George Eliot that natural surroundings first bore a specific relation to the characters and the events in their lives.

\( ^6 \)Ibid., p. 296.

The best example of this treatment of nature is shown in *The Mill on the Floss*, where the river from the beginning to the end of the story is, perhaps, the dominating influence in the life of Maggie Tulliver--indeed, of all at Dorcote Mill--and symbolizes in its varying moods and its never ceasing often tumultuous course, the inconsistencies of Maggie's own experience and the relentless consequences of her reaction to life.8

Aside from George Eliot, another English novelist, George Meredith, gave nature a fundamental function in his work. He represented nature as being sympathetic toward man in the novel *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* "in the scenes where the storm speaks to Richard and sends him back to Lucy, and where Diane feels her youth again among the Italian lakes and attributes the change to the influence of 'beauty and grandeur' of nature."9 Meredith depicted this same type of sympathetic humanity in nature in his novel *Sandra Belloni*.

But in the novels of Thomas Hardy man and nature are completely opposed and are seeking different ends. Nature is not concerned with man's happiness or welfare. Hardy did see beauty in nature, but he was cognizant of nature's other distinctive quality: her indifference and even cruelty to man.

This is a vision of the cosmic "mother" very different from Swinburne's and Meredith's "Fair Mother Earth."

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9Ibid., p. 181.
In Hardy's bitter awareness of the predicament of life there are no "divine contraries" but a web of chance and circumstance holding the sentient being in its coil.\textsuperscript{10}

Hardy simply viewed nature as a realist and a scientist. This was his intellectual response. However he did respond emotionally to nature as fervently as any of the nature-worshiping Romantics. In fact, in Hardy's novels nature in one form or another is never absent. Hardy himself was a child of nature, having grown up near the heath and the woodlands. His heritage as a peasant and a countryman endowed him with a unique power in picturing landscape. "Wordsworth had no deeper passion for the silent hills than he [Hardy] for woodlands, valleys and wide heaths of Wessex."\textsuperscript{11} This emotional awareness of nature controlled and colored all his writing.

Hardy's specific contribution to English literature was his original and unique use of nature in his novels. No other English novelist has even approached his complicated and aesthetic treatment of nature. \textsuperscript{["Hardy's earth, in a word, is a haunted place, . . . the distinctive element in a daring and powerfully individual conception of the universe."\textsuperscript{12}}

\textsuperscript{10}Roppen, p. 304.
\textsuperscript{12}J. L. Lowes, Essays in Appreciation (Boston, 1936), p. 125.
Since each device of Hardy's treatment will be examined fully later in this study, here a definition of each will suffice. The first of these methods Hardy applied in the interpretation of nature was the use of nature as Fate or Causation. Hardy showed that man's life is changed and directed by the conditions and moods of air, earth, and sky. When nature acts as fate or chance in his fiction, it never works for man's betterment but always operates for his disadvantage and ruin. "Nature then is regarded with something of the pathetic fallacy as a conspirator against man."\textsuperscript{13} Hardy conceived of nature as being pleased by her malign and ironic tricking of man.

The second use that Hardy made of nature was to imagine nature as one of the characters in the story. This is the aspect treated in \textit{The Return of the Native}, where Egdon Heath is personified. It is silent, mysterious, and inscrutable and controls the lives of the people who inhabit it. The characters seem unable to exert their own wills against it. It frustrates their desires, even bringing death to those who fight it. "Egdon Heath [is the place] where the great silent forces of Nature somberly interblend with the forces set in

\textsuperscript{13}S. C. Chew, \textit{Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist} (New York, 1915), p. 145.
motion by the human will, both futile to produce happiness." This same motif is heard again in The Woodlanders, where the forest has the dominant role and the protagonists are thwarted or destroyed by it.

This is a constant revelation in Hardy's novels: that there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it. Against the background of dark, passionate Egdon, of the leafy, sappy passion and sentiment of the woodlands, is drawn the lesser scheme of lives; The Return of the Native, The Woodlanders. . . . Upon the vast, incomprehensible pattern of some primal morality greater than ever the human mind can grasp, is drawn the little, pathetic pattern of man's moral life and struggle, pathetic, almost ridiculous. In these two novels nature steps forward and with one tremendous gesture dwarfs the human beings in the story to insignificance.

Hardy's third manner of nature-usage was to characterize the personages in the novel through a description of nature and to set a particular mood by picturing a similar mood in nature. These two uses were the ones employed most frequently, every novel containing many instances of each. Hardy stressed constantly the interpretation of man through nature. He was imaginatively sympathetic toward and thoroughly conscious of the close relationship between man and the natural world amidst

which he moves and of which he is a part. "In many novels great care . . . was taken to harmonize the setting with the event that takes place therein." The many passages in his novels that reveal his intimacy with the minutiae of nature also show the characters in his novels closely bound to the world on which they move. Hardy suggested "on every page of his writings the intimate interrelation of human beings and human affairs with the natural world around them." This correlation between the landscape and the rendering of episode is exemplified in the novels Far from the Madding Crowd and The Woodlanders. Bathsheba, the heroine in Far from the Madding Crowd, meets her two lovers in two entirely different physical surroundings; the physical settings illuminate the personalities of the men:

Oak she first sees while he is occupied with ewes in the lambing season. . . . Troy she encounters on a dark path and her skirt is caught by his sword. In The Woodlanders Marty is seen for the first time in the lonely cottage and the last time by the lonely grave.

The activity of the lambing season illustrates the trustworthiness of Oak, his dependability and his concern and care for tender life; such staunch and enduring concern does he have for Bathsheba. This setting should be

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16 Chew, p. 130.

17 Ibid., p. 136.

18 Ibid., p. 130.
contrasted with the setting in which she meets Troy. The place is dark and overshadowed; so is the relationship of Bathsheba and Troy dark and full of disaster. The sword that pierces her dress is suggestive of the slashing of Bathsheba's peace and serenity in her marriage to Troy. So in The Woodlanders, Marty, who hopelessly loves Giles, is seen the first time and the last time in solitude and isolation, which is her portion when Giles cannot love her. However, it is in the novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles that the kinship between the earth and the character is most exquisitely realized.

Part of the achievement in Tess is due undoubtedly to the always effective and superb evocation of the natural background. This is a special triumph of Hardy's and one which had hitherto scarcely been attempted. Such a description as that of the dawn at Talbothays may perhaps best be compared with the description of London in Oliver Twist. In neither case is the word "descriptive" with its cold suggestion of an objective backcloth adequate. . . . The atmosphere evoked in such description is not an embellishment to the book, but an integral part of it. . . . In Tess we find the superb revelation of the relation of men to nature, the haunting evocation of Wessex landscape, not as backcloth, but as the living, challenging material of human existence.19

The fourth and final achievement of Hardy was the symbolic utilization of landscape, birds, and animals to convey to the reader his central theme or idea. Throughout his novels he recorded the ways of birds and animals

with knowledge and understanding. He made the actions of insects and tiny animals important to the development of the story when he had the movements of the spider and the toad point out to Gabriel that a storm is approaching. As a sign of coming spring he wrote that "birds began not to mind getting wet." He showed his love and understanding of dogs in his sympathetic account of the unfortunate exertions of Oak's sheep-dog while guarding the sheep. The ways of cows are unfolded in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and of sheep in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. It is small wonder that he used the earth's creatures symbolically to convey ideas. Among the numerous symbolic uses he made of birds, one of the most powerfully imagined is the scene at the opening of *Jude the Obscure*. Jude is at the time only a boy and is hired by Farmer Troutham to stone the rooks in his field of corn. The stoning of the birds symbolizes the stoning of Jude by life and circumstances. Every wish and desire of Jude meets the same fate as the hunger of the stoned birds, affliction and broken fortunes. The vista in the first pages of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is that of a lonely road down which Henchard is painfully traveling afoot. The road symbolizes the desolate journey of Henchard's life that knows no fruition. This frustration is the theme of the novel. "And as ever with this poet of landscapes that are the stage of human
action, there is the quiet insistence of poetic symbolism in which the physical circumstances have their suggested counterpart in the disposition of men's hearts."\(^{20}\)

These then are the four mediums through which Hardy translated the natural world around him. These "reading[s] of earth" convince the reader of the tragic intensity of his viewpoint. Hardy seemed to be able to draw but one conclusion: there is basically a harsh discord between man and his environment.

The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusive centuries has permanently displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What the Greeks only suspected we know well; what their Aeschylus imagined our nursery children feel. That old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation.\(^{21}\)

It has been shown that Hardy's view of nature was strongly influenced by Mill's essay on nature, which Hardy had read while still a young man. Hardy abandoned his belief in "Nature's holy plan" from reading the works of Darwin and Spencer, as well as those of John Stuart Mill.

Hardy was the first great Victorian poet to present a view of nature diametrically opposed to the view of nature as a divine and benevolent power. He was the first


\(^{21}\)Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (London, 1920), I, 205.
important novelist to assign to nature a functional and involved complicity in the lives of his characters.

Hardy viewed nature as a realist and a scientist. He revealed a keen observation and knowledge of the natural world in all his novels, but this knowledge did not express itself in a Romantic interpretation of nature.

In Hardy's novels nature always opposes man's wishes, and when nature is not actively malign she is totally indifferent to man's welfare.
CHAPTER II

NATURE AS FATE

In this study of the treatment of nature in Hardy's six major novels, a definition of the word nature as Hardy used it is necessary. Nature includes not only the natural phenomena of the inanimate world but also the animate section of lower nature as well. Hardy treated the ways of man in relation to the vegetable and animal world. It would be impossible in this study to eliminate the relationship between Hardy's characters and brute creation because it is everywhere present in his work. The encroachment of nature upon the life of man will henceforth be understood to include the animal and insect world.

"Nature was to him [Hardy] the emblem of those impersonal forces of fate with whom he presents mankind as in conflict."  

