CONFLICT ON THE HEATH

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CONFLICT OF THE HEATH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian dilemma was the result of an industrial revolution and an ideological revolution. Technically, the age of steam was initiated and mechanical power was being applied to theretofore manual employments. Ideologically, the age was in a turmoil. A period of unequaled religious crisis was afoot. The Return of the Native, and, to a lesser degree, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, served as the "darkling Plain" upon which Hardy tried to pose and to solve his theories of the universe, its meanings and its duties toward man. The "darkling plain" in Hardy's works is represented by Egdon Heath and the country surrounding this heath. In the before mentioned works, Thomas Hardy sought to work out a world view which would eliminate the problems posed by the Victorian crisis in thinking.

In 1836, Sir Charles Lyell, an interested scientist of geology, published his Principles of Geology. It was a work which proposed to set forth the age of the earth based upon geological data. His work dated the age of the earth millions of years prior to the age which the church doctrine allotted. Although Lyell had not planned this result, the church's doctrine had been challenged. The foundations of the church were weakened slightly.
Lyell's thesis, which was considered "heresy," was followed in 1859 by Darwin's *Origin of Species*, which served to substantiate Lyell's work. In Darwin's theory, evolution required millions of years in which to occur, and not, as the church had stated, thousands of years since man's beginning.

The Victorian was forced into deciding if there were a God, and, if so, what His duties were toward man. The mere existence of a universe did not necessarily insure the existence of a benevolent God. The predication of many members of the church that science was a study for atheists led many Victorians to a crisis in thinking. To follow reason was to suffer the title atheist; to follow intuition was an insult to man's reasoning capacities. This inconsistency between the church and science was the very problem with which Thomas Hardy had to contend.

It is not uncommon for a novelist to work out his world view within the novels themselves, to develop and transmit a philosophy, not in direct statements, but more often, through his characters and their environments. Such was the case with Thomas Hardy and his county of Wessex.

As a young man, Hardy expected too much of the world, and, because of this, he became a disillusioned idealist.¹

He was greatly influenced by two of the greatest thinkers of the Victorian period. John Stuart Mill and Charles Darwin offered a pragmatic view of the world. Mill's *On Liberty* greatly influenced Hardy's thoughts, to the extent that he committed to memory large portions of the essay. Mill expounds in his work on the threats to individuality. Individuality, as seen by Mill, was paramount to a person's well-being. John Stuart Mill saw that

The general average of mankind are not only moderate in intellect, but also moderate in inclinations: they have no tastes or wishes strong enough to incline them to do anything usual, and they consequently do not understand those who have, and class all such with the wild and intemperate who they are accustomed to look down upon.3

This desire for individuality, as expressed by Mill, was adhered to by Hardy.

Darwin's thesis served to strengthen Hardy's bias for truth, whatever the cost. Hardy, prior to *Origin of Species*, had "interpreted nature as something 'love alone had wrought.' " Darwin thought of nature as the scene of struggle for existence..." Hardy began to formulate

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4 Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

an idea of nature which was to be expressed in his major
ovels as an immutable, uncaring, yet seemingly malevolent,
setting, into which Hardy placed humanity, a struggling,
ignorant and defeated essence.

It is interesting to note that Essays and Reviews and
Origin of Species "could have destroyed his faith and forced
him into the first formulation of his 'pessimistic' philosophy,
even if they had not been supplemented by other rationalistic
literature." And with the augmented material at the disposal
of a disillusioned Thomas Hardy, his faith in the traditional
God crumbled and led him to the plain of doubt on which he
and other men of the Victorian Age found themselves. Matthew
Arnold captures this dilemma in "Stanzas from the Grande
Chartreuse." "Wandering between two worlds, one dead,/The
other powerless to be born,/With nowhere yet to rest my
head,/Like these, on earth I wait forlorn." 7

This early struggle with religious problems "was an
important factor in shaping his melancholy nature." 8 He
endeavored to embody in literature the implications of
science. "He seized these scientific facts and turned

6 Ibid., p. 39.
them to imaginative uses, and there is little doubt that his ideas of Nature and Immanent Will were influenced by them." \(^9\)

Religion, it was evident to Hardy, had failed in its purpose. It did not explain empirically the nature of God or the responsibility God had toward his creation, man. "Since the ideals of Christianity had failed to benefit the race, in Hardy's opinion, it is time for religion to be replaced by a more rational system." \(^10\) The traditional God of omnipotence and omniscience did not seem to care for the condition of man, and this seemed to negate his omniscience. Could a God, who knew the conditions man lived in, continue to let man suffer in his day to day endurance? Hardy did not believe so.

Hardy points out that God cannot be endowed with benevolence and omniscience. If he is benevolent, he must be limited in perception and unable to foresee the ultimate effect of his creative activities. On the other hand, if he is acquainted with conditions on earth, he must be indifferent to suffering. \(^11\)

Possibly, at the heart of Hardy's philosophy lies the suggestion that man is apparently helpless in this world. \(^12\)

\(^{9}\)Ibid., p. 23.

\(^{10}\)Lionel Stevenson, *Darwin Among the Poets* (Chicago, 1932), p. 244.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 272.

Hardy's novels of major importance leave the reader with the impression that man is subject to nature's control.\textsuperscript{13}

It is, then, in this frame of reference, of disillusionment and searching, of man's subjection to cruelty by the external forces of nature, that The Return of the Native and Tess of the D'Urbervilles will be studied. For, within this frame of reference there lies the heart of Thomas Hardy's cosmic view, and his own individual philosophy of life. His philosophy of life was not meant to be a formal philosophy, merely a means by which he could reach some level of understanding of the cosmos and its purpose. Hardy does not answer questions so much as he asks questions about the universe.

CHAPTER II

THE CHARACTER OF THE HEATH

Thomas Hardy did more than create a setting for his stories; he created a character of awesome perspective which dominated all activities within the landscape and personages who dwelled on the heath. The Return of the Native shows two aspects of nature: Nature as simple and Nature as mysterious and illimitable.¹

The initial introduction of Egdon Heath sets the tone for the ensuing book as untameable and vast.

... And the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath enbrownd itself moment by moment. Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor.

The heaven being spread with this pallid screen and the earth with the darkest vegetation, their meeting-line at the horizon was clearly marked. In such contrast the heath wore the appearance of the instalment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the sky.²

The heath was a world unto its own. The day wore the appearance of light, but Egdon, for all practical purposes, had omnisciently established night for itself and its

²Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (New York, 1964), p. 3.
inhabitants. Hardy has succeeded, in the opening paragraphs of his narrative, in introducing a majestic and powerful setting.

The next step in the development of Egdon's character into full proportions was the personification of this wasteland. The work of Herbert Grimsditch on the character of the heath is important, but it does not constitute a detailed study of the entire makeup of the heath with its varied aspects in relation to its purpose in The Return of the Native. By the use of frequent similes, Grimsditch observes; from living things, the inanimate is given a personality.³

The face of the heath by its mere complexion added an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread.⁴

The sombre stretch of round and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it.⁵

This vast stretch of land is now endowed with a face, a complexion, an ability to breathe and feel sympathy, and the ability to retard portions of natural order, anticipate future events unknown to others and intensify phenomena. All of this is Egdon Heath, not a setting, but a personality, not a landscape, but a feeling and moving entity.

³Herbert B. Grimsditch, Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1962), p. 49.
⁴Hardy, op. cit., p. 5.
⁵Ibid., p. 4.
The personality of the heath is not fully drawn; its finer ramifications, its subtler powers appear in the succeeding pages and chapters until the reader cannot deny that Thomas Hardy has created an enigmatical vastness which, in all probability, can never be fully explored.

The heath is inscrutable to the casual viewer and impenetrable by the empiricist. It must be understood through feeling and sensation. As night comes to the heath, the best opportunity for feeling an explanation of its personality arises: "It could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen [sic] its complete effect and explanation lying in this and the succeeding hours before the next dawn: then, and only then, did it tell its true tale."\footnote{Ibid.}

Hardy makes it clear that the heath is immutable. For centuries it has placidly endured, has not changed its appearance nor its attitude. "The untameable, Ishmaelitish thing that Egdon now was it always had been."\footnote{Ibid., p. 6.} With the passing of centuries "Egdon had hardly heeded the change."\footnote{Ibid., p. 124.}

Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis—the final overthrow.\footnote{Ibid., p. 4.}

Thus, the heath waits in watchful silence, enduring the passage of centuries, waiting, but for what? For whom?

The heath, now, is more than a place and more than a
personality. It takes on the appearance of an entire macrocosm, as, within its bounds, its inhabitants see no other area, cannot penetrate beyond its distant, misty horizon. On Egdon they live; on Egdon they die. There is no other place to them save Egdon.

To recline on a stump of thorn in the central valley of Egdon, between afternoon and night, as now, where the eye could reach nothing of the world outside the summits and shoulders of heathland which filled the whole circumference of its glance, and to know that everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New. The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence which the sea cannot claim. Who can say of a particular sea that it is old? Distilled by the sun, kneaded by the moon, it is renewed in a year, in a day, or in a hour. The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained. What is Egdon then? It is a pretentious entity, stopping time, stopping change, and stopping influences which might disturb its centuries-old slumber. The new ideas that invade the world, that challenge men's mind, that thwart men's rest, do not enter the boundaries of Egdon Heath. Here, as for generations, the old remains; what was, is; and, what could be is denied entrance. There is no Darwin prophesying evolution; there is no Mill advocating Individuality; there is no Lyell to measure the age of Egdon. There is only Egdon Heath, old and unchanging and allowing no changes to invade its perimeters.

Ibid., pp. 6-7.
Attempts, obviously, had been made to tame this "Ishmaelitish" thing, but all attempts failed. Where man had beaten back the boundaries of Egdon, Egdon had waited to return to its own boundaries when man grew lax and forgetful of its power. Hardy describes an area which bore "evidence of having once been tilled; but the heath and fern had insidiously crept in, and were reasserting their old supremacy."\(^{11}\) Nature, in the form of Egdon Heath, returns to its former state. Man's efforts are meaningless and without duration. Nature is a permanent aspect; man is a changing one. The process cannot be otherwise.