The view of nature as an agent of chance is used at many critical moments in Hardy's novels. The unforeseen and inexplicable tricks of nature affecting the lives of the characters occur throughout his work. Since Hardy was convinced that scientific determinism was the only logical

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1Lord David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist (Indianapolis, 1946), p. 94.
view, he believed that man's life was governed by a series of chance happenings. He disagreed with Zola, whose "hopes were based on a perfect faith in the ultimate order of the universe, and on the belief that 'we should have faith in life and confidence in Nature.'" Hardy looked at life in an entirely different manner. He found no such harmonious and reliable scheme governing the natural world. "Hardy appears as one who did not subscribe to either Zola's basic premise about human behavior, or to his conception of the universe as an ordered and trustworthy place." To the characters in Hardy's novels these chance occurrences in nature bring only sorrow, and the tricks of the "purblind Doomsters" result always in disaster. Hardy was convinced "that the unheeding and casual working of natural law inevitably brings ruin to man."

Hardy's conception of the part that chance or "crass Casuality" plays in human affairs is illustrated in the lives of his characters. These men and women live in an agricultural community and follow occupations close to nature; thus nature can more easily alter their lives. In setting forth the experiences of people deeply involved

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2 William Newton, "Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists," Philological Quarterly, XXX (January, 1951), 159.

3 Ibid., p. 154.

4 Roppen, p. 299.
with the cycle of the earth, Hardy is able to show how the haphazard can affect the condition of the countryman; the occurrence of the unexpected in nature plays havoc with his desires.

Because life is made or unmade by crass Casuality, because the "purblind Doomsters" had taken the place of Divine Providence, the whole universe to Hardy, by a simple extension of argument, was an outcome of blind chance. In such a universe ideals and aspirations and happiness have no right and no meaning, for they are like the rest, produced by accident and unrelated to the general scheme.

One of the artistic uses of nature as fate occurs in the novel Far from the Madding Crowd. This is the action of the rain through the mouth of the gargoyle at the church. Troy has suffered remorse because of his treatment of Fanny, his betrayed sweetheart. She has died because of his neglect, and Troy visits her grave to show his contriteness by planting flowers on the burial mound. A rainstorm arises after he has finished his mournful task, and while "Troy slept on in the porch, ... the rain increased outside. Presently the gargoyle spat." It is seventy feet from the gargoyle's mouth to the ground, and "the persistent torrent from the gargoyle's jaws directed all its vengeance into the grave." The newly-turned

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5Ibid., p. 289.
6Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd (London, 1919), II, 136.
7Ibid., p. 137.
earth on the grave is turned into a boiling cauldron, and "the flowers so carefully planted by Fanny's repentant lover began to move and writhe in their bed." Soon all the flowers and bulbs so carefully planted "were loosened, rose to the surface, and floated away."

When Troy views the results of the rainstorm, he feels that all the world is against him. He leaves the grave and is next seen swimming out to sea, where he is picked up by a ship that takes him to America. It appears that "nature will not have the facile and belated repentance, and washed out the whole of Troy's labour . . . . This is not pure fortuitousness; it is nature again intervening . . . ." Troy leaves the church indifferent to life, and his entire future is changed by his subsequent actions.

Again the idea of nature as the "ultimate Casualty" is illustrated in The Woodlanders by a rainstorm which is the direct cause of the death of Giles Winterborne. Grace runs away into the woodland to escape her husband and stumbles accidentally on the little cottage occupied by Giles. Since Grace is unable to go any farther in the rain, Giles insists that she stay in his house, and he

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8Ibid. 9Ibid. 10H. C. Duffin, Thomas Hardy (Manchester, 1937), p. 13.
sleeps outside in a rudely constructed hut. During the night Giles tries to protect himself from the weather, but "the rain, which had never ceased, now drew his attention by beginning to drop through the meagre screen that covered him."\textsuperscript{10} The prolonged dampness produces a "trembling of his knees and the throbbing of his pulse told him that in his weakness he was unable to fence against the storm, and he lay down to bear it as best he might."\textsuperscript{11} It is this exposure from the rain and dampness that is the cause of Giles's death. Here nature "functions as fate in the manufacture of destiny."\textsuperscript{12}

Hardy used the weather as fate twice in \textit{The Mayor of Casterbridge}. The first time nature acts as fate is as a rainstorm; the storm ruins the festival Henchard has organized to celebrate a national event. Henchard and Farfrae get up rival shows to win popularity in Casterbridge. Farfrae erects a tent to house his amusements, and Henchard organizes his festivities in a meadow near the village. Henchard advertises about the town that games of all sorts will be held there. But at twelve o'clock on the day of the festivities "the rain began to

\textsuperscript{11}Hardy, \textit{The Woodlanders} (London, 1920), II, 149.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}Mardy Caroline Richards, "Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision," \textit{Nineteenth Century Fiction}, IV (June, 1949), 27.
fall... In an hour the slight moisture resolved itself into a monotonous smiting of earth by heaven, in torrents to which no end could be prognosticated." Some of the townspeople "had heroically gathered in the field, but by three o'clock Henchard discerned that his project was doomed to end in failure." The storm serves directly as the agent that causes Henchard to lose the good opinion of the folk in Casterbridge; this loss of respect later costs him the office of mayor.

A second time in the same novel Henchard's purposes are defeated by the weather, this time however by a storm that does not happen. Fair weather is the agent of failure and bankruptcy. Henchard hopes to rebuild his shattered fortune by gambling on the chance that "rain and tempest" will ruin the corn crop of his neighboring farmers. Trusting in the accuracy of the weather forecast, "Henchard bought grain to such an enormous extent that there was quite a talk about his purchases." However, when all of Henchard's storehouses are full, the weather continues mild and "an excellent harvest was almost a certainty." The weather brings him disaster again! "He was obliged to sell off corn that he had bought only a few weeks before at figures higher by many

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14 Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, I, 125.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., II, 27.
shillings a quarter."\textsuperscript{17} This trick of the weather brings about the ruin of Henchard; his "plans for making himself rich are brought to naught by a good harvest; the weather takes the place of fate here."\textsuperscript{17} As a result of this misfortune, Henchard's life seems to him to grow more futile day by day. He no longer has any faith in the future or in himself. Each step he takes from that day is a step downward.

In the novel \textit{Far from the Madding Crowd} Hardy again used a storm as an instrument of fate because it reveals to Bathsheba the unworthy character of her husband. The storm almost destroys Bathsheba's farm, but Shepherd Oak works steadily to save the wheatsacks from fire and from rain while her husband sleeps in a drunken stupor. Troy is warned that a storm is gathering, but he does not have Oak's perceptions concerning the signs of approaching bad weather and ignores the menacing forecast. It is Oak and not Troy who saves Bathsheba from ruin. Without regard for his own safety, Gabriel works to cover the ricks while the lightning "sprang from east, west, north, south, and was a perfect dance of death."\textsuperscript{18} It appeared like a thing alive—"dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{18}Cecil, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{19}Hardy, \textit{Far from the Madding Crowd}, II, 60.
mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion." Gabriel is almost blinded by the flashes of light, and the thunder crashed out of the sky with "a stupefying blast, harsh and pitiless, and it fell on their ears in a dead, flat blow . . . . A sulphurous smell filled the air; then all was silent, and black as a cave . . . ."\textsuperscript{20} Gabriel's brave persistence in the thatching of the ricks despite an infuriated universe signifies the tragic choice that Bathsheba has made in marrying the alien Troy. The tense, boding atmosphere of the storm is the deliberate agency employed by Hardy to show Bathsheba that Troy does not belong in her world.

In \textit{The Woodlanders} Hardy made the life of a tree serve as fate. In the Hintock woods there is "among all the woodland . . . one tree of more than arboreal importance."\textsuperscript{21} A great elm tree grows before the dwelling of old John South. He is obsessed with the idea that the tree is his enemy and threatens his life. "The shape of the tree seems to haunt him like an evil spirit."\textsuperscript{22} He complains of "the danger to his life and Winterborne's

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\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Duffin}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Hardy, The Woodlanders}, I, 124.
\end{flushright}
house property in consequence."\(^{23}\) The decision is made to cut the tree down to save his life, but when "the old man saw the vacant patch of sky in the place of the branched column so familiar to his gaze, he sprang up, speechless . . . . His whole system seemed paralyzed by amazement . . . . He lingered through the day, and died that evening at sunset."\(^{24}\) The disappearance of the tree, instead of saving his life, kills him. Hardy then has the felling of the tree serve as an act of fate because it takes the life of John South, and by a strange entanglement of destinies, Giles Winterborne's lease of several houses is lost when the old man dies. The destruction of the tree causes Giles to lose his property and thereby his bride-to-be.

The chance operation of indifferent and casual nature is revealed in the manner in which Hardy used brute creation to serve as the instrument of fate. Often in the novels animate nature plays the role of the maker of destiny as it slays or mismanages lives. In The Return of the Native the bite of an adder causes the death of Mrs. Yeobright. She crosses the heath to her son's home, seeking reconciliation with Clym. A helpless and bewildered figure, she wanders across the heath in the intense

\(^{24}\) Ibid., I, 125.  
\(^{25}\) Ibid.
heat of an August day, when the "sun . . . [has] branded the whole heath with his mark." It is on her return journey that she collapses and lies on the ground near the path. Here Clym finds her and carries her unconscious form into the hut and lays her down. In a few moments "she became sufficiently conscious to signify by signs that something was wrong with her foot . . . . It was swollen and red . . . . the red began to assume a more livid colour, in the midst of which appeared a scarlet speck." It soon becomes apparent to Clym and her neighbors that Mrs. Yeobright had been bitten by an adder. All attempts to aid her are futile, and she dies at midnight of that same day.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* the exertions of Oak's younger sheep-dog cause Oak to lose his holding as a sheep farmer. He prizes highly the respect that such independence gives him, and he hopes by careful husbandry to stand on a level with the other successful farmers in and around Casterbridge. Gabriel's farm lies to the right of Norcombe Hill, and "on the further side . . . [of the hill] was a chalk-pit . . . . Two hedges converged upon it in the form of a V, but without quite meeting. The narrow opening left, which was immediately over the brow of the pit, was

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26 Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, II, 92.

protected by a rough railing."\textsuperscript{28} It is through this broken rail that the dog George drives Gabriel's ewes. Oak hears their piteous bleating and rushes to the edge of the pit, from which the sounds issue. "A horrible conviction darted through Oak. With a sensation of bodily faintness he advanced ... Oak looked over the precipice. The ewes lay dead and dying at its foot--a heap of two hundred mangled carcasses, representing in their condition just now at least two hundred more."\textsuperscript{28} This is one of nature's malign tricks. "Oak's sanguine expectations are brought to nothing by malicious hazard ... the savings of a lifetime are dispersed at a blow."\textsuperscript{28} The result of the accident is that Gabriel is forced to earn his living as a simple shepherd at Weatherbury Farm.

The fortuitousness of nature plays an important part in \textit{The Return of the Native}. A storm in its character of antagonism and dour hostility drives Eustacia to her death in Shadwater Weir. As Eustacia leaves her cottage to make her escape from the heath, "she found that it had begun to rain, and as she stood pausing at the door, it increased,

\textsuperscript{28}Hardy, \textit{Far from the Madding Crowd}, I, 40.

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, I, 41-42.

threatening to come on heavily. All around her "the
gloom of the night was funereal; all nature seemed clothed
in crape." Eustacia soon loses her way in the darkness
of the night, and in the blinding storm she wanders to the
edge of the weir-pool. The torrents of rain have washed
away the retaining wall, and Eustacia, blinded by the wild
lashing of the tempest, stumbles into the weir and is
drowned. Wildeve, crossing the wind-and-rain-beaten heath
to keep a tryst with Eustacia, hears the fall of a body into
the stream. He leaps into the "boiling cauldron" to
rescue her but is also drowned in the attempt. Thus the
violent storm is directly responsible for the death of
Eustacia and indirectly for the loss of Wildeve's life
also.

The last instance to be reviewed of Hardy's indict-
ment of nature is a delicate bit of irony in Far from the
Madding Crowd. In Hardy's arraignment of nature as
responsible for man's sorrow, he called into his service
the mighty and disastrous phenomena of the natural world,
but in this instance, he used a tiny sprig of ivy. This
tendril of vine helps Gabriel Oak detect Troy in a false-
hood, which is the first indication of Troy's dishonor.

\[31\] Hardy, The Return of the Native, II, 188.
\[32\] Ibid.
Striving to impress Bathsheba with his honorable character, Troy has told her that he goes to church every Sunday but enters the church privately by the old tower door and sits at the back of the gallery. When Gabriel chides Bathsheba about her love for a worthless soldier, Bathsheba confidently reports this information to Oak. He is incredulous; "this supreme instance of Troy's goodness fell upon Gabriel's ears like the thirteenth stroke of a crazy clock."\textsuperscript{32} On his way home after this conversation, Gabriel goes by the church to examine the door that Troy has allegedly used. He finds that the door has not been opened for a long time because a sprig of ivy has "grown across the door to a length of more than a foot, delicately tying the panel to the stone jamb. It was a decisive proof that the door had not been opened at least since Troy came back to Weatherbury."\textsuperscript{33}

These examples illustrate Hardy's deeply felt and continual theme of the incompatibility of man and his natural environment. "Fate with . . . [Hardy] being so largely that impersonal thing, environment; allied with temperament (for which he [man] is not responsible), and with opportunity--another element of luck--it follows logically

\textsuperscript{33}Hardy, \textit{Far from the Madding Crowd}, I, 228.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 231.
that man is the sport of the Gods." The disruption of mortal destiny by an unconcerned and incomprehending nature recurred again and again in his work. It was not possible for Hardy to combine harmoniously the idea of a haphazard natural process with a belief in a meaningful life. Chance and 'crass Casualty' obstruct not only sun and rain, but every event and all beings."

The following passage from an earlier novel was Hardy's singular observance of the role of chance that nature plays in man's destiny; it definitely anticipated the interpretation of nature that he presented in his later work.

To those musing weather-beaten-West-country folk who pass the greater part of their days and nights out of doors, Nature seems to have moods in other than a poetical sense: predilections for certain deeds at certain times, without any apparent law to govern or reason to account for them. She is read as a person with a curious temper; as one who does not scatter kindnesses and cruelties alternately, impartially, and in order, but heartless severities or overwhelming generosities in lawless caprice. Man's case is always that of the prodigal's favourite or the miser's pensioner. In her unfriendly moments there seems a feline fun in her tricks, begotten by a foretaste of pleasure in swallowing the victim.

36 Roppen, p. 290.
In Hardy's concept of the word, nature included not only the natural phenomena of the inanimate world but also the animate section of lower nature as well. This is the view of nature that is expressed in all of his novels. Because of his treatment of nature as an agent of chance, Hardy was labeled a scientific determinist. He seemed to conclude that man's environment, temperament, and opportunity are all a matter of fortuitousness in nature.

Hardy's conception of the part that chance plays in human destiny is illustrated in the lives of his characters. Weather, landscape, and animate nature assume the guise of destiny, and man's life is either changed for the worse or destroyed by the haphazard tricks of nature.
CHAPTER III

NATURE AS CHARACTER

In analyzing Hardy's general outlook on nature, it will be necessary to enquire into the techniques he contrived to frame his point of view. Since Hardy felt that nature shows no sympathy for human aims and that between man and his environment there is always a struggle, his imagination conceived of nature as an omnipotent power and the human figures only puppets directed and controlled like pawns in some inscrutable game. This belief in the antagonism of inanimate nature to the aspiring human spirit is portrayed in the personification of Egdon Heath in the novel The Return of the Native. Without doubt the major character in this work is the heath.

\[\text{The heath holds the action of the novel and the characters as though in the hollow of the hand.} \ldots\]

\[\text{The heath is an extended image of the nature of which man is a part, in which he is caught, which conditions his very being, and cares nothing for him.}\]

The other characters in the novel are formed, directed, and driven by the personality and will of the heath, and it bends them all to its purpose. "Egdon Heath symbolizes the whole cosmic order, in which man is but an

insignificant particle. And it seems to be alive, to be impassively aware of what these men and women are doing and suffering."² Since the heath has the power of life or death over all the protagonists, their reaction to its mandates determines the destiny of each. _Eustacia Vye_ is the most rebellious of all involved in the tragedy, and since she will not be subdued, she must be broken; the sentence pronounced on her is death. _Wildeve_ is another who feels no love at all for the heath, whose nature is superficial to it and who has no understanding of its inner purpose or design. His rebelliousness is not so defiant or intense as that of _Eustacia_, but it is resistance nevertheless; therefore, he must suffer the same fate as she. _Clym Yeobright_, however, feels no repugnance towards the heath but instead finds peace and serenity by living on it. The _passiveness_ of the heath soothes him who has been repelled by the vacuity and futility of the life he has formerly led. His tribulation is met by "the _imperturbable countenance_ of the heath, which having defied the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man."³ Since _Clym_ does not

²Baker, p. 34.

³Hardy, _The Return of the Native_, II, 152.
defy the heath, he is allowed to live, and he finds his purpose and fulfillment within the expanse of its borders. Thomasin is also in harmony with this region "outside the gate of the world" and finds satisfaction in observing its haggard features. She does not struggle against the heath and is rewarded with contentment and happiness.

Mrs. Yeobright, Clym's mother, is another one of the characters who refuses to accept the law of the heath. Because she resents the influence Egdon Heath has over her son and has no sympathy with his vision of a life dedicated to serving his fellowman, the heath must kill her too. Digory Venn, the readleman, is as much a part of the heath as the heath-croppers and the furze bushes. He and Thomasin are in harmony with their background and are rewarded because of their compliance with the will of the heath.

In the opening pages of the novel Hardy puts on the stage the principal actor in the drama, and for the duration of the play Egdon Heath is in control of the action and the characters. "Egdon is not only the scene of the tale: it dominates the plot and determines the characters. It is sentient: it feels, it speaks, it slays."4 The heath has many moods, but its most pronounced is one of

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4Duffin, p. 128.
gloom. "It could . . . retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight . . . ."\(^5\)
The heath sleeps and wakes with "feline stealthiness," broods and is more in sympathy with the wilder aspects of the elements than with the calm, "for the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend."\(^6\) It is "untameable" and "Ishmaelitish" and is impervious to cultivation. It drives back those who attempt to plant its barbaric soil; "tillage, after holding on for a year or two, had receded again in despair, the ferns and furze-tufts stubbornly reasserting themselves."\(^7\) It remains unconquered and unconquerable by agriculture. The tone of its voice is solemn and pervasive. This is the brooding and mysterious presence that touches and shapes the life of each person in the drama in turn. The adjustment that each of the characters makes to his environment is the theme of the novel. The conflict that defines the tragedy is found in the attractions and repulsions that Egdon breeds in its inhabitants. The insignificant and ephemeral nature of man juxtaposed against the permanence of nature--the

\(^{5}\)Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, I, 3.

\(^{6}\)Ibid., p. 6.

\(^{7}\)Ibid., p. 214.
heath—is the principal idea that Hardy wishes to convey to the reader.

'Clym Yeobright is the chosen son of Egdon. He is in sympathy with its moods and finds "friendliness and geniality written in the faces of the hills around him."\(^8\) Clym attains perfect concord with the heath, absorbing its colors and characteristics. Egdon has been his cradle; he is "permeated with its scenes .... His eyes had first opened thereon; with its appearance all the first images of his memory were mingled; his estimate of life had been coloured by it."\(^9\) He is glad to count its denizens, the snakes and heathcrovers, his friends, and he loves the barren and rugged face of the moor. Clym is bound in a very close fashion to the heath by ties of love, but Eustacia is not; she feels imprisoned on this barren wasteland. "Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym."\(^10\) Clym returns to Egdon from Paris, which he views with distaste, seeking on the moor those very qualities which were absent in the existence he has abandoned. Clym becomes convinced that his business in Paris was "the idlest, vainest, most effeminate

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 142. \(^9\)Ibid., p. 213. \(^10\)Ibid.
business that ever a man could be put to. That decided me: I would give it up and try to follow some rational occupation among the people I knew best, and to whom I could be of most use. I have come home; and this is how I mean to carry out my plan. I shall keep a school as near to Egdon as possible . . . .”