Egdon Heath possesses other attributes which loaned to it an aspect of royalty. At twilight, Egdon Heath evolved into a "a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity."\(^{12}\)

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Hardy describes Blackmoor, another, but less majestic part of the heath country. But, as with Egdon, "The secret of Blackmoor was best discovered from the heights around; to read aright the valley before... it was necessary to descend into its midst."\(^{13}\) Once within its midst, the true Blackmoor was inscrutable to those who dwelled

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\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 64.  
\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 4.  
therein. The Blackmoor land is in some aspects similar to Egdon Heath. Both are impenetrable to those surrounded by their natural barriers. Both are worlds unto themselves, seeking neither to be discovered nor interpreted by men from the outer world; both shroud themselves in a cloud of mystery to delude the idle explorer, so as to protect those who inhabit their boundaries.

Egdon and Blackmoor become actors in the human drama. They present a dichotomous nature. They are mysterious. They display protective natures. They are actors, yet serve as settings. They are macrocosms, yet they represent two comparatively small units of land on the earth.

Egdon Heath could present a beauty, but not under the conventional definition of beauty. "Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair."\(^\text{14}\) Her changing seasons, which changed her appearance to the outward world, present another aspect of Egdon Heath. "The country's ever-changing moods and the variable temper of the weather have also a distinct bearing upon Hardy's sense of place."\(^\text{15}\) During winter, when tempests and mists arose, "Egdon was aroused to reciprocity; for the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend. Then it

\[^\text{14}\text{Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 5.}\]  
\[^\text{15}\text{M. Pocock, On the Track of the Wessex Novella.}\]
became the home of strange phantoms..."16 This was the mysterious season, a season when Egdon and the elements mingled. The natural scene of winter is a land torn by winds and lashed by rain, but Egdon Heath finds in these elements a "lover" and a "friend." The vivid personification of this "haggard" land lends it quasi-grotesque beauty.

With a change of season, there occurs a dramatic change in the face of Egdon. "The month of March arrived, and the heath showed its first faint signs of awakening from winter trance. The awakening was almost feline in its stealthiness."17 The feline personification Hardy bestows on Egdon at this period of reawakening is brilliantly conceived. What better picture of deliberately slow movement than that of a cat? Egdon, with this innovation to its character, becomes graceful, cautious and elegant in its movement, with an implication of stealthiness.

As the season changes from spring to the heat of summer, yet another aspect of Egdon Heath is ascertainable. Hardy had the ability to sense sound and color in the countryside and the talent to describe these sights and sounds vividly.18 Egdon comes to glorious proportions during July. "The July sun shone over Egdon and fired its crimson heather to scarlet. It was the one season of the year, and the one weather of the

16Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 5.
17Ibid., p. 225.
season, in which the heath was gorgeous. "19 Froom Vale, the farm country in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, shares this beauty with Egdon during the summer. Froom Vale, as described by Hardy, had a summer which was "a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization . . . ."20 The countryside in the two novels is seething with natural phenomena.

The final step in the development of the character of Nature, i.e., Egdon Heath and all other settings on the heath country, is the equation of nature to man. The heath has taken part in man's progress passively "through disillusive centuries, unconcerned with the joys or sorrows of petty human kind."21 The heath was "a place perfectly accordant with man's nature—neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony."22 It seems as though Hardy believed that nature was not malign; nature seemed indifferent to the fate of human beings.23 "... there is the admixture of his two-fold vision of the immensity and littleness of the great and the small, whether it be the skies and stars, or a struggling human atom beneath

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19 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 283.
20 T. Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 190.
21 Webster, op. cit., p. 120.
22 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 6.
23 Webster, op. cit., p. 121.
their lofty gaze. . . ."24

If man views nature as malevolent, the reader must pause and ask himself if man deludes himself into believing this, or, if in fact, nature is malevolent toward its inhabitants. Nature was, in fact, slow to the point of plodding in its progress; but, did man misinterpret this slow nature to mean that nature lay in wait for man, as a feline predator awaits its prey? This question will be considered in succeeding chapters, for this question holds another aspect of Thomas Hardy's view of nature.

At twilight, Egdon looked as if in a state of repose.

This was not the repose of actual stagnation, but the apparent repose of incredible slowness. A condition of healthy life so nearly resembling the torpor of death is a noticeable thing of its sort; to exhibit the inertness of the desert, and at the same time to be exercising powers akin to those of the meadow, and even of the forest, awakened in those who thought of it the attentiveness usually engendered by under-statement and reserve.25

Is the proper aspect of man one of incredible slowness as intimated by Hardy? If this is his intimation, then he would seemingly reject any rapid change. This statement, however, must be qualified. Hardy was in search of a state of mind which would impose happiness, and this state, as will be shown, is only enjoyed by Hardy's rustics, his simple heath folk. The inquiring mind must exist in a state of unrest, of unhappiness. To the intelligent man, a submersion

24 Parker, op. cit., p. 7.
25 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 12.
into a rustic state would also produce unhappiness, for the intelligent man would become stagnated. Only for the disillusionsed quasi-intelligent man was a reversion to the simple state possible.

This trend of thought will be developed further as the other characteristics of the heath and its inhabitants are explored. In The Return of the Native and Tess of the D'Urbervilles a panorama of human frailties, frustrations, passions and tragedies unfolds within a background of nature, and from this evolves Hardy's cosmic view.
CHAPTER III

THE HEATH AS AN EMOTIONAL SETTING:
MRS. YEOBRIGHT AND CLYM, THE NATIVE

Hardy's characterizations of Clym and Mrs. Yeobright show two people who are in seeming harmony with the heath. In *The Return of the Native*, then, the reader listens "to two movements: the movement of man's life and the movements of nature's, counterpointed one against the other, to produce a complex beauty." ¹

Hardy places into the scales the country and the town. The country emerges the victor in such a balancing. It is the country people, the rustics, who seem to be "more loyal, charitable and demonstrative: country weather is less perverse and more easily definable: country people wear brighter colours and are more healthy. . . ." ² The typified figure for this paradise-like life is the simple rustic. His beliefs and manner of living have not changed over the centuries, just as the heath has not changed. He is at home in nature because he is primitive in his life and in his instincts.

The rustics in *The Return of the Native* are, almost, men out of their time. They still observe the old customs and

²E. Hardy, *op. cit.*., p. 148.
rites, as did their ancestors centuries before their time. During the yearly November festival "paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in all, and they adored none other than themselves."^1

The rustic understands the heath and finds nothing to fear from it. Regardless of the time of day or night, the rustic sees in the vast heath nothing truculent or malevolent. Its criss-crossing paths, an enigma to most persons, were as clearly defined to those rustics as if signs marked each step of their journey. "Those who knew it well called it a path; and, while a mere visitor would have passed it unnoticed even by day, the regular haunters of the heath were at no loss for it at midnight."^2

In the dark of night the smallest sound is magnified until most find terror in the sound, but the rustic finds nothing terrifying on the heath. Even a small boy, alone on the heath at night, is undisturbed by the sounds he hears: "The shrivelled voice of the heath did not alarm him, for that was familiar."^3 The familiar is not terrifying, and, to the rustic, the heath is familiar. The rustic understands the language of the heath and lives secure in

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^1T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, pp. 307-308.
^2Ibid., p. 63.
^3Ibid., p. 83.
this knowledge. It is a language inscrutable to the invader, the outsider. Only those who belong on the heath or those who were born on the heath can understand it.

Mrs. Yeobright presents a picture of an invader. She was not born on the heath, but she belongs on the heath. She has reached a level of understanding of its ways, and only rarely can a sign of her true feelings toward the heath be seen. One such rare example is the white picket fence which meticulously surrounds her house. It is almost "a mockworthy effort to maintain some degree of isolation from the heath and its myriad forms of life." But, for the most part, Mrs. Yeobright conducts herself with dignity on this tract of heath land.

Clym had made his decision to marry Eustacia Vye. The decision was contrary to the will of Mrs. Yeobright, for she saw in Eustacia something evil, something she could not explain, something that was present in her mysterious nature that Mrs. Yeobright feared was counter to her son's well-being. On the day of the wedding, when Mrs. Yeobright turned to glance in the direction of Mistover and the chapel that was there, even nature reinforced her fears because the grasshopper's "husky noises on every side formed a whispered chorus." Thus, nature reflected and magnified

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7 T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 255.
her thoughts into sounds, "whispered" sounds arousing trepidation in her.

Mrs. Yeobright, like the rustic child at night on the heath, found in the heath a friend, not a thing to be feared on nocturnal journeys. The landscape of the heath was a familiar surrounding to her and "the addition of darkness lends no frightfulness to the face of a friend."8 What one knows and understands can be a friend; what one fears and does not understand will be an enemy. Mrs. Yeobright understands the recesses of Egdon Heath.

Yet, for all her understanding of the heath, Mrs. Yeobright is not a rustic type. She is superior to the heath folk and aloof in her manner toward them. Her aloofness is a natural result of her belief that she was superior to the rustic of Egdon Heath.

Persons with any weight of character carry, like planets, their atmospheres along with them in their orbits; and the matron who entered now upon the scene could, and usually did, bring her own tone, into a company. Her normal manner among the heath-folk had the reticence which results from the consciousness of superior communicative power.9 Therefore, for all her likeness to the heath, there still remains a grain of the outsider, but an outsider of degree only.

8Ibid., p. 38.
9 Ibid., p. 35.
During her journey across the heath to visit and to reconcile herself with her son, the heath wears an ominous aspect for Mrs. Yeobright. The hot summer sun seems to beat down on her, making each step of the long journey a torturous one. The sky which often bore a "sapphirine hue of the zenith in spring and early summer" is absent. In its place was a sky of "metallic violet."\(^{10}\) Nature reflected her emotions at that moment. It was no longer a friendly sky, but one of malevolence. The metallic color of violet was harsh, and Mrs. Yeobright was suffering under its intense heat. Because she was in pain, she viewed nature as a hard, metallic thing; man and nature were reflecting the same image—one dealing and one suffering from its harshness. The sky had not seemed harsh to her before, but now even the countryside seemed harsh. "The trees beneath which she sat were singularly battered, rude and wild, and for a few minutes Mrs. Yeobright dismissed thoughts of her own storm-broken and exhausted state to contemplate theirs."\(^{11}\) Again, nature reflects her emotional state. Because she is "storm-broken and exhausted" the countryside, too, looks "battered... and wild." Even the place where she has made this pause in her journey carries a befitting name, the "Devil's Bellows." Nature has provided Mrs. Yeobright with an emotional setting. Even "the trees kept up a perpetual moan

\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. 327.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 329.
which one could hardly believe to be caused by the air."