Clym's wish is to serve humanity in some way and to find some occupation in which he can be useful. Clym standing on the summit of Rainbarrow surrounded by the men and women of Egdon listening to his words is the last scene in the novel. He has found his purpose in life as an itinerant open-air preacher and lecturer. His acceptance of and submission to the heath has been rewarded with contentment.

To Eustacia the heath is a prison. She is at variance with her surroundings and is repulsed by the somberness and isolation of her environment. Unlike Clym, who has been born on the heath, Eustacia is an alien and longs to return to those brighter lands whence she has come.

"Egdon was her Hades . . . . she felt like one banished; but here she was forced to abide . . . . Her prayer was always spontaneous, and often ran thus, 'O deliver my heart from this fearful gloom and loneliness: . . . else I shall die.'"

She feels that she deserves a better

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\[2\] Ibid., pp. 80, 81, 83.
fate than to wear herself out in impotent loathing of the heath. She refuses to see any grandeur in the gaunt majesty of its hills. "The subtle beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapours. An environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine."\textsuperscript{13} Egdon looms before Eustacia as a towering obstruction to her desires, and her bitter struggle against it is "an extended image of the Nature of which man is a part, in which he is caught, which conditions his being and cares nothing for him."\textsuperscript{14} Eustacia cannot understand why she must be chained to such a place and foretells her own tragic end when she murmurs to Wildeve that the heath is her cross, her shame, and will be her death. She flings her cries and tears against the blackness and darkness of the heath, and its passivity and indifference drive her to despair.

How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! . . . I do not deserve my lot! . . . O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 84. \hfill \textsuperscript{14}Allen, p. 286.
\textsuperscript{15}Hardy, \textit{The Return of the Native}, II, 190.
Eustacia's rebelliousness must be punished, and just as she attempts to escape her jail, the heath sends her to her death by drowning in Shadwater-Weir.

Wildeve is another of the characters in the novel who can never adjust to his surroundings. He is not of equal stature with Eustacia; neither does he have her depth of character nor her perception of the futility of resistance to the heath. Wildeve, too, is a foreigner to Egdon; he finds it lonely and a place where it seems impossible to do well. His abhorrence of the moorland causes him to leave Thomasin and to persuade Eustacia to go away with him. The insignificance of all the characters in relation to the heath is seen in the description of Wildeve and Eustacia walking on the moor. "Their black figures sank and disappeared from against the sky. They were two horns which the sluggish heath had put forth from its crown, like a mollusc, and had now again drawn in."¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid., I, 103.
Mrs. Yeobright is another one of those who protest against the dominance of the heath. She has long ceased to have any ambition for herself but entertains many high hopes for her son. Her wish is that he will return to Paris and gain some manner of worldly success. She is an inflexible and self-contained woman, and the "solitude exhaled from the heath was concentrated in this face that had risen from it. The air with which she looked at the heathmen betokened a certain unconcern at their presence, or what might be their opinions of her ..."\(^1\) Mrs. Yeobright's resentment against the heath is directed at the influence it has on Clym which induces him to live out his life as a teacher on the moorland. "Her desire that he shall rise to a higher social level than Egdon can provide is one of the chief original forces in the novel leading to tragedy."\(^2\) The deep incongruity that exists between Mrs. Yeobright's viewpoint and that of Clym is revealed when she tells him that he is wasting his life. She tells him that his idea of opening a school on the heath is "very well to talk of, but ridiculous to put in practice."\(^3\) She insists that he should be able to see

\(^1\)Ibid., I, 37.


\(^3\)Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, I, 235.
the folly in such self-sacrifice and that he should go back to Paris and try to make a success in some business or other. Since she has attempted to combat the design of the heath, if not in her own person, then through the person of her son, she must be destroyed. "Just as the tempest in Lear aided the ruin wrought by the ingratitude of the King's daughters, so Egdon here first wearies out the heart-torn wandering woman, and then kills her with a venomous creature from its own bosom." 20

The only major characters who are in complete harmony with their background are Diggory Venn, the readleman, and Thomasina Yeobright. Diggory and "Tamsie" are happy living among the gorse and furze. The readleman is almost one of the heath creatures himself. He is a nomad like the bees, the amber butterflies, and the heath ponies who follow him about. His home is "some brambled nook" that he has adopted for his quarters while he is living on Egdon. He comes and goes as casually and silently as the herons fly into the ponds on the moor. H. C. Duffin has called the readleman "the spirit of the heath." 21 Tamsie has lived always on the heath, and she finds it congenial. She admires its grim old face and knows that she can never be

20 Duffin, p. 129.
21 Ibid.
happy living away from it. The winds that howl and the
rains that smite the moor are not to Tamsie, "as to
Bustacia, demons in the air . . . . The drops which lashed
her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the
mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground.
Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its
worst moods reasonable."22 Thomasin and Venn are not
rebels against circumstance; they accept their way of life
and are blessed for their compliance.

Hardy demonstrated in the novel the power of nature
over man by the destruction of the three rebels against
the heath in contrast to showing that serenity may be
enjoyed by those who submit themselves to their surround-
ings. He expressed this idea in an allegorical description
of a storm that uproots the trees but only bends the
grasses. "Those gusts which tore the trees merely waved
the furze and heather in a light caress."23 Clym and
Thomasin and Venn are like the heather, which yields but
is not broken; Bustacia, Wildeve, and Mrs. Yeobright are
the trees that resist and are destroyed by the storm.
Hardy stated clearly that nature rules the fortunes of
humanity, that the concept of individual free will is only

22Hardy, The Return of the Native, II, 201.
23Ibid., II, 13.
an illusion when man is constantly frustrated and thwarted by the external forces of nature.

In *The Woodlanders* Hardy personified Hintock Woods just as he personified Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*. The personification of the woodlands is not so extended and obvious as that of Egdon Heath, and the woodlands do not exert any control over the characters, as does the heath. Hardy wished to show that (like man) the forest suffers as a result of the blind, meaningless force that controls all life, animate or inanimate. Hardy also drew an extended portrait of the four major characters to show their suffering. The characters and the woodland blindly and hopelessly struggle for existence and happiness, but the struggle is of no avail. "In two of his books, *The Woodlanders* and *The Return of the Native*, the setting is made to stand for the universe . . . . Not a background, but an actor in the play, it is always present, the incarnation of a living force with a will and a purpose of its own."24 In *The Woodlanders* the same contradictions that exist in nature—exemplified by the internecine warfare within the woodland—exist in the relationship between Giles and Marty, Giles and Grace, and Grace and Fitzpiers. The tragic waste of human affection and human aspirations that characterizes the relationships

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24 Cecil, pp. 94-95.
of the protagonists is also depicted in the continuous carnage and waste of life in the woodlands. Hardy established a completely unsentimental world in which not man but all nature is in unhappy conflict. In both novels the "law of nature, cruel and indifferent, forms the background . . . incarnating itself now as savage Egdon, now as the woods of Hintock, whose apparent peace masks an unending struggle for survival."25

In The Woodlanders, instead of the somber and gloomy heath, there are "extensive woodlands, interspersed with apple-orchards. Here the trees . . . make the wayside hedges ragged by their drip and shade . . . ." The "leaves lie so thick in autumn as to completely bury the track. The spot is lonely."26 The forest is so dense that the sun cannot be seen until midday, and in some parts of the wood the continuous shade prevents any growth under the beeches, and always there is the constant murmur of the rustling leaves "with a sound almost metallic, like the sheet-iron foliage of the fabled Jarnvid Wood."27 Whereas Egdon is a bleak and impersonal force upon which man can make no impression, Hardy used the woodlands in a series of personified images as a means of extending

25 Ibid., p. 36.
26 Hardy, The Woodlanders, I, 1.
27 Ibid., p. 61.
throughout the universe the same sufferings he saw in man. The death of Giles, the loneliness of Marty, and the betrayal of Grace are the result of the same destructive force that can be seen within the forest.

Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling. 28

The woodland is characterized, not by Egdon-like repose and endurance, but by its struggle for existence. The trees must contend with one another and with the elements, parasites, and animals in order to maintain themselves and to lift their branches triumphantly to the sky. Each of the terms that Hardy used to describe the warfare among the trees conveys to the reader man and nature's tragic situation. The summer shadows in the dense woodland are mysterious and frightful. In winter the leafless trees look like "a weird multitude of skeletons." In heavy, moist weather the many boughs seem to be "in a cold sweat." The trees and bushes are "haggard phantoms" under a still gray sky. On a violent night in the wood it is "difficult to believe that no opaque body, but only an invisible colourless thing . . . [is] making branches creak, [is]

28 Ibid.
springing out of trees,"29 shrieking and blaspheming, smiting the roof "in the manner of a gigantic hand smiting the mouth of an adversary, to be followed by a trickle of rain as blood from the wound."30 The similes that Hardy employed to personify the wood are always in terms of human agony; this imagery is so vivid that there can be no doubt as to the tragedy inherent in the forest.

The setting in the Hintock woods . . . the tragic portion, the story of Giles and Marty . . . is as beautifully and profoundly wedded to the natural surroundings as was that of Clym and Eustacia. The woodlands are much more than mere background; they are the very stage of life, and have the same vital part in the drama as Egdon Heath in The Return of the Native.31

The first intimation of the sorrow that is to come to Grace is seen when Giles awaits Grace's return to Little Hintock after a two-year absence. Giles has brought specimens of apple trees with him to sell. He stands in the market place holding one of the trees above his head "like an ensign"; its "boughs . . . [rise] above the heads of the farmers, and . . . [bring] a delightful suggestion of orchards into the heart of the town."32 This is the first glimpse that Grace gets of Giles, and she is embarrassed and a little ashamed that her girlhood sweetheart

29 Ibid., II, 154.  
30 Ibid.  
31 Baker, p. 49.  
32 Hardy, The Woodlanders, I, 41.
is so obviously a countryman and a woodlander. Furthermore this is the first indication that Grace's relations with the politer world have dulled in her the fine sensitiveness to nature's contacts that is possessed by the true woodlanders, Giles and Marty. The next evidence of her separation from her old life is her not knowing the names of apple trees. She and Giles are driving down the lanes to Grace's home, and as they pass the apple orchards, Giles calls her attention to the different kinds of apple trees, but she is unable to distinguish between the John-apple trees and the bittersweets as she used to do. It seems to Giles that the "knowledge and interests which had formerly moved Grace's mind had quite died away from her."^33 Hardy subtly suggested that Grace had become indifferent to Giles's world. She turns to other loyalties than those of the woodlands, and she will be spared none of the consequences of her rejection. Her new deprivations—her marriage to Fitzpiers—bring her only sorrow. Hardy made it plain, however, that Grace's rejection of Giles, who embodies the ways of her childhood, and her acceptance of Fitzpiers, who is a foreigner to the life of the forest, is a decision forced on her by a power over which she has no control.

[^33]: Ibid., I, 48.
The character of Marty South, who hopelessly loves Giles, is drawn to show her intimately related to the woodland ways. Like Winterborne, she is a child of the woods, knowing the lore of trees and birds, living a life in the forest of utter loneliness. She is always seen engaged in activities relating to the forest, sharpening spars or planting young trees. She is so closely fused with her surroundings that she would not be a reality away from them. Marty has an expert knowledge of "that wondrous world of sap and leaves called Hintock woods." 34 She is "able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing; ... the sights and sounds of night, winter, wind, and storm amid those dense boughs, which had to Grace a touch of the uncanny, and even of the supernatural" 35 were to Marty "only simple occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws" 36 she knew well. "Marty South takes over and enriches the function of Venn in The Return of the Native." 37 The last voice in the novel is Marty's when she stands at the grave and declares her loyal devotion to Giles even in death.

If Marty South is the spirit of this sunless forest, then Winterborne is its "priest or tutelary god." His

34 Ibid., II, 182. 35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
kinship with the trees, his knowledge of the occupations of the forest, woodcraft and cidermaking, characterize him as the son of the forest just as Clym is the son of the heath. Giles can plant saplings with unerring skill, and his fingers are "endowed with a gentle conjuror's touch in spreading the roots of each little tree, resulting in a sort of caress under which the delicate fibres all laid themselves out in their proper directions for growth." 38 For Giles the roots take hold in the soil in a few days and live, whereas those planted by other journeymen die in a few weeks. Both Marty and Giles emerge from the forest as woodland children with an insight into woodland life that has been born in them.

They had planted together, and together they had felled; together they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which seen in few were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet. From the light lashing of the twigs upon their faces when brushing through them in the dark either could pronounce upon the species of the tree whence they stretched; from the quality of the wind's murmur through a bough either could in like manner name its sort afar off. They knew by a glance at a trunk if its heart were sound, or tainted with incipient decay; and by the state of its upper twigs the stratum that had been reached by its roots. The artifices of the seasons were seen by them from the conjuror's own point of view, and not from that of the spectator. 39

38 Hardy, The Woodlanders, I, 75.
39 Ibid., II, 182-183.
Marty and Giles are refined by working with nature and broadened until at their best they are almost impersonal and represent, as Hardy said, "abstract humanism." The suffering and death of Giles and the loneliness of Marty are senseless and purposeless and serve no other aim in the novel than that of pointing up its theme: man and nature are fellow-sufferers from the burden of life. Man and nature are both in conflict with an "aimless Will" governing the universe.

Hardy imagined nature as a character with omnipotent power against whom the men and women in his novels are unable to exert their wills. This role of ruthlessness is assigned to the heath in the novel The Return of the Native. Hardy seemed to be convinced that man in nature does not have free will, and that man in protesting against his environment is destroyed, but in submitting to a force he cannot control, finds some measure of contentment.

In the other major novel in which Hardy gives a dominant role to nature, The Woodlanders, he demonstrates the influence of the woodlands and orchards on the lives of the protagonists who dwell among them, but here nature's authority is more diffused, and nature, as well as the human beings, suffers.
CHAPTER IV

DELINEATION OF CHARACTER AND MOOD

THROUGH NATURE

In Chapters II and III nature has been shown to have a dominant role as fate and as character in Hardy's novels, but in this chapter it will be demonstrated that in these same novels, nature often moves to the back of the stage and assumes a guise more indirect and subtle. In this less conspicuous manner nature takes three forms in the novels. It is used to portray or delineate character and to intensify emotion, and description of nature is employed to establish mood. A harmony between background and character or situation is found in all of Hardy's novels. It reveals an infinite care in the observation of detail in the natural world. Hardy had the scientist's knowledge of nature, and it became poetry when Hardy transformed it into the written word. In fact, nature-description was never used by Hardy as decoration. It was used only as it could illustrate by contrast or similarity the life of man, for Hardy believed that "nature and man are constantly engaged in expressing the same thought."¹

¹Dawson, p. 222.
It is impossible to imagine Hardy's principal characters apart from the landscape in which they move; they are as much a part of the scenery as the trees, the birds, and the creatures that live on the earth; his characters are the actual growths and manifestations of nature. In this technique of unifying man and environment, Hardy had no peer:

Hetty Sorrell and Adam Bede might have lived in any pleasant and rural hamlet, but Winterborne and Marty South belong to one scene only and are inconceivable apart from it. Even the virtuous and sturdy persons Wordsworth celebrates might exist apart from the actual hillsides where he found them, but Hardy's . . . characters are as much products of a particular soil as the glades in which they live. Nature herself breathes and speaks through them.²

This close relationship between nature and Hardy's protagonists is beautifully illustrated in the character of Giles Winterborne. When Grace sees him approaching her through the orchards heavy with fruit, he looks to her "like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat-colour, his eyes blue as cornflowers, his sleeves and leggings dyed with fruit-stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips."³

At another time observing him at his work with the cider press, Grace notices "fragments of apple-rind . . . upon the brim of his hat . . . [and] brown pips of the same

²Ibid., p. 215.

fruit . . . sticking among the down upon his fine round arms, and in his beard." Later in the novel when Grace has been deserted by Fitzpiers and she realizes that her false values have led her to make a dreadful mistake in the choice of a husband, she remembers the staunch love and unswerving devotion of Giles's feeling for her. She remembers him as he appeared to her before she left Little Hintock, and in her memory he appears as the fruit-god and the wood-god in alternation: sometimes leafy and smeared with green lichen, as she had seen him amongst the sappy boughs of the plantations; sometimes cider-stained and starred with apple-pips, as she had met him on his return from cider-making in Blackmoor Vale, with his vats and presses beside him.

This description of Giles is in reality a picture of the landscape, and this characterization is a subtle blending of his person with the woodland soil, the trees, grasses, and marshy lanes under the beeches.

Eustacia in The Return of the Native is another of Hardy's characters who appears to emerge from her surroundings. It is a poetic paradox that Eustacia embodies in her features those elements of darkness and somberness which are also features of the heath and that the darkness of her beauty is intensified by the darkness of the heath. Hardy's portrait of Eustacia shows his imaginative power

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4 Ibid., I, 213.
5 Ibid., II, 115.
in delineation of personality because "as a woman she is absolutely at variance with her surroundings: as an artistic creation she is triumphantly akin to them."\(^6\) The traits of night are the traits that characterize Eustacia. Her face is "without ruddiness, as without pallor." Her hair is so dark "that a whole winter did not contain enough darkness for its shadow: it ... [closes] over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow." Her eyes are described as being "full of nocturnal mysteries." To a person in her presence she brings "memories of Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnights," and the ornaments that she wears in her hair are never flowers or some gay gossamer but a "thin fillet of black velvet, restraining the luxuriance of her shady hair, in a way which ... [adds] much to this class of majesty by irregularly clouding her forehead."\(^7\) Examine the words that Hardy used to describe Eustacia: darkness, shadow, nightfall, nocturnal mysteries, black velvet, shady, clouding. Eustacia is the very embodiment of night. It is nearly always night when Eustacia appears; she prowls the heath alone when black clouds have obscured the moon; she meets her death at midnight in the weir when

\(^6\)H. B. Grimsditch, Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (London, 1925), p. 52.

\(^7\)Hardy, The Return of the Native, I, 78, 79, 80.
the heath has unleashed all its furies of darkness and
storm. There is

an artistic congruity between her environment and her
dark and unconventional passions, her savage inde-
pendence of mind. It will be the eternal irony of
this poetic figure that no reader will ever be able
to disassociate her from the lonely and gloomy set-
ting from which she made her desperate, vain attempt
to escape. 8

In the same novel there is a striking similarity in
the picture of the heath and the appearance of Clym
Yeobright. He is seen gathering faggots on the heath, and
as he slowly moves across the moor, he is "not more dis-
tinguishable from the scene around him than the green
caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on." He appears merely
as "a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green
gorse, and nothing more." Cutting furze in his brown
clothing on the brown stretches of Egdon, he seems to be
only another one of the heath creatures so familiar that
the

amber-coloured butterflies . . . quivered in the
breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back,
and sported with the glittering point of his hook
as he flourished it up and down. Tribes of emerald-
green grasshoppers leaped over his feet . . . . Huge
flies . . . buzzed about him without knowing that he
was a man. 9

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8 Beach, Technique, p. 102.
9 Hardy, The Return of the Native, II, 64.
The fern-dells snake glide over his feet, and the young rabbits hop about in the sun where he is working, and none of the creatures are afraid of him. Hardy subtly interwove a description of the heath into the description of Clym.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* Hardy used landscape to interpret the inner nature of two of the men in the novel through the medium of the setting where they are first seen by the heroine. Gabriel Oak is a sheep farmer, and Bathsheba observes him going into his hut carrying "in his arms a new-born lamb . . . which he . . . [places] on a wisp of hay before a small stove."\(^{10}\) When the lamb is revived by the warmth of the fire, Gabriel takes the lamb and places "the little creature with its mother."\(^{11}\) This scene is a specific revelation of the character of Gabriel, who shows care and concern for helpless life. This same concern he shows for Bathsheba as the novel progresses, and it is a marked characteristic of their relationship.