Her return journey was more desolate than her embarkation. Her trip to be reconciled with Clym and Eustacia had ended in what she believed to be a statement of rejection. Knowing there were people in the house, she felt cast-off by her son because the door remained locked to her entry. She did not know what the true reasons were for this rejection, and she would never know.

Contemplating her own misery, she views a colony of ants and considers their permanence juxtaposed to her own impermanence.

To look down upon them was like observing a city street from the top of a tower. She remembered that this bustle of ants had been in progress for years at the same spot—doubtless those of the old times were the ancestors of these which walked there now.

But what of Clym? He is the native of the narrative, the man who belongs to the heath and belongs on the heath. Clym Yeobright imagines himself "to be emancipated and liberal-minded." But in reality, he is "more enmeshed by tradition and convention than he is aware."

Clym had left Egdon Heath and had journeyed to Paris. There he educated himself as to the meanings of the world.

\[12\text{Ibid.} \]
\[13\text{Ibid., p. 343.} \]
\[14\text{Samuel Chew, Thomas Hardy: Poet and Novelist (New York, 1964), p. 31.} \]
but Clym returned to Egdon Heath. He did not understand Paris fully, but he understood the workings of the heath countryside. It is only natural to return to those things which one understands.

If any one knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product. 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; his toys had been the flint knives and arrowheads which he found there, wondering why stones should 'grow' to such odd shapes; his flowers, the purple bells and yellow furze; his animal kingdom, the snake and croppers; his society, its human haun ters. Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym. He gazed upon the wild prospect as he walked, and was glad.\(^\text{15}\)

What then was Clym? A product of the heath and a part of the heath; he was one with the heath.

Clym had been so inwoven with the heath in his boyhood that hardly anybody could look upon it without thinking of him. So the subject recurred: if he were making a fortune and a name, so much the better for him; if he were making a tragical figure in the world, so much the better for a narrative.\(^\text{16}\)

"So much the better for a narrative" because Clym did make a tragical figure in Paris. Discontented with the world of experience, as exemplified by Paris, Clym lived a life he could not comprehend. It was a useless life, filled with duties with no purpose, save the making of a living. This was unsatisfactory for the young "idealist," and he returned

\(^{15}\) T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 205.

to the heath into which he had been woven, as a young man, and with which he had been permeated since birth.

... It is true that the whole trend of one novel after another portrays this same scale of values. To adapt one's life to one's traditional situation is good, to uproot oneself for material ends is bad, to do so for romantic passion or an abstract ideal is if anything worse.17

Clym, the native, returns to the heath because he has seen that the "traditional situation" is the one that best befits his life. He realizes his journey to Paris was based on the "wrong" motives; he repents his error and returns. While in Paris he saw "the general human situation" clearly, and this "realization ... causes ambition to halt awhile."18

His ambition had, indeed, halted, and he now wished to make a reappraisal. This reappraisal leads inevitably to a realization on his part that the world represented by Paris, instead of alienating him from the heath, has instead magnified this love for the heath.19

Clym, the embodiment of the new man in a changing world, desires to find himself again on the heath and establish his old values. Clym desires to combine high thinking with the plain living which is to be found among the heath dwellers.20

17Holloway, op. cit., p. 286.
18T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 222.
19Chew, op. cit., p. 41.
To be doomed to behold the world through smoked glass for an indefinite period was bad enough, and fatal to any kind of advance; but Yeobright was an absolute stoic in the face of mishaps which only affected his social standing; and, apart from Eustacia, the humblest walk of life would satisfy him if it could be made to work in with some form of his cultural scheme.\footnote{T. Hardy, \textit{The Return of the Native}, p. 296.}

Clym, due to a weakening of his eyesight, has turned to the menial occupation of a furze cutter. This occupation, as long as it does not interfere with Clym's vision of combining high thinking and plain living, is ideal. The heath and Clym are sympathetic partners in his endeavor. Clym harvests his bounty from the heath and the heath supports its humble child. As stated earlier, one could not view the heath without thinking of Clym. The inverse of this must also be true. One could not view Clym without thinking of the heath. They are both stoic, simple, and basic in nature. "The monotony of his [Clym's] occupation soothed him, and was in itself a pleasure."\footnote{Ibid., p. 299.}

Immediately after his return to the heath, Clym resists his total submersion into his native land, momentarily. He turns to books and studies instead of to the land. But "after the purification of suffering" when his eyesight begins to verge on blindness, "he relishes a rapport with the bugs and bushes" once again.\footnote{McCann, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 142.}
Eustacia Vye's one wish was to leave Egdon Heath, and Clym's devotion to her seemed to assure her of that departure. But, Clym's love is a divided one, and an unequally divided one. The heath claims his first attention, not Eustacia. Eustacia is lost to Clym as long as they remain within the framework of the heath.

Clym watched her as she retired towards the sun. The luminous rays wrapped her up with her increasing distance, and the rustle of her dress over the sprouting sedge and grass die away. As he watched, the dead flat of the scenery overpowered him, though he was fully alive to the beauty of that untarnished early summer green which was worn for the nonce by the poorest blade.24

Even as Clym watches Eustacia moving across the heath, his attention is caught up, not by her departure, but by the colors and beauty of the heath. The heath, it seems, works to muffle Eustacia's presence, so as to eliminate from Clym's eyes and ears any hint of her vanishing figure. The heath co-operates with Clym to shut out all things which are not for his betterment, and co-operates to bring Clym's thoughts back to the heath.

Upon the discovery of his mother's last words from Susan Nonesuch, a simple rustic, Clym's anguish is acute. He realizes what Eustacia has done, and he blames her for the death of his mother. Yet, when he leaves the house of Susan, his passion is not directed toward Eustacia. The heath seems to come forward and overpower these feelings, making

24T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 245.
his anger and his deep anguish appear to be microcosms in a macrocosm. The heath looms before him and portrays its vastness, making man's state in life a grain of sand on a vast expanse of beach.

The pupils of his eyes, fixed steadfastly on blankness, were vaguely lit with icy shine; his mouth had passed into the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus. The strangest deeds were possible to his mood. But they were not possible to his situation. Instead of there being before him the pale face of Eustacia, and a masculine shape unknown, there was only 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. 25

Clym's passion against Eustacia is diverted by his own counterpart, the heath. The heath absorbs his small problem into its own vastness and Clym returns to a degree of sanity. A problem which would seem great under any normal set of circumstances is suddenly thrust into the background by the vast and immutable heath which dominates all those who inhabit its boundaries.

With the death of Eustacia, Clym finds his remorse overpowering. A year on the heath purges Clym of any feelings of guilt which he had, and he returns to his original plan to teach a higher learning to those of the simple life.

Hardy ironically places the last scene of the novel

on the very spot where his first scene took place, the
top of Rainbarrow. Clym is seen standing atop the barrow,
giving a sermon to the rustics of Egdon Heath. The heath
has claimed its victims, Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright, and
has won its child back to the simple, uncomplicated life
the heath, itself, nurtures.

Mrs. Yeobright represents a common sense conventionality
of the present; Clym represents a thoughtful asceticism of
the future; the heath represents all time, for it was as
it is, and is as it will be, unchanging.

\[26\text{Schweik, op. cit., p. 758.}\]
CHAPTER IV

THE HEATH AS AN EMOTIONAL SETTING

AND FATE: EUSTACIA VYE

If Clym Yeobright personifies the new man, and if he is to live out his life as an itinerant preacher in rewarding un-rewardingness, then Eustacia Vye must represent a person out of some remote past who can find no happiness in the world. Several moods dominate The Return of the Native: "one in which the human condition and local environment are fused and harmonized...," which would be personified by Clym Yeobright, and "the other when character is antagonistic to environment," as personified by Eustacia Vye.1 Eustacia is not in harmony with her environment and attempts, vainly, to fight the controlling force of the heath.

The first glimpse of Eustacia Vye leaves her nameless, She is seen standing on the highest part of the heath, Rainbarrow, by the redcleeman Venn and then is seen to disappear. The scene takes place as night is approaching, seeming to suggest "that night-time of the heath is indeed the most fitting symbol of the condition of man...").2 She is a vague, shadowy figure at the opening of the narrative and seems to surmount even Egdon.

1Parker, op cit., p. 8.

2Charles Child Walcutt, Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction (Minneapolis, 1966), pp. 159-160.
It is not until Chapter VII that Eustacia Vye takes on the proportions of a person out of her time, a person who is "Queen of the Night." Her title is quite appropriate, for she seems to incorporate all the essences of night into her own frame. "To see her hair was to fancy that a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form its shadow; it closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow." The description given by Hardy of Eustacia Vye continues to re-enforce the view of night, both in the heath and in Eustacia. "She had Pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries, and their light, as it came and went and came again, was partially hampered by their oppressive lids and lashes. . . ." 

She is "Queen of the Night." Her hair is darker than the darkness of winter on the heath; her eyes were full of "nocturnal mysteries." Her presence brought memories of such things as . . . "tropical midnights." Since she had arrived at Egdon Heath "she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone. . . ." In her hair she wore a piece of "black velvet" which restrained her hair which at times seemed "clouding her forehead." This, then, is the initial view of Eustacia Vye. Looking closely at the words which are

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3T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 75.
4Ibid., p. 76.
5Ibid.
6Ibid., p. 77.
7Ibid.
used to describe her, i.e., darkness, nightfall, nocturnal, midnights, dark, clouding, it is evident that Eustacia Vye is a counterpart of Egdon Heath. For the heath, too, possesses all these qualities which Eustacia assumes as her own.