Bathsheba encounters Troy for the first time on a dark path as she is returning from the nightly inspection of her property. She goes to each barn and shed to make sure everything is "tight and safe for the night." On

\(^{10}\)Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, I, 12.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 13.
her return home she has to make "her way back to the house . . . by a path through a young plantation of tapering firs." The path is dark at all times of the day: "gloomy there at cloudless noontide, twilight in the evening, dark as midnight at dusk, and black as the ninth plague of Egypt at midnight." The darkness and gloom that close around her when she meets Troy continue to surround her in all her associations with him; her marriage with him brings her nothing but unhappiness and heartache. Hardy employed setting in each of these instances to act as a mirror giving back the true reflection of each man.

In drawing the picture of Thomasin in The Return of the Native Hardy placed her always in a light and airy setting. She is a happy, simple-hearted girl with no dark nuances in her personality. The light and sunshine that surround Thomasin are in direct contrast to the blackness and night that envelop Bustacia. Thomasin is seen getting apples from the loft, and through a hole in the roof "the sun . . . [shines] in a bright yellow patch" upon her figure. Around her head pigeons are flying, and a few stray motes of light flit across her face. While Thomasin is gazing up at the birds, the sunshine falls "so directly upon her brown hair and transparent tissues that it

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12 Ibid., p. 190.
almost . . . [seems] to shine through her."\(^{13}\) Another
view of her is at the top of a holly tree gathering ber-
ries "amid the glistening green and scarlet masses" of the
tree. A further scene that graphically portrays Tamsie is
at the May-revel under the maypole, around which are
"crossed hoops decked with small flowers; beneath these
. . . [comes] a milk-white zone of May bloom; then a zone
of bluebells, then of cowslips, then of lilacs, then of
ragged-robin, daffodils . . . .\(^{14}\) The composite picture
of Thomasin includes sunshine, birds, the colors of green
and red, and May flowers.

A second phase of Hardy's employment of nature in
support of characterization is his use of nature for
intensification of emotion. This is an art peculiar to
Hardy and one which he practiced with consummate skill.
No other writer has ever attempted its use to such a wide
and varying degree.

Hardy's greatness lies as a poetic interpreter of
human emotions in their relationship to nature; he
had extraordinarily keen and delicate preceptions
which enabled him to communicate what he felt through
well-wrought scenes, sometimes of breath-taking
intensity and sometimes of idyllic loveliness . . . .
He shows elemental passions in dramatic conflict but
closely related to the moods of nature.\(^{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, I, 135, 136.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., II, 227.

\(^{15}\) G. H. Gerould, *The Patterns of English and American
One of the most illuminating examples in Hardy's work of the portrayal of the union between natural forces and human emotion is the passage in *The Return of the Native* that depicts Eustacia's despair just before her death. She has reached the nadir in the conviction of the hopelessness of her situation as she leaves her cottage to cross the heath during the wildness of the storm. As she follows the path toward Rainbarrow, she stumbles "over twisted furze-roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps of fleshy fungi which at this season lay scattered about the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal."\(^{16}\) As Eustacia looks up at the sky she sees that "the moon and stars . . . [are] closed up by cloud and rain to the degree of extinction." When she at last reaches Rainbarrow, the reader is told that "never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without."\(^{17}\)

It is in the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, however, that the adjustment of place and season to human emotion is accomplished with the greatest skill. Nowhere in Hardy's work is there such artistic unity between the scenery and the characters; the landscape adapts itself to

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\(^{16}\) Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, II, 188, 189.

\(^{17}\) *Ibid.*, II, 189.
and identifies itself with the personages in the novel. The emotion of each phase of Tess's life is reflected in the physical world that surrounds her. The merging of nature with feeling is seen as she goes to the home of Alec D'Urberville with flowering hopes in the season of high summer. There she is decked out with "roses at her breast; and roses in her hat; roses and strawberries in her basket to the brim." She returns to her home after her betrayal by Alec in the early winter. In her plight "her sole idea . . . [seems] to be to shun mankind." She takes solitary walks amid the lonely hills and dales near her home; "her flexuous and stealthy figure . . . [becomes] an integral part of the scene . . . The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and barks of the winter twigs, . . . [are] formulae of bitter reproach."  

The initial tragedy of Tess's life, her seduction by Alec D'Urberville, takes place in the somber and dark woodland of Cranborne Chase. Alec is bringing Tess home at midnight through the dark forest. Finding himself confused as to directions, Alec leaves Tess for a few moments to try to find his way out of the wood. When Alec gropes his way back to the spot where he has left her, the Chase

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18Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, I, 52.
19Ibid., I, 111.
is "wrapped in thick darkness . . . and the moon . . . quite gone down." Under the primeval yews and oaks "the obscurity . . . [is] so great that he . . . [can] see absolutely nothing but a pale nebulousness at his feet . . . . Everything else . . . [is] blackness."20

The darkness and gloom that will follow Tess until her death begins in the gloom of Cranborne Chase.

The courtship of Clare and Tess, the creation, expansion, and maturing of their love, takes place at Talbothays Dairy in the fertile Froom Valley. "It is on a thyme-scented, bird-hatching morning in May" when Tess leaves home the second time to earn her living as a dairy-maid. Talbothays lies in "the valley of the Great Dairies, the valley in which milk and butter grew to rankness . . . the verdant plain so well watered by the river Var or Froom."21

Here could be seen the herds of cattle, red and white, trooping towards the dairy barns through the water-meads growing rank and lush. "Amid the oozing fatness and the warm ferments of the Var Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate."22

Tess and Clare, working

20 Ibid., I, 93.
21 Ibid., I, 135-137.
22 Ibid., I, 198.
and talking together, are irresistibly drawn to each other. Their love flowers in the most sensuous surroundings. The region is a "green trough of sappiness and humidity," of "fat alluvial soil," where "the languid perfume of the summer fruits, the mists, the hay, the flowers, formed therein a vast pool of odour which ... seemed to make the animals, the very bees and butterflies, drowsy." It is the Froom Valley, which lies within sight and sound of the crystal streams, where meads grow lush and the air is fragrant with the scent of many flowers, that is the setting of Tess's passionate love for Clare. Nature matches the state of hearts at Talbothays Dairy.

The next phase of her life, her desertion by Clare, finds her at Flintcomb-Ash. The coldest part of the winter sees her laboring at the roughest kind of work in the swede-fields on that "starve-acre" farm. The setting is in direct contrast to the lushness and fertility of the Froom Valley. The abject misery of Tess is duplicated in her surroundings. Flintcomb-Ash lies on a high, rocky, wind-swept upland, where almost no trees grow. No green of vegetation can be seen; the fields are in color a desolate drab, and between the earth and the sky the only shades are gray and brown. Tess's suffering is almost too

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23 Ibid., I, 225.
much for her to bear when the intense cold comes. "There had not been such a winter for years." Every twig and bush and tree is covered with frost. With the snow comes a cold so intense that "it chilled the eyeballs . . ., made their brows ache, penetrated to their skeletons."

The mood of horror is intensified by the arrival of the "strange birds from behind the North Pole" at Flintcomb-Ash. The wretchedness of Tess's condition is mirrored in the eyes of gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes—eyes which had witnessed scenes of cataclysmal horror in inaccessible polar regions of a magnitude such as no human being had ever conceived, in curdling temperatures that no man could endure; which had beheld the crash of icebergs and the slide of snow-hills by the shooting light of the Aurora; been half blinded by the whirl of colossal storms and terraqueous distortions; and retained the expression of feature that such scenes had engendered.24

The hopelessness, the defeat, the utter dejection of the abandoned wife is everywhere apparent in the landscape.

The dramatic motivation provided by natural earth is central to every aspect of the book. It controls the style: page by page Tess has a wrought density of texture that is fairly unique in Hardy; symbolic depth is communicated by the physical surface of things with unhampered transparency . . . . The starved uplands of Flintcomb Ash, with their ironic mimicry of the organs of generation, "myriads of loose white flints in bulbous, cusped, and phallic shapes," and the dun consuming ruin of the swede fields—the mockery of impotence, the exile.25

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24Ibid., II, 129.

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* Hardy superbly related man to nature, used the Wessex landscape not as a backdrop, but as living material of human existence.

One more instance in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* when nature seems to reflect the emotion felt by the protagonist is when nature seems to mourn with Tess at the death of the family horse, Prince. As Tess stands helplessly by the form of the lifeless animal, nature becomes as distraught as Tess. "The atmosphere turned pale, the birds shook themselves in the hedges, arose, and twittered; the lane showed all its white features, and Tess showed hers, still whiter." 26

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* there is a constant interweaving of human emotion with descriptions of nature, but in the novel *Jude the Obscure* Hardy allows physical nature very little participation in human affairs. However, in the scene in which Jude bids a final farewell to Sue, a sleet storm is made to reproduce the violence of emotions felt by the characters. Jude has sunk so low in depression that he has wished to take his own life, but he still has a wish: to see Sue once more. Through "a driving rain from the north-east" Jude travels to meet her for the last time. The wild storm that shrieks and eddies in their minds, their tortuous

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parting, is matched by the deluge of rain and sleet that surrounds them.

All the examples cited so far in this chapter show how Hardy used descriptions of nature to reinforce the emotions felt by his characters. In the instances that follow it will be shown how Hardy was able to invoke in the reader and in his protagonists by intensely wrought sketches of nature the particular mood that he desired. When in *Far from the Madding Crowd* Fanny's coffin is brought for burial, the description of the fog that encloses the casket and wagon heightens the mood of sadness for the reader.

Joseph Poorgrass has been sent with a cart to bring the body of Fanny to the church. As the wagon rolls along the road toward Weatherbury, Joseph sees "strange clouds and scrolls of mist rolling" over the landscape. "It was a sudden overgrowth of atmospheric fungi which had their root in the neighboring sea, and by the time horse, man, and corpse entered Yalbury Great Wood, these silent workings of an invisible hand had reached them, and they were completely enveloped."27 The mood darkens as the silence and the fog hover around Joseph and his burden like a specter. "Not a footstep or wheel was audible anywhere around, and the dead silence was broken only by a heavy

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27 Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, II, 96.
particle falling from a tree through the evergreens and alighting with a smart rap upon the coffin of poor Fanny."28 Ernest Brennecke says that "the dismal fog that comes down upon Joseph Poorgrass and his cart in the most dismal section of the story, is felt unmistakably to be Nature's silent commentary on the course of events."29

In the novel The Return of the Native Hardy conveyed to the reader through the picture of the moaning firs on Devil's Bellow the mood of desolation and rejection felt by Mrs. Yeobright as she crosses the heath to rectify the breach between herself and her son. During the journey she becomes very agitated and weary and sits down to rest under a clump of fir trees on the top of a knoll. She notices that the trees are "singularly battered, rude, and wild . . . Mrs. Yeobright . . . [dismisses] thoughts of her own storm-broken and exhausted state to contemplate theirs. Not a bough . . . but . . . [is] splintered, lopped, and distorted by the fierce weather."30 Many of the trees have been blackened and split by lightning blasts. Although no wind is blowing, Mrs. Yeobright can hear the trees moan and sigh in the stillness of the afternoon.

28 Ibid., II, 97.

29 Ernest Brennecke, Jr., Thomas Hardy's Universe (Boston, 1925), p. 42.

30 Hardy, The Return of the Native, II, 95.
In *Far from the Madding Crowd* nature also mirrors the moods felt by Boldwood on two different occasions. The first instance is when Boldwood receives Bathsheba's valentine with the words "Marry Me" written on it. He becomes very nervous and excitable, and cannot sleep that night. When he arises at dawn, the sun looks cold and hueless; the sky is "leaden to the northward, and murky to the east . . . only half of the sun yet visible . . . [burns] rayless, like a red and flameless fire."\(^{31}\) As Boldwood looks toward the west, "the wasting moon, now dull and greenish-yellow," hangs "like tarnished brass" in the sky. However, Bathsheba's valentine has been a "seed thrown on a hotbed of tropic intensity," and Boldwood begins to woo her with unexpected fervor. This courtship takes place in the springtime as "the vegetable world begins to move and swell and the saps to rise." Hardy signified that in Boldwood, too, the saps are beginning to rise.

Hardy made use of the same analogical treatment of background in *The Return of the Native*. Clym and his mother have a serious quarrel; sharp words are spoken, and Clym leaves Mrs. Yeobright to make his home in a vacant cottage on the heath. As he makes his way across the moor, he is very distraught and unhappy. The weather

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\(^{31}\)Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, I, 117-118.
parallels his mood. "The cold clouds . . . [hasten] on in a body, as if painted on a moving slide. Vapours from other continents . . . [arrive] upon the wind . . ."\textsuperscript{32} He observes the condition of the young fir and beech trees in the rain and sees that they are "undergoing amputations, bruises, cripplings, and harsh lacerations, from which the wasting sap . . . [will] bleed for many a day to come . . . ."\textsuperscript{33} The boughs of the young trees are "wrenched at the root, where . . . [they move] like a bone in its socket, and at every onset of the gale convulsive sounds . . . [come] from the branches as if pain were felt."	extsuperscript{34} 

Since the weather can be unhappy when Clym is unhappy, it can also be gay when Clym is gay. Clym enjoys his honeymoon during the flowering season of the heath, when "the July sun" shines on "Egdon and . . . [fires] the crimson heather to scarlet." It is the one time in the year when both the weather and the season combine to make the heath beautiful.

The minutely detailed picture of the suffering of the trees in \textit{The Woodlanders} reflects the anxiety and suffering felt by Grace as she watches at the window for Giles's return. From where she sits, Grace looks out upon the

\textsuperscript{32}Hardy, \textit{The Return of the Native}, II, 12.  
\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid.}, II, 13.  
\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}
trees ravaged by the winter storms. One tree is "an old beech with vast armpits, and great pocket-holes in its sides." Beneath the trees dead boughs are strewn on the ground. The trees that stand close together wrestle with each other for existence, "their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings and blows."
The turmoil that exists in the forest exists also in Grace's mind.

Just as the mutual destruction among the trees reveals the ravaged emotions of Grace, so does the dead pool reflect Oak's desolation in Far from the Madding Crowd. Gabriel has just lost his entire flock of ewes, and as he surveys the pit into which they have fallen, his gaze falls on the pool that is situated at the margin of the pit. It seems to him that the water glitters "like a dead man's eye"; the reflection of the chrome-yellow moon is distorted and elongated by the undulation of the water. The pool has a stagnant, dark look as if it, too, were stricken with sorrow.

The close relation of the moods of nature to the moods of the characters is again seen in The Woodlanders in the sighing of the trees when they are planted by Giles and Marty. Marty is mute and uncomplaining in her sorrow and loneliness. Her hopeless passion for Giles increases her sadness, and as she plants the saplings, she
translates the sighing of the tree branches as evidence that the trees are sad too. When Marty erects "one of the young pines into its hole . . . the soft musical breathing instantly . . . [sets] in, which . . . [is] not to cease night or day till the grown tree should be felled."35 Marty believes that the young trees sigh because they are sorry to start life, just as she is sorry to live it.

The last instance of delineation of mood through portrayal of scenery to be examined in this chapter is in the novel Far from the Madding Crowd. Fanny Robin goes to find Sergeant Troy at his barracks to plead with him to marry her because she is going to bear his child and because she is very frightened and apprehensive. Fanny is in deep trouble, and since Hardy wanted to impress this on the reader, he took pains to set a background for her that would complement her unfortunate position and set the stage for the tragedy that overtakes her later in the novel. The place is a barren moor, and the time is a snowy, winter night, black and cold. It is a night when "sorrow may come to the brightest . . ., hope sinks to misgiving . . . ."36 The menacing sky is full "of crowding flakes . . . . The vast arch of cloud above . . . [is] strangely low, and . . . [forms] as it were the roof of a

35 Hardy, The Woodlanders, I, 75.
36 Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, I, 98.
large dark cavern . . . If anything could be darker than the sky, it . . . [is] the river beneath. 37 Here again man's emotion and nature's mood are mingled together, conveying the blackness, gloom, and despair in Fanny's heart.

These numerous examples of nature's response to mood and emotion of the characters in the novels justify the assertion that Hardy did not use scenery as an embellishment but as an intricate design interwoven within the fabric of each of his works. Ernest Baker has said that his scenery is not scenery in the ordinary sense, not decoration in purple patches, not mere background, but an integral part of the drama. All is made visible, the landscape and the life going on upon it . . . . His pictures of external nature . . . are of a piece with the story; they have precisely the same meaning. 38

If Hardy in his novels has empowered nature to act as destiny and despot, he also assigned to nature another less conspicuous, but not less artistic role. This is the use of nature as an indirect and pervasive agent in the portrayal of character and in the delineation of mood and emotion. Hardy used this device more frequently than any other in his novels.

It is impossible to imagine Hardy's characters separated from the landscape in which they exist. The major characters in his novels, Clym, Eustacia, Giles

37 Ibid., I, 99.
38 Baker, IX, 37.
Winterborne, Thomasin, Tess, Marty, and Gabriel Oak, all borrow their most distinctive characteristics from the natural world that surrounds them.

Hardy's picturing of landscape almost always performs a dual role. Description of nature not only serves to illustrate the world in which the protagonists move, but it also reveals the emotions and moods felt by the characters and the reader. This artistic use of nature has gained for Hardy an unassailable place among the great novelists of the world.
CHAPTER V

THE SYMBOLIC USE OF LANDSCAPE, BIRDS, AND ANIMALS

Hardy used landscape, birds, and animals in his novels as realistic symbols for ideas. He used landscape in The Mayor of Casterbridge to convey to the reader the frustration of Henchard's life. In the first pages of the book, the curtain rises to reveal a country road stretching away into the distance, "a road neither straight nor crooked, neither level nor hilly, bordered by hedges, trees, and other vegetation."¹ Down this road the weary figures of Henchard and his wife and child are trudging. This road is an image of the bleak pilgrimage which is the subject of the story. Henchard's life is bleak and lonely and, like the road, wanders away into nothingness.

In the opening pages of The Return of the Native Hardy draws a picture of the silent and inscrutable heath, that cannot be conquered or even understood. This untamable waste of Egdon Heath is a symbol of the vast, unexplored, and unfathomable physical universe.

¹Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, I, 1.
In the very first sentence of *The Woodlanders* Hardy projected the symbols that he contrasted throughout the novel, the woodland and the orchard. "The rambler who, for old association's sake, should trace the forsaken coach road running almost in a meridional line from Bristol to the south of England, would find himself during the latter half of his journey in the vicinity of some extensive woodlands, interspersed with apple-orchards."\(^2\) The woodlands represent the force of nature unrestrained, and the orchards symbolize nature temporarily held in check. He carried this symbolism forward in the creation of the uncontrolled characters of Fitzpiers and Felice Charmond, who were to be contrasted with the restrained and controlled personalities of Marty South and Giles Winterborne.

In the novel *The Return of the Native* it is not by chance that Hardy had Eustacia and Clym meet for the first time as lovers during an eclipse of the moon. While Clym waits for Eustacia, and as "he watched the far-removed landscape a tawny stain grew into being on the lower verge: the eclipse had begun."\(^3\) What could be a more fitting symbol of the shadowing and clouding of Clym and


\(^3\)Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, I, 238.
Eustacia's love than the shadowing and clouding of the moon at their first lovers' tryst?

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* Hardy gave a symbolical significance to the vivid description of the weeds in the garden through which Tess has to pass to listen to Clare's harp. The garden is "damp and rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch; and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells . . . ."\(^4\) Tess goes stealthily through weeds, "gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails . . . underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin . . . ."\(^5\) This offensive and repugnant description occurs along with an account of the lushness and fertility of Froom Valley. It serves a symbolical function of illuminating the role that Clare plays in relation to Tess.

The weeds, circumstantial as they are, have an astonishingly cunning and bold metaphorical function. They grow at Talbothays, in that healing precreative idyl of milk and mist and passive biology, and they too are bountiful with life, but they stain and slime and blight; and it is in this part of Paradise . . . that the minister's son is hidden, who, in his conceited impotence, will violate Tess more nastily than her sensual seducer.\(^6\)


\(^6\)Van Ghent, p. 201.
The last instance to be examined in this chapter of landscape used symbolically by Hardy is the tree that stands by John South's door in *The Woodlanders*. The importance of tenure to the tenant is treated with symbolical significance in this novel in South's association of the tree outside his window with his lifehold, and the destruction of the tree is symbolic of the loss of the freehold.