Hardy contrasts the darkness and light of the heath, showing that:

The bright sky and the dark heath seem to be two aspects of life—aspiration contrasted with ability, freedom or will against fate, or intelligence against the dark compulsions of instinct. The glowing sky stands for the potential . . . the dark heath for the forces . . . that oppress and defeat them.  

This contrast is seen when Hardy views the heath at twilight. "... darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while date stood distinct in the sky. Looking upwards, a furze-cutter would have been inclined to continue work; looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggots and go home."  

This could also describe Eustacia Vye. Her potentials, her lighter aspects, had been darkened by the heath, defeated. She had "imbibed much of what was dark in its tone."

Eustacia was meant to rule the heath, possibly, in former times. As she was a person out of her time, so was Egdon Heath. "To many persons this Egdon was a place which

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8 Walcutt, op. cit., p. 159.

9 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 3.
had slipped out of its century generations ago, to intrude as an uncouth object to this. It was an obsolete thing, and few cared to study it."\(^{10}\)

Eustacia does not understand the heath because she never studied its meanings. "To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtle beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapours."\(^{11}\)

It would seem as if Hardy were explaining Eustacia Vye in *Desperate Remedies* when he states:

But to attempt to gain a view of her—or indeed of any fascinating woman—from a measured category, is as difficult as to appreciate the effect of a landscape by exploring it at night with a lantern—or of a full chord of music by piping the notes in succession.\(^{12}\)

Thus, both she and Egdon had to be explored fully, and neither she nor Egdon Heath were in full understanding or appreciation of each other.

Eustacia is tied to the heath in another manner. It is the time of the yearly festival on Egdon Heath, an ancient rite performed by the rustic. Small fires were built over the heath and the rustics gather around them, just as their ancestors had done centuries before them. These flames are representative of another quality of Eustacia. "Assuming that the souls of men and women are

\(^{10}\text{Ibid.}, p. 205.\)

\(^{11}\text{Ibid.}, p. 81.\)

\(^{12}\text{Thomas Hardy, Desperate Remedies (New York: 1869), p. 8.}\)
visible essences, you could fancy the colour of Eustacia's should to be flame-like. The sparks from it that rose into her dark pupils gave the same impression."13 This image is re-enforced by the redleman. Venn, while discussing Wildeve, noticed and "was surprised to see how a slow fire could blaze on occasion."14 The fires of the heath and the fires within her are counter-balanced to one another. Eustacia was flame-like, capable of blazing on occasion and then subsiding into her more natural state. This idea is re-enforced later in the narrative when Eustacia was on the heath by her own bonfire, which had been built for reasons contrary to the rustics' festive fires. "As Eustacia crossed the firebeams she appeared for an instant as distinct as a figure in a phantasmagoria—a creature of light surrounded by an area of darkness: the moment passed, and she was absorbed in night again."15 She was flame-like, but was overshadowed by the night of the heath. She could not sustain her own brilliance long before the obscurity of the heath pushed her into her background.

Her title "Queen of the Night" was an appropriate one. She possessed all the qualities a queen should, and she

13T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 76.
endowed the title with divine properties from the ancient world of the pagans.

Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government.\(^{16}\)

Hardy implies that the heath did not bear a friendly aspect toward women, that the heath had a special antagonism for them.

A tract of country unaltered from that sinister condition which made Caesar anxious every year to get clear of its glooms before the autumnal equinox, a kind of landscape and weather which leads travellers from the South to describe our island as Homer’s Cimmerian land, was not, on the face of it, friendly to women.\(^{17}\)

Eustacia would come to believe that the land did hold a special antagonism toward women. She knew that she was not benevolent in her feelings toward it. She, in fact, felt that her energies were wasted on this wild track of land, and her potential drowned in its vastness.

"Why did a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath?"\(^{18}\) Fate had destined her presence here. As a child she had been left in the care of her grandfather, Captain Vye, who had chosen Egdon Heath as a place to live after his retirement from sea duty. "She hated the change" from Budmouth.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 75. \(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 60. \(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 77.
and "felt like one banished; but there she was forced to abide."19

With the passing of years, Budmouth underwent a transformation in her mind. She began to see it as a city of life and love, a city of romance; inversely, with the passing of years, Egdon Heath became more and more desolate to her, a prison, a Hades. *Eustacia's* qualities of Dignity and taste are partly natural, partly absorbed by her from the austerity of the heath country, where the remembered glitter of Budmouth is transformed by her romantic imagination into a fairyland instead of transforming her into something tawdry, as it might have done if she had stayed on there.20

When her thoughts turned to Budmouth, she imagined her life as it might have been if she had stayed there. The realities of the small seaport escaped her; it became a wonderland of gay parties and romantic settings. It became a place to escape to, to elude the grip of the heath.

Thus it happened that in Eustacia's brain were juxtaposed the strangest assortment of ideas, from old time and from new. There was no middle distance in her perspective: romantic recollections of sunny afternoons on an esplanade, with military bands, officers, and gallants around, stood like gilded letters upon the dark tablet of surrounding Egdon. Every bizarre effect that could result from the grand solemnity of a heath, was to be found in her. Seeing nothing of human life now, she imagined all the more of what she had seen.21

But, on the heath, she was a queen without realms to rule, a queen without courtiers. "The only way to look queenly

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19Ibid., p. 78.
20Walcutt, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
21T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 78.
without realms or hearts to queen it over is to look as if you had lost them; and Eustacia did that to a triumph. "22 She was unable to assume a tragic figure's role and play it "to a triumph." All the qualities she had were wasted on Egdon Heath, and this knowledge drove her to hate the heath with a passion.

But celestial imperiousness, love, wrath, and favour had proved to be somewhat thrown away on netherward Egdon. Her power was limited, and the consciousness of this limitation had biassed her development. Egdon was her Hades, ... Her appearance accorded well with this smouldering rebelliousness, and the shady splender of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her. A true Tartarean dignity sat upon her brow, and not factitiously or with marks of constraint, or it had grown in her with years. 23

The heath was her Hades, and she loathed it. Only one season seemed endurable on the heath to the "Queen of the Night." "I cannot endure the heath, except in its purple season." 24

It is only appropriate that she should love the purple season. She was royalty, and royalty throughout the ages has loved the rich reds and purples which they claim to be their royal colors. The "Queen of the Night" felt the heath responded to her majesty only when it wore purple, during the spring of the year. The rest of the year, as the redleman affirms, Egdon was "jail" to her. It restrained her, held her in, and she hated it as her Hades and as her jail.

22 Ibid., p. 79. 23 Ibid., p. 77. 24 Ibid., p. 220.
Eustacia has a counterpart, a sympathetic spirit in the character of Damon Wildeve. When Wildeve is in the presence of his wife, Thomasin, he displays an attitude which prompts her to accuse him of viewing "the heath as if it were somebody's gaol instead of a nice wild place to walk in."\textsuperscript{25} He, too, feels the restraining influence of the heath. His and Eustacia's spirits are kindred in this respect.

Only infrequently does the heath wear a friendly aspect to Eustacia. These moments usually center around moments when she is "in love." To Eustacia waiting for the arrival of Wildeve, the heath "was to the full as lovely a place as Rainbarrow, though at rather a lower level; and it was more sheltered from wind and weather on account of the few firs to the north."\textsuperscript{26} It was not an uncongenial spot during these interludes when Eustacia was "in love," but, her love was one born of boredom and vacillated constantly. "On Egdon, coldest and meanest kisses were at mind prices; and where was a mouth matching hers to be found?"\textsuperscript{27} Eustacia enslaves Wildeve "half in boredom, half from self-deception and love of love."\textsuperscript{28} Hers was an unconstant love, dependent entirely upon her moods and caprices, not upon a deep devotion.

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 413. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 79.
And so we see our Eustacia—for at times she was not altogether unlovable—arriving at that stage of enlightenment which feels that nothing is worth while, and filling up the spare hours of her object. This was the sole reason of his ascendency: she knew it herself. 29

When they are together, at times, they are in sympathy with one another. One such meeting they avow their hatred for the heath, she by calling it "my cross, my shame, . . ." and he by stating "I abhor it to. . . ." At that moment they notice "how mournfully the wind blows around us now." 30 Nature is a mirror reflecting their mutual mood. If they are mournful of their particular situation, nature too is mournful and echoes this in the wind.

Eustacia is aware that her love for Wildeve is placed upon the wrong basis, but even this knowledge does not, nor can it, keep her from following her emotions and involving herself with him. "Reason, at any rate according to Hardy in this particular situation, cannot keep Eustacia from travelling along a path that would not be travelled along if her reason could conquer her emotions." 31 She is the subject of her own emotions; her makeup is not evenly distributed. According to Duffin, man's nature is fourfold: Passion, Reason, Emotion and Instinct. 32 Eustacia's psychological makeup is heavily weighted in emotion which is capable of overpowering reason. This reliance

29T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 81.

30Ibid., p. 98. 31Braybrooke, op. cit., p. 28.

32H. C. Duffin, Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems, and the Dynasts (University of Manchester, 1962).
upon emotion will lead eventually to the destruction of Eustacia.

To be loved to madness—such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover. 33

Eustacia is dominated by passion, passion which dominates her reason.

It is conceivable that Hardy decided on this misbalance in agreement with John Stuart Mill's essay. Mill states that

... desires and impulses are as much a part of perfect human being as beliefs and restraints; the strong impulses are only perilous when not properly balanced; when one set of aims and inclinations is developed into strength, while others, which ought to co-exist with them, remain weak and inactive. 34

Hardy allows Eustacia's passion to become "perilous" by not restraining it by a reasoning power as strong as her passionate power.

When dominated by passion and awaiting Wildeve's arrival to fulfill their rendezvous, Eustacia views nature as wild and in harmony with her own spirit. "Eustacia walked to the bank and looked down the wild and picturesque vale towards the sun, which was also in the direction of Wildeve's." 35

33 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 79.
34 Mill, op. cit., p. 75.
35 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 108.
Nature and man are in harmony. These instances in which she feels no animosity from, nor towards, the heath are few in number. Only when Eustacia is in love, or on the heath during the purple season, can she find no malevolence.

Wildeve's love, too, is not a constant one. His love for Eustacia vacillates, until the time he finds that another man is interested in Eustacia. Then jealousy dominates his movements, just as Eustacia was content to love Wildeve but not to marry him until she discovered that he loved Thomasin. Their natures are alike; their motivations are very similar. "The old longing for Eustacia had reappeared in his soul: and it was mainly because he had discovered that it was another man's intention to possess her." Wildeve is not governed by reason; he is driven by passion. He, as Eustacia, is subject to unequally divided portions of his nature, a misbalance of reason and emotion.

Hardy cleverly interposed a symbol which is representative of Eustavia and Wildeve. After her marriage, wishing to see her alone, Wildeve finds a moth and lets it fly into her window. It is consumed by the flame on the table. It must be remembered that Eustacia was "flame-like" and could "blaze upon occasion."

\[36\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 253.}\]
Wildeve contemplated her for a minute, and then retreating into the heath beat the ferns lightly, whereupon moths flew out alarmed. Securing one, he returned to the window, and holding the moth to the chink, opened his hand. The moth made towards the candle upon Eustacia's table, hovered around it two or three times, and flew into the flame.

Just as the moth was drawn to his death by the light from the candle, so is Wildeve drawn to his death by the "flame-like" Eustacia Vye who, consumes him in her passion. Just as the moth sought the light, so did Wildeve seek Eustacia. Just as the moth was annihilated by the flame, so was Wildeve killed by his love for Eustacia.

... The novels of Hardy illustrate the conception of a man as a willing rather than a thinking being and that he is ruled not by reason but by the mysterious inclinations of his nature. The will within him forces him on, often against his better judgment.

Eustacia's passion for Wildeve rapidly cools when she discovers that Clym Yeobright is returning to the valley, returning from Paris. The mere mention of Paris was enough to render her love for Wildeve a thing of the remote past. Paris represented, a thousand times over, more romance than Budmouth. She immediately began to think of Clym as the retainer of her love. Hardy's insight into the weaknesses of women is perceptive. "Once let a maiden admit the possibility of her being stricken with love for some one at a certain hour and place, and the thing is as good as done." This

37 Ibid., p. 319.

is precisely what occurs. She channels all of her passion from Wildeve to Clym, without even the first glimpse of Clym. Such were her passions, unreasoning and unchanging in their ability to turn capriciously.

Eustacia schemes to meet Clym and finally touches upon taking a part in the mumming play. The heath wears not an unattractive appearance to her as she crosses it in the disguise of a Turkish Knight. The moon "threw a spirited and enticing rightness upon the fantastic figures." Their path led them through a vale "green to a width of ten yards..." 40 Again, the heath wears an almost attractive appearance when Eustacia is in love.

Once the knowledge of Clym's return was known to her, she fell to imaginative dreams. The heath became less overpowering to her and her fascination for Clym overshadowed Egdon Heath.

There was, however, gradually evolved from its transformation scenes a less extravagant episode, in which the heath dimly appeared behind the general brilliancy of the action. She was dancing to wondrous music, and her partner was the man in silver armour who had accompanied her through previous fantastic changes, the visor of his helmet being closed. The mazes of the dance were ecstatic. Soft whispering came into her ear from under the radiant helmet, and she felt like a woman in Paradise. Suddenly these two wheeled out from the mass of dancers, dived into one of the pools of the heath, and came out somewhere beneath into an iridescent [sic] hollow, arched with rainbows.41

Her dreams are fulfilled and she marries Clym Yeobright.

40Ibid., p. 153.
41Ibid., p. 138.
Their home at Alderworth is at first serene. She is content with their existence, hoping, probably, that soon Clym will tire of this life and return to the gaiety of Paris. However, Hardy best explains Eustacia's feelings of serenity in a passage from Desperate Remedies.

Perhaps, indeed, the only bliss in the course of love which can truly be called Eden-like is that which prevails immediately after doubt has ended and before reflection has set in—at the dawn of the emotion... before the consideration of what this love is, have given birth to the consideration of what difficulties it tends to create...  

In the first days of their marriage only "bliss" could describe their existence. They were happy in "a sort of luminous mist" which kept the harshness of the heath away from Eustacia's eyes. Yet, Clym remembered, as Eustacia apparently did not, her speech on the "evanescence of love," and in remembering, "he recoiled at the thought that the quality of finiteness was not foreign to Eden." It is interesting to note that in both Desperate Remedies and The Return of the Native, Hardy compares the first stages of love to Eden; this state of love carries the inference of man losing his position in Paradise and entering the world of reality.

But, as in Desperate Remedies, Eustacia Vye finds that "Sudden hopes that were rainbows to the sight proved but mists to the touch." She realizes that her dream of living in

42 T. Hardy, Desperate Remedies, p. 43.
43 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 283.
Paris is lost to Clym, who is content to abide on the heath in a simple endurance.

The estrangement of Clym and Eustacia from Mrs. Yeobright leads to Mrs. Yeobright's journey to Alderworth to make an attempt at reconciliation. As it has been seen, this journey proved a fatal one for Mrs. Yeobright and, ultimately, for Eustacia Vye. Eustacia, upon Clym's realization of the cause of his mother's death, returns to Mistover, the house of her grandfather. Eustacia seemed now to be within the grips of destiny and the heath.

She could show a most reproachful look at times, but it was directed less against human beings than against certain creatures of her mind, the chief of these being Destiny, through whose interference she dimly fancied it arose that love slighted only on gliding youth—that any love she might win would sink simultaneously with the sand in the glass. The idea prompted by viewing the sand of an hour glass slipping through time had now been fulfilled. She had lost the love of youth.

Her wish now was for death. "Why should I not die if I wish? . . . I have made a bad bargain with life, and I am weary of it--weary." This utterance has led J. W. Beach to assert that Eustacia's death was a suicide. However, as will be shown, this is not probable. It is quite natural, when all attempts have failed toward reaching a goal, for a

\[46T. Hardy, \textit{The Return of the Native}, p. 399.\]
\[47\textit{Ibid.}\]
\[48\textit{Beach, op. cit.}, p. 91.\]
person to wish for the lifting of the burden, but this does not mean that, when saner moments have returned, the wish will still be made. It is a wish of frustration, but not of sincerity. Eustacia Vye was far too vital a figure to maintain such a wish for any length of time.

However, at this juncture of the narrative, the hand of Fate seems to play a most prominent role. Clym, wishing to be reconciled with Eustacia, sends a message asking her to return to him. The message is delayed in its arrival by a bumbling rustic who simply forgets his errand until late that evening. Eustacia is also the subject of Fate when Charley, seeking to please Eustacia, builds a fire for her. The fire signal from Mistover was the one to which Wildeve had answered since his love for Eustacia had first seized his passion. It was a signal he would not refuse to answer. This evening the signal was not made by Eustacia, who had resolved that, although she would rather be with Wildeve, her marriage vows were too seriously taken by her to allow her to follow this desire. Now, Fate had thrown into her path the physical proof of a subconscious desire. "... it is usually clear that if the incident Hardy describes had not occurred, some other detail could soon enough have brought about the same ultimate result."\(^49\) It is now clear that nothing within Eustacia's power is controlling her life.

\(^{49}\text{Holloway, op. cit., p. 250.}\)
She is in the hands of fate, a malevolent fate which seems to seek her destruction. However, Hardy is equivocal on this idea because he, himself, is not sure of the qualities of Fate.

Hardy now uses the landscape to intensify the emotions of the plot. Eustacia and Wildeve had made an appointment to rendezvous; their intended purpose is for him to take her to Budmouth. She could not refuse his help to Budmouth and at the same time accept his monetary help. She is held in the vice-like grip of fate.

The weather on the heath turns to a more gruesome intensity as the night progresses. "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." Reason was asserting itself in Eustacia. "At this time it was in her view a windy, wet place, in which a person might experience much discomfort, lose the path without care, and possibly catch cold." With reason being the dominant part of her nature at this time, and with her realization of the dangers of losing the path in such a storm, it is evident that Beach's theory of suicide is improbable. She was aware of and took care of the treacherous paths she was traversing to reach her destination.

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50 Carol Reed Andersen, "Time, Space, and Perspective in Thomas Hardy," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, IX (December, 1954), p. 204.
She had every intention of meeting Wildeve and no intention of committing suicide.

As the final catastrophe approaches, the heath seems to don the proper attitude and coloring. "The gloom of the night was funereal; all nature seemed clothed in crape [sic]. The spiky points of the fir trees behind the house rose into the sky line turrets and pinnacles of an abbey." The heath reflects the ensuing death scene; it was "funereal" and the trees had the appearance of "turrets and pinnacles of an abbey."

It was only by chance that Eustacia did not meet the redlelaman that night. Instead, Venn found Thomasin wandering over the heath and gave her the warning that part of the shoring of the weir had given way. Thus, if a person familiar with the heath were to take the usual path, it would lead to disaster. Eustacia was familiar with the heath and took the path leading by the weir.

During her walk she contemplated the condition of the elements. "The moon and stars were closed up by cloud and rain to the degree of extinction. It was a night which led the traveller's thoughts instinctively [420] to dwell on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world . . . ." 54

53Ibid., p. 420.

54Ibid., pp. 420-421.
Again, the re-enforcement of nature is seen in the impending tragedy. The stars were 'dosed to the degree of extinction" and the night seemed to cause the traveller "to dwell on nocturnal . . . disaster."

During her journey to Rainbarrow, the chaos of nature seemed to grow more intense and "Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without."55

At this point, it could be conceded that Eustacia Vye had, indeed, been beaten by the heath. She had resisted it and the heath had seemingly won, but it was a hollow victory. Unknowingly, she takes the accustomed path and falls to her death in the weir. Wildeve, in an attempt to save her, also drowns. Thus, the rebel against the heath was destroyed by the heath.

It may have been the hand of Fate which destroyed her. The forgotten letter, the fire which was set by a well-meaning Charley, the response of Wildeve to the signal" sent, the tempest on the heath that night which made visibility impossible, and the destruction of the path which Eustacia always used may have all been Fate, or Chance, or the Immanent Will (all of which Thomas Hardy used interchangeably).