In the analysis of Hardy's use of birds as symbols, the instance of the starved goldfinch in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is one of the most familiar. Henchard has been reduced by many misfortunes to the status of beggary. He has no friends, no family, no fortune. He determines to make one more contact with his past by attending the wedding of his step-daughter, Elizabeth-Jane, and buys a wedding present, a goldfinch in a cage. At the wedding festivities, however, he is received very coldly by Elizabeth, and he leaves his old home dejected and despised. Some days later as Elizabeth-Jane is exploring her new house, she discovers "in a screened corner a new bird-cage, shrouded in a newspaper, and at the bottom of the cage a little ball of feathers—the dead body of a goldfinch. Nobody could tell her how the bird and cage had come there; though that the poor little songster had
been starved to death was evident." The dead goldfinch is a symbol of Henchard, who dies also because he has been abandoned by all who had once loved him.

The device of using birds as symbols is employed again in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in the use of the pheasants that Tess tenderly kills to relieve their suffering. She comes upon the birds in a wooded thicket where she has lain down to rest, and she discovers that they have all been wounded in some manner or other by hunters. She finds them lying about under the trees, "their rich plumage dabbled with blood; some were dead, some feebly twitching a wing, some contorted, some stretched out—all of them writhing in agony, except the fortunate ones whose tortures had ended during the night by the inability of nature to bear more." The birds are used as a symbol of Tess, who also must innocently suffer and die. Tess's suffering, like that of the birds, is ended by death.

Hardy continues to use birds as symbols. The next two instances to be considered are found in the novel *Jude the Obscure*. This novel marks Hardy's transition from fiction to poetry, from writing in which he treated people and events

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7Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, II, 196.  
realistically to writing in which he treated them as nonrealistic symbols for ideas . . . . In no other of the novels is the characterization and social background more realistic, and yet, in none of them is there such a strong tendency for people and events to become symbols.9

In the beginning of the novel, Jude has been hired by Farmer Troutham to frighten the rooks away from a field of corn. However, Jude soon begins to feel sympathy with the birds, and they seem "like himself, to be living in a world that . . . [does] not want them. Why should he frighten them away? . . . A magic thread of fellow-feeling united his own life with theirs. Puny and sorry as those lives were, they much resembled his own."10 The desire of the farmer to stone the birds symbolizes society's stifling of Jude's aspirations and hopes. Jude too is stoned by life and circumstances.

The other birds which achieve the status of symbols are the pigeons which Jude and Sue are forced to sell to a poulterer. But Sue cannot bear the idea of their death, and "on passing the poulterer's shop . . . she . . . [sees] the pigeons in a hamper by the door." Sue is so overcome with emotion at seeing them locked in the basket that she acts on impulse, and "first looking around

9Norman Holland, Jr., "Jude the Obscure: Hardy's Symbolic Indictment of Christianity," Nineteenth Century Fiction, IX (June, 1954), 50.

10Hardy, Jude the Obscure, I, 11.
quickly, she . . . [pulls] out the peg which fastened down the cover and the pigeons fly away. Hardy wished to convey the idea that Jude and Sue are caged like the pigeons and are sold by society for reasons which are quite incomprehensible to them. Hardy used the symbol of the trapped rabbit to convey the same idea. Jude hears the cry of the little creature caught in a gin, and he cannot sleep any longer "till he had put it out of its pain." Jude is guided to the animal by the sound of the trap's being dragged on the ground, and "reaching the spot he . . . [strikes] the rabbit on the back of the neck with the side of his palm and it . . . [stretches] itself out dead." The rabbit caught in the gin is Jude caught in the meshes that nature and society have set for him, and the only way that he can be released from the snare is through death.

Perhaps the most pointed use of symbols in the novel are those depicting the animalism of Arabella's nature. The episodes of Jude's meeting, courting, marriage to, and separation from Arabella are accompanied by an image concerning pigs. The meeting of Jude and Arabella is brought about by Arabella's hitting Jude with a pig's pizzle. He is walking along by a stream when "on a sudden something

11Ibid., II, 140.
12Ibid., II, 22.
smacked him sharply in the ear, and he became aware that a soft cold substance had been flung at him."\textsuperscript{13} Jude looks down at the thing that has hit him, and "a glance told him what it was—a piece of flesh, the characteristic part of a barrow-pig, which the countrymen used for greasing their boots, as it was useless for any other purpose."\textsuperscript{14} The only attraction that exists between Jude and Arabella is sexual, and no better image for what drew them together could be used. The pig's pizzle hangs on the bridge rail between them throughout their first conversation.

To enlarge further his picture of Arabella's grossness, Hardy made her father a pig-breeder and made their livelihood a pork shop.

The principal event in the courtship of Jude and Arabella is the chasing of swine. Arabella is trying to herd the pigs in a sty when one of the creatures plunges "through a hole in the garden hedge, and into the lane . . . . She . . . [rushes] in full pursuit out of the garden, Jude alongside her, barely contriving to keep the fugitive in sight."\textsuperscript{15}

Continuing with the swine image to emphasize the carnality of their relationship, Hardy had Jude and

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., I, 41.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., I, 59.
Arabella keep and raise a pig during their marriage, and it is the slaughtering of the pig which leads to the break-up of their union.

Hardy gives this entanglement of Jude and Arabella a complex and elaborate symbolism which demonstrates his theme. Jude has been trapped by nature into the sacrifice of his aspirations. Hardy said that the book was written "to tell without mincing of words of a deadly war waged between the flesh and the spirit, and to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aim."¹⁶ In his notes he stated that his purpose was "to show the contrast between the ideal life man wished to lead, and the squalid life he was fated to lead . . . . This idea was meant to run through the novel." It was to be a tragedy "of the WORTH encompassed by the INEVITABLE."¹⁷

Hardy's effective use of symbolism in his novels was only one of the several devices he used to emphasize his main theme of the elemental passions of man measured against the elemental background of nature.

Hardy viewed the suffering in nature and translated this suffering into symbols of man's distress and pain. He employed caged pigeons and goldfinches, trapped

¹⁶Ibid., I, iv.

¹⁷F. E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (London, 1930), pp. 41, 14.
animals, slaughtered pheasants and rooks to symbolize nature's savage treatment of aspiring human beings. He made use of swine to symbolize nature's ensnaring man in order to serve nature's will: the continuation of the race. He saw nature as the enemy of the mind, scorning man's finer emotions and showing no interest in his aspirations.

Hardy uses such diverse aspects of landscape as a road, orchards and woodlands, and an eclipse of the moon to symbolize the sorrow inherent in man's domain.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Thomas Hardy's concept of nature and nature's role in relation to man was formed under the influence of such men as John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Sir Leslie Stephen. As a result of the revolution in scientific thought that occurred in the nineteenth century, Hardy divested himself of all belief in the benevolence of nature. He became convinced that nature, if not actively malign, is indifferent to man's welfare.

Unlike Wordsworth and Clare, Hardy did not conceive of nature as the projection of the mysticism and divinity of a loving deity. Hardy saw beauty in nature but realized that such beauty only masked carnage and destruction, the chief features of the natural world. Hardy treated nature in his novels in a conspicuously unorthodox manner, portraying nature as man's enemy and tormentor. Man is never helped or aided by nature but is thwarted and destroyed by nature's cruel and inexplicable tricks.

In Hardy's novels nature assumes four varying roles in the tragedy of man: nature functions as fate or chance, nature becomes a character and dominates and controls man, its description is employed to portray character and mood, and it is used symbolically. In all his novels, Hardy selects the gloomy and ominous moods of animate and
inanimate nature to convince the reader that man is an 
unwelcome stranger in an inhospitable world. This is the 
view of nature that he employed throughout his work.

Hardy conceived of nature as chance or "crass 
Casuality," and thus chance becomes the personification 
of nature's indifference to man. Nature as chance affects 
the lives of his characters and changes their destiny. 
Hardy's world is a chance-governed universe, one in which 
nature plays many disastrous and fatal tricks on man.

Another effective device used by Hardy to show the 
enmity of nature toward man was to cast nature in the 
dominant role in the drama of man. In the novel The Return 
of the Native the heath as nature plays the leading role, 
and all the men and women in the novel are subject to the 
will of the heath. Nature has a more subtle part in The 
Woodlanders; in this novel nature suffers with man, and 
the influence over the protagonists is more diffused.

A further extension of Hardy's concept of nature's 
entanglement in man's affairs is the use of nature to por-
tray character, intensify emotion, and establish mood in 
his novels, a method practiced by Hardy in all his work. 
Through his manipulation of landscape to delineate charac-
ter, the characters seem to emerge from their physical 
surroundings as indigenous growths of nature, assuming the 
coloring and features of the natural world which
encompasses them. Hardy also utilized aspects of nature to reveal the emotions felt by the characters; these varying appearances of nature establish moods of sorrow, despair, and, sometimes, gaiety.

The final revelation of the participation of nature in man's life is asserted by Hardy's use of nature symbolism in his novels. He assigns landscape, birds, and animals symbolic parts to play in his work. Hardy's compassion for and sympathy with the suffering in nature instigated his use of aspects of nature as symbols of the suffering and torture of man. He realized that natural symbols could be poetically employed to convey ideas about human life in a forcible way.

In summing up what has been revealed of Hardy's treatment of nature, one fact stands out clearly, and that is that Hardy widened the scope of the novel to include nature as more than a background and promoted it to a deadly and titanic collaboration in human affairs. He presented nature as chance and destiny. Nature became a dominant character, overpowering the minds of the actors and domineering over their lives and fortunes. He showed the effect of nature upon man's personality and upon his moods and saw man's emotions mirrored in the natural world around him. He perceived that the suffering in nature was symbolic of the pain that man must endure in this "vale of tears."
The continuous theme in all of Hardy's novels is a contradiction everywhere apparent in life, the loftiness of man's aspiration and the lowliness of his condition.
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