In death, Eustacia was still the "Queen of the Night." She was majestic, even exotic in death. Upon the funeral

55Ibid., p. 421.
bier she was even more deserving of the title she had used in life.

Pallor did not include all the quality of her complexion, which seemed more than whiteness; it was almost light. The expression of her finely carved mouth was pleasant, as if a sense of dignity had just compelled her to leave off speaking. Eternal rigidity had seized upon it in a momentary transition between favour and resignation. Her black hair was looser now than either of them had ever seen it before, and surrounded her brow like a forest. The stateliness of look which had been almost too marked for a dweller in a country domicile had at last found an artistically happy background.56

The Return of the Native seems to imply that destruction awaited the two rebels against the Heath, Eustacia and Wildeve, and a "serene content" was awarded those who submitted themselves to circumstance. "There is a greater emphasis than heretofore upon the power of environment over the fortunes of humanity."57 If this is, in truth, the lesson, then the implication is clear. Nature is malevolent and benevolent. It is malevolent to those things or people who resist its awesome force and try to, in some manner, change their lot; it is a benevolent force to those who succumb to it and enjoy the fruits it has to offer. Eustacia Vye was an intruder, an outsider, who could not bring herself to be dominated by anything inanimate such as the heath, or anyone such as Clym or Wildeve. She was a sphere which sought one aim—release from the heath. The heath was oppressive to her for the most part; it was only occasionally beautiful when she was

56 Ibid., p. 448.
57 Chew, op. cit., p. 40.
in love or "in love with the idea of love."

Wildeve was a sympathetic sphere seeking domination by Eustacia. His rebellion against the heath was more of a mirror of her rebellion than it was of his own origin. Eustacia was meant to rule, to be the "Queen of the Night," and not to be ruled.

"In its blackest mood, the heath destroyed its enemy, the Queen of the Night; yet, it was infinitely tender to Clym, for was not he a little mad?" Cym was a part of the heath, and possibly a little mad because of his submersion into the heath. If Clym was a part of the heath, then he too was responsible for her destruction.

The characters in The Return of the Native either hate the heath violently or love it passionately, and this one fact seems to determine their own individual destinies, survival or cessation in life.
CHAPTER V

TESS AND NATURE

Hardy created in Tess of the D'Urbervilles another frame of reference in which nature could be viewed. In this novel, life changes just as the scenery changes for Tess from the Vales of Blackmoor and Froom in her innocence, to the grim winter of Flintcomb-Ash and her wedding night with Clare.¹

"The Vale was known in former times as the Forest of White Hart. . . ."² This Vale "was to her the world, as its inhabitants the races thereof."³ Tess was surrounded by people who were simple in their lives and simple in their views. Tess represents a country girl; she represents "the agricultural community in its moment of ruin."⁴ She is representative of a girl who is confronted with new ideas and old prejudices, and this brings about her ruin, and her death.

What was the community like from which she originated? While in the valley "the world seems to be constructed upon a smaller and more delicate scale"⁵ than the rest of the world. This bred into its inhabitants a smaller view of the world and a delicate sense of the mores of the world.

²T. Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 10. ³Ibid., p. 40.
⁵T. Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 9.
The hand of fate first enters into Tess's life by way of her father. He, seemingly by fate, encounters a parson who has made it his hobby to investigate the old family trees of England. He fills Mr. Durbeyfield with visions of his family's past greatness, and Durbeyfield, in turn, fills Mrs. Durbeyfield with the hopes that their lot could be made better. Theirs, he asserts, is a family which numbered among the few great families of ancient England. Tess is to receive from her parents the prodding which sends her on her fateful journey to claim her kinship with the D'Urbervilles of Trantridge.

Because her father's drinking has incapacitated him, Tess undertakes the journey to the market with their bee hives. It is this journey which obligates her to honor her parents' wishes. Unfortunately, Prince, their horse, the sole provider for the family, is killed, and the Durbeyfield's are left without means of delivering their wares to the market.

"The mute procession past her shoulders of trees and hedges became attached to fantastic scenes outside reality, and the occasional heave of the wind became a sigh of some immense sad soul, conterminous with the universe in space. . . ." Nature "sighs" like some "sad soul." This is a reflection of Tess's attitude when the horse is killed. She is a "sad soul" who feels the burden of supporting her family fall

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6Ibid., p. 34.
squarely upon her shoulders. This attitude of nature causes Tess to contemplate her mother's desires for a marriage above their present station, and one which is worthy of their austere heritage.

The fortunes for Tess have turned. She was happy living in the valley, but she is now to journey to Trantridge to claim her "heritage." Before her lay Trantridge, behind her the valley of her youth, and the valley of her innocence. ". . . An immense landscape stretched around them on every side; behind, the green valley of her birth, before, a gray country of which she knew nothing. . . ." 7 The colors of nature mirror Tess's feelings. The life of the valley is represented by "green" because it was alive; the countryside ahead of her offers only a "gray" appearance, one of tinged happiness.

Once on the farm, Tess seems to adapt herself to her situation very rapidly. "It was a fine September evening, just before sunset, when yellow lights struggle with blue shades in hair-like lines, and the atmosphere itself forms a prospect without aid from more solid objects, . . . " and "through this lowlit mistiness Tess walked. . . ." 8 The countryside in summer reflects life with a vibrance of prism colors. But, within this setting, Tess walks through "low-lit mistiness" in an attitude of resignation.

7Ibid., p. 62.
8Ibid., p. 76.
Tess is "hoplessly resigned to her doom." A trivial matter leads to Tess's seduction by Alec D'Urberville.

"... To Hardy it is the trivial which leads to such dreadful complications."\(^9\) Tess journeys into the city to do her marketing, and there she finds that it is the day of the fair. Alec, who was in the city for the fair, notices Tess and follows her into the countryside when she begins her homeward jaunt.

Nature, that evening, takes on a somber appearance.

"... A faint luminous fog, which had hung in the hollows all the evening, became general and enveloped them. It seemed to hold the moonlight in suspension, rendering it more pervasive than in clear air."\(^11\) This is the night of the seduction and around them there is "darkness and silence"\(^12\) which rule. "The situation is blurred for her; the forces that have defeated her are beyond her comprehension."\(^13\)

There is a feeling of fatalism which prevails in this episode. "As Tess's own people down in those retreats are never tired of saying among each other in their fatalistic way: 'It was to be.'"\(^14\) This seduction by Alec places a great moral guilt upon Tess, who had no part in the instigation of the act.

Tess returns to her own familiar surroundings, the

\(^9\)Elliott, op. cit., p. 47.
\(^11\)T. Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 86.
\(^12\)Ibid., p. 90.
\(^13\)Brown, op. cit., p. 98.
\(^14\)Ibid., p. 81.
Vale of Blackmoor, and in nature she finds solace.

The only exercise that Tess took at this time was after dark; and it was then when out in the woods, that she seemed least solitary. She knew how to hit to a hair's breadth that moment of evening when the light and the darkness are so evenly balanced that the constraint of day and the suspense of night neutralize each other, leaving absolute mental liberty. It is then that the plight of being alive becomes attenuated to its least possible dimensions. She had no fear of the shadows; her sole idea seemed to be to shun mankind—or rather that cold accretion called the world, which, so terrible in the mass, is so unformidable, even pitiable, in its units.\(^\text{15}\)

Nature in its smaller units, nature of the vale, brings Tess and her misfortune into the proper perspective. She finds comfort in her tragedy by viewing nature and its vastness and its minuteness. In her trial, Tess "felt akin to the landscape."\(^\text{16}\) Being a part of the green valley, she is rejuvenated. She is disillusioned and resigned now to her fate, but she is able to feel rejuvenated in the sense that now she can at least, once more, venture forth from her family dwelling and mingle with people.

The motif of Time has two chief uses in Hardy: the tremendous importance of the moment, and the disillusionment and change which come with the years. The first emphasizes how many may depend on only a few seconds; the other how little really matters in a thousands years or more.\(^\text{17}\)

Tess comes to realize that her constantly changing personal world is a minute sphere in contrast to the world of nature, which remains immutable by time.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., pp. 107-108. \(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 132. \(^{17}\)Elliott, op. cit., p. 71.
The past was past; whatever it had been it was no more at hand. Whatever its consequences, time would close over them; they would all in a few years be as if they had never been, and she herself grassed down and forgotten. Meanwhile the trees were just as green as before; the birds sang and the sun shone as clearly now as ever. The familiar surroundings had not darkened because of her grief, nor sickened because of her pain.  

She realizes her alienation from all things and accepts this with tragic passivity. She realizes the power of nature to "grass down" someone and make them forgotten souls. During her inner struggle, there is evident in the narrative that Tess is "striving against something that is bound to beat her." With this realization, "Almost at the leap Tess thus changed from simple girl to complex woman. Symbols of reflectiveness passed into her face, and a note of tragedy at times into her voice. . . . She became what would have been called a fine creature. . . ."  

Tess leaves her home for the second time at this juncture. But within Tess is her destruction. Tess's "consciousness of her own innocent life makes her doom" inescapable and tragic. Her journey takes her to the Valley of the Great Dairies where she may immerse herself in a world which knows nothing of her life and which offers her a healing salve, work. In this rich valley with its abundance of produce, Tess experiences also a birth of love.  

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19 Braybrooke, op. cit., p. 53.  
21 Braybrooke, op. cit., p. 53.
"... She found herself on a summit commanding the long-sought-for vale, the Valley of the Great Dairies, the valley in which milk and butter grew to rankness...."

Life settles into a routine, a soothing monotony for Tess, which is severely broken only one time. A story is told in Tess's presence alluding to the evilness of the "fallen woman." This story sends Tess out into the courtyard where nature reflects her mood.

... None of them but herself seemed to see the sorrow of it; to a certainty, not one knew how cruelly it touched the tender place in her experience. The evening sun was now ugly to her, like a great inflamed wound in the sky.

It seems a cruel penalty to Tess that she should suffer, in her blamlessness, just as wanton women suffer. Tess's sense of guilt is vanquished for a short time when she finds herself enamored with Angel Clare, a man she could not hope to marry and a man too pure to accept her if he were to know of her past. During these first days of falling in love, nature reflects Tess's moods.

Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing at a star, came now without any determination of hers; she undulated upon the thin notes of the secondhand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears into her eyes. The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden's

23 Ibid., p. 173.
sensibility. Though near nightfall, the rank-smelling weed-flowers glowed as if they would not close for intentness and the waves of colour mixed with the waves of sound.\textsuperscript{24} The garden has endowed itself with human sensibilities; it "weeps" and is "intent." Nature supports the notes of the music from Angel's harp producing "waves of sound," and the pollen "seems to be his notes made visible." Nature is indeed sympathetic to Tess at this very moment of falling in love.

When she and Angel are together "they were never out of the sound of some purling weir, whose buzz accompanied their own murmuring, while the beams of sun ... formed a pollen of radiance over the landscape."\textsuperscript{25} Again, nature is benevolent and understanding to Tess. The sound of the running water is but an echo of their own murmurings and the sun seems to envelop them into its warmth.

When Tess and Angel come together, they are both moving from one position in life to another. Tess is changing from the ignorant state of the peasant who lives by convention, and Angel is changing from his conventional status to a "belief of a higher station."\textsuperscript{26} She is losing the bonds of superstition and he is trying to unfetter himself from the prejudice of his age.

Clare has found town life unbearable and he has turned to the life of nature to find his contentment.

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 158. \textsuperscript{25}Ibid., p. 247. \textsuperscript{26}L. Johnson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 175.
Early association with country solitudes had bred in him an unconquerable, and almost unreasonable, aversion to modern town life, and shut him out from such success as he might have aspired to by following a mundane calling in the impracticability of the spiritual one.\(^7\)

He thinks himself to be a free man who has broken from the bonds of conventionality and has found a world which is just in its decisions and truly civilized in its approach to life and living.

Tess's transformation is aided by Clare, who wishes her to be an educated woman. "She was expressing in her own native phrases--assisted a little by her Sixth Standard training--feelings which might almost have been called those of the age--the ache of modernism."\(^8\)

Hardy has two aspects of his writing which appear in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. One is the concern for the changes which seem to be sweeping the world and the other for the constant aspect of the world which remains unchanging and gives life its uniformity, the world of nature.\(^9\)

They crept along towards a point in the expanse of shade just at hand at which a feeble light was beginning to assert its presence, a spot where, by day, a fitful white streak of steam at intervals upon the dark green background denoted intermittent moments of contact between their secluded world and modern life. Modern life stretched out its steam feeler to this point three or four times a day, touched the native existences, and quickly withdrew its feeler again, as if what it touched had been uncongenial.\(^{10}\)

\(^7\) T. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, p. 150.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 160.

\(^9\) L. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

\(^{10}\) T. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, p. 239.
The vales, representing the world, are only slightly touched by the modern world, and then, the modern world seeing that the old world is uncongenial, retreats from the boundaries of the countryside.

Tess and Clare have made plans for their wedding. It is to take place during the winter, but Tess's conscience dictates that she may not marry Clare without his knowing the truth of her past. She hopes and firmly believes that his sense of justice will absolve her of any guilt and that he will love her with the same intensity as before. She slips a note under his door explaining her seduction by Alec, but Fate would have it that the note finds its way under a carpet in his room and he never receives the missive. She decides, the next day, that his sense of justice has prevailed, but, to make certain that he has read the letter, she looks into his room. To her dismay she finds the letter, unopened. She feels it is now too late to tell him and so she marries him. Immediately after the ceremony, nature reflects Tess's inner torment. "Passing by the tower with her husband on the path to the gate she could feel the vibrant air humming round them . . . and it matched the highly charged mental atmosphere in which she was living."

On their wedding night, his present to her of a family heirloom seems to mock her. "A large shadow of her shape

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31 Ibid., p. 272.
rose upon the wall and ceiling. She bent forward, at which each diamond on her neck gave a sinister wink. . . ."32 At this point she tells Clare of her seduction. She resolves to do so only after he tells Tess of his own misadventures as a young man. It is her love, which is almost idolatrous worship, which drives her to tell him of her past. It is this love which proves to be the instrument of her destruction.33

Angel Clare now becomes a villain more hateful than Alec D'Urberville. The man who is emancipated from prejudice, who is free from injustice, condemns Tess for her illicit dealings with Alec.

With all his attempted independence of judgment this advanced and well-meaning young man, a sample produce of the last five-and-twenty years, was yet the slave to custom and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings.34

The old world prejudice has returned to Clare and Tess falls the slave of its will. She is condemned by the prudery of an old world view, and left, not only the victim, but, in his view, the perpetrator of the terrible sin. Though Clare verbally scorns the old conventions, he mentally adheres to them. "Clare's spurning of Tess, his tragic failure to understand her real spiritual integrity, is the sentence of a blind social order."35

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34T. Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 338.
The natural surroundings reflect the events which are transpiring. As Clare condemns Tess,

The fire in the grate looked impish—demonically funny, as it did not care in the least about her strait. The fender grinned idly, as if it too did not care. . . . All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration. 36

The natural surroundings reflect a face "sympathetic to the mood of the supernatural design." 37 Tess is mocked by Clare and by nature. Of the two crimes against her, the physical one by Alec and the spiritual one by Clare, Clare's is the most far reaching in its consequences. Clare becomes the "intellectual wretch," while Alec assumes the role of the less dangerous "stage villain." 38

When Clare leaves Tess nature reflects the moment. "Clare arose in the light of a dawn that was ashy and furtive, as though associated with crime." 39 Indeed, it is a crime he is perpetrating. The prudery displayed by Clare is the product "of urban civilisation [sic]: they lie within the vortex of Clare's selfishness which is a crueller, subtler selfishness than that of . . . d'Urberville." 40

36T. Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 291.

37Mary Caroline Richards, "Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision," Part Two, Nineteenth-Century Fiction, IV (June, 1949), p. 27.


Tess is left once more with a wound to heal. "Time, the bringer of all things, is usually the bringer of regret, decay and death." Tess sees the world around her without life and without meaning; its neutral tones seem to dominate everything. Nature around her

Was in colour a desolate drab; it was a complexion without feature, as if a face, from chin to brow should be only an expanse of skin. The sky wore, in another colour, the same likeness; a white vacuity of countenance [363] with the lineaments gone.42

Tess, as Eustacia Vye, is a creature of her emotions. The reasoning power within Tess is dominated by her emotions and her conscience. She is "a vessel of emotions rather than reasons ..."43 After giving up all hope of Angel's return, and after a constant bombardment of proposals from Alec, she succumbs to his persistence and marries him. Angel returns and Tess is driven by emotion and slays her new husband Alec, who she claims has tricked her into their marriage. She pays the heavy penalty of death; Angel pays the penalty of remorse. Tess is characterized as a woman of blamelessness "under all the 'blundgeonings of chance.'"44 It is not until too late that Clare realizes this to be truc,

41 Elliott, op. cit., p. 72.
43 Ibid., p. 421.
and his repentance lends an ironic twist to Tess's fate. Had he but returned at an earlier date, had he but let justice dictate his actions, Tess's life would not have had to be sacrificed.

Nature, throughout the book, serves as a sympathetic background to the action. Tess is introduced in the spring, when the season is at its height and she is a simple, happy country girl. She is seduced by Alec in the summer. She begins work on the dairy farm in the summer; there her love for Angel ripens. She is married, unhappily, in the cold of winter. She returns to Alec in the autumn, a season of decay. She murders Alec in the height of her despair in the winter. Nature's clothing in the seasons matches the feelings of the heroine's situations in Hardy's attempt to intensify the emotions and results of each major action of the narrative.

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CHAPTER VI

THE HEATH AS A REFLECTION OF CLASSICAL TRAGEDY

Although *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is a later creation than *The Return of the Native*, it is evident that the character of Tess does not attain the magnitude of tragedy which Eustacia Vye attains. A partial revelation of this lies, probably, in the fact that the countryside, which plays such a predominant role in the latter novel, is not as fully developed in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. It is the intensity of the heath felt in *The Return of the Native* which lends to it the atmosphere reminiscent of classical tragedy.

Hardy consciously develops Egdon Heath into a classical backdrop for Eustacia Vye's struggle on the heath. A tragic writer can never view man as little or insignificant. Also, the classical writer must keep in sight the fact that there is something at work in the nature of things that is seeking man's overthrow.¹ Hardy, in this frame of reference, is a tragical writer. He saw man as significant, and his struggles against the outer and inner forces as significant. He viewed man from the point that he "has desires which the nature of things prevents him from fulfilling. The struggle for existence, directed by an indifferent nature, does not

ordinarily result in success for those most deserving."  

It will be granted at the outset that Hardy does not approach the moralized destiny which is prevalent in Greek tragedy and which lies "ready to avenge any violence to the prescribed symmetry of moral affairs. . . ."  

This difference is due primarily to two differing views of the powers which are "just" and "benevolent."  

"If the fundamental basis of Greek drama be religious, whereas Hardy's was essentially an agnostic nature, the true subject of every drama in ancient Greece which has come down to us is some aspect of the mystery of human existence. . . ." and especially of the question and its solution, but his approach was not from a "symmetry" of life view as was that of the Greeks, but from the point of the aimlessness and apparent unjustness of the suffering.  

Hardy made a conscious effort to create out of Egdon Heath the epitome of the ancient paganistic world. The Heath dons the appearance of Limbo in the opening pages of The Return of the Native.  

Then the whole black phenomenon beneath represented Limbo as viewed from the brink by the sublime Florentine in his vision, and the muttered articulations of the wind in the hollows were as complaints and petitions from the 'souls of mighty worth' suspended therein.  

It was as if these men and boys had suddenly dived into past ages, and fetched therefrom an hour and dæd which had before been familiar with this spot.  

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2Webster, op. cit., p. 77.  
4Rutland, op. cit., p. 33.  
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The rustics of the heath have recreated in their annual pagan ritual a time centuries past and have brought it to life as their ancestors had once done. It symbolizes the ancient Greek underworld, and, as seen previously, to Eustacia it was her "Hades."

References to pre-Christian events, people, and places continue to develop the character of Egdon Heath into a classical backdrop. "Although from the vale it appeared but as a wart on an Atlantean brow, its actual bulk was great."  
The heath is also described as "Titanic," which incurs memories of the Greek gods' struggle for power. The allusion to the pre-Christian highway which cuts across the surface of Egdon as the "great Western road of the Romans, the Via Iceniana, or Ikenild Street" serves to re-enforce the image.

Viewed from the road, the barrow was "surmounted by something higher. It rose from the semi-globular mound like a spike from a helmet." Eustacia Vye was walking in the night and "The first instinct of the imaginative stranger might have been to suppose it the person of one of the Celts who built the barrow, so far had all of modern date withdrawn from the scene." To the viewer it looked as if she were "the

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6Ibid., p. 13.  
7Ibid., p. 7.  
8Ibid., p. 13.  
9Ibid.
last man among them, musing for a moment before dropping into eternal night with the rest of the race. 10

In working out his setting for the story, Hardy has "evoked the antiquity of the Celts and Hebrews as well as that of the Greeks. The classical allusions, however, far outnumber the Celtic and Hebraic." 11 Upon the heath "Festival fires to Thor and Woden had followed on the same ground . . . ," and the fires were descendants from the "Saxon ceremonies" which had been held hundreds of years ago. 12 These images are pre-Christian ones which serve to re-enforce the idea of Eustacia being a person out of her time.

Crossing the heath at night, Mrs. Yeobright finds herself in a "Tartarean situation," 13 alluding to the dark underworld of Greek mythology. Thus, by a "systematic accumulation of allusions to the geography and history, the legend and literature of classical antiquity," Hardy did evoke the "large and heroic 'world' out of which Greek tragedy came . . . ." 14

Within this setting Thomas Hardy places Eustacia Vye, a woman of passions, "the raw material of a divinity" whose instincts "made a model goddess." She has "Pagan eyes" and

10 Ibid.


12 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 17.

13 Ibid., p. 38.

14 Paterson, "The 'Poetics' of 'The Return of the Native.'"
dwell in what she considers "Hades." Because of the nocturnal qualities she possesses, and because she is an outsider, she is viewed with distrust. This distrust is reminiscent of Medea's plight in Euripides' play when Medea states "For a just judgment is not evident in the eyes/ When a man at first sight hates another, before/ Learning his character, being in no way injured;/ And a foreigner especially must adapt himself."¹⁵ Being distrusted is not only affinity Eustacia shares with Medea. Medea is accused by Kreon of being "a clever woman, versed in evil arts..."¹⁶ and Eustacia is considered a sorceress by man on the heath. Eustacia's power is not based upon the "evil arts"; it is based upon her inherent power as a woman, and she uses it to satisfy her passions. She summons Wildeve to her side and triumphs at her power.

I merely lit that fire because I will dull, and thought I would get a little excitement by calling you up and triumphing over you as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel. I determined you should come; and you have come! I have shown my power. A mile and half hither, and a mile and half back again to your home--three miles in the dark for me. Have I not shown my power?¹⁷

Wildeve, the counterpart to Eustacia, and Eustacia "are ruthless players of the game of love, drawn together and

¹⁶Ibid., p. 35.
¹⁷T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 73.
repelled according to the pagan laws of jealousy, vanity and pique." Eustacia is governed by her emotions. She does not attempt to charm her suitors. "... it is not in her nature; she conquers and commands. Wilfulness becomes stormy passion in her, caprice turns to scornful determination to have in all things no law but her own nature."  

As Wildeve and Eustacia meet on the top of the barrow, they present an ominous picture. "Their black figures sank and disappeared from against the sky. They were as two horns which the sluggish heath had put forth from its crown, like a mollusc, and had now again drawn in." They seem to be demoric because they are compared to a gigantic mollusc extending its dark grotesque fellers. "Eustacia's status as witch or demon would be supported by the fact that Damon Wildeve, the slave and image of her own invention, is composed of exactly the same stuff."  

Eustacia Vye, in many respects mirrors the image of Medea, a proud person, meant to rule, but frustrated by the forces which seem to oppose her. The warning directed toward Medea could well be taken by Eustacia Vye's neighbors: "... But be careful/ Of the wildness and bitter nature/ Of that

18 Joseph Warren Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy (Chicago, 1922), p. 81.  
19 Abercrombie, op. cit., p. 177.  
20 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 99.  
21 John Peterson, "The Return of the Native as Antichristian
Hardy, like Euripides, is interested in depicting men as they actually are. There is an interest by both men in the conflicts which rage within a person and in the study of the characters whose division within their souls presents a struggle of some magnitude. The emphasis by both men is upon the weaknesses of the human being which lead to his chaotic state. Eustacia falls the victim to her emotions, Medea to her jealousy.

As far as social ethics were concerned Eustacia approached the savage state, though in emotion she was all the while an epicure. She had advanced to the secret recesses of sensuousness, yet had hardly crossed the threshold of conventionality. She has become the mistress of the secrets to sensuousness, but she is hardly above the savage state in her regard for social conventions. ... Women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at later date. It is this savage state which is in conflict with the forces surrounding her. It is her "Pagan fantasy" which

\[\text{Euripides, op. cit., p. 29.}\]
\[\text{T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 107.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., pp. 134-135.}\]
keeps her aloof from the rest of the heath dwellers.

Eustacia Vye symbolizes a world untouched by Christianity: "She reincarnates on the withered parish of Egdon Heath the larger and braver vision of the ancient Greeks."²⁵

Both Medea and Eustacia are extremely clever women. This very aspect of their nature poses a problem for both of them. Medea has the insight into the problems arising from cleverness. "For being clever, I find that some will envy me;/ Others object to me."²⁶ When Eustacia Vye schemes, her schemes are guided by a Delphian quality.

She seldom schemed, but when she did scheme, her plans showed rather the comprehensive strategy of a general... though she could utter oracles of Delphian ambiguity when she did not choose to be direct. In heaven she will probably sit between Heloises and Cleopatras.²⁷

Her schemes are not those of an ordinary woman, and this fact is felt to be true by the heath folk. They consider Eustacia to be the incarnation of something evil and malevolent.

Describing Eustacia, Hardy turns to the pre-Christian world to fill her beauty with the achievements of an ancient poetess."A profile was visible against the dull monochrome of cloud around her; and it was as though side shadows from the features of Sappho and Mrs. Siddons had converged

²⁶Euripides, op. cit., p. 35.
²⁷T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 82.
upwards from the tomb to form an image like neither but suggesting both."  

28 But, Eustacia had other qualities from the ancients. "When her hair was brushed she would instantly sink into stillness and look like the Sphinx."  

29 When she dreamed, her dreams "had as many ramifications as the Cretan labyrinth, as many fluctuations as the Northern lights . . . To Queen Scheherazade the dream might have seemed not far removed from commonplace . . . ."  

30 She is closely tied to the deities and the ancient world by her stance and mannerisms.

Her presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnights; her moods recalled lotus-eaters and the march in 'Athalie'; her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola. In a dim light, and with a slight rearrangement of her hair, her general figure might have stood \( \text{[76]} \) for that of either of the higher female deities. The new moon behind her head, an old helmet upon it, a diadem of accidental dewdrops round her brow, would have been adjuncts sufficient to strike the note of Artemis, Athena, or Hera respectively, with as close an approximation to the antique as that which passes muster on many respected canvasses.

31 She has become, as Aristotle said a tragic heroine must be, a member of the royalty, or a person of the highest rank.

She is linked with Artemis, Athena and Hera. Her title is the "Queen of the Night." "Where did her dignity come from?

\[ \text{28Ibid., p. 62.} \]  
\[ \text{29Ibid., p. 75.} \]  
\[ \text{30Ibid., p. 138.} \]  
\[ \text{31Ibid., pp. 76-77.} \]
By a latent vein from Alcinous' line, her father hailing from Phaeacia's isle?... Her dignity was not common to people, but, to the goddesses of Olympus and to the royal families of mythology, her dignity had reached their level of attainment.

It is not Eustacia's character, however, which makes her a tragic figure. In Hardy's tragedy "it is the power behind man and deliberately opposed to his will—a power which we shall, for the moment, call Fate." Therefore, regardless of the character Eustacia possesses, regardless of the decisions she may or may not make, her destiny is sealed by Fate and aided by her emotions. It is her emotional response to the events of the heath which makes the plot of *The Return of the Native* a complex one.

Eustacia's desire to marry Clym and thus elude the grasp of the heath is an emotional decision. Her schemes bring Clym into her power and they are married. But, for Eustacia, there is no escape. She has misjudged Clym and his intentions. He does not desire to return to Paris; he wishes to live quietly on the heath. She could have easily borrowed Medea's utterance and have said "... How my hopes have missed their mark!" Both women have been frustrated.

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32 Ibid., p. 78.
33 Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
35 Euripides, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
Both women have been thwarted in their desires; both women have missed their mark. "... The most striking characteristic of the tragic hero as a personality is just his possession of a purpose—a drive or an ideal which insists on being gratified."\(^{36}\) Eustacia Vye possesses the idea and the drive to leave the heath, but her every attempt is blocked.

Another aspect of tragedy is that a character must be consistent.\(^{37}\) But this consistency of character must be qualified. The heroine must be consistent in her actions to the extent that the actions are consistent with the actions of men. It must be granted that man's actions are not consistent; man is a creature of changing moods and desires. Therefore, if the character of tragedy must be consistent with men, she must be consistent in her inconsistency. She should not possess the ability to be anything other than human in her actions.

In the narrative, Clym and Eustacia are not only in disagreement in respect to their desires, they are in disagreement in respect to their positions in life.

While Clym suggests the deterioration of 'the Hellenic idea of life,' Eustacia suggests its anachronistic and hence foredoomed revival. When she is not being victimized by the gods and goddesses, she is visualized as one of them herself. ...\(^{38}\)

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\(^{37}\) Aristotle, *op. cit.* p. 27.

\(^{38}\) Paterson, "The 'Poetics' of *The Return of the Native,*" p. 217.
And Eustacia Vye is victimized. Her husband has made her a victim of the heath. He, himself, first fell victim to her charms.

Did anything at this moment suggest to Yeobright the sex of the creature whom that fantastic guise inclosed, how extended was her scope both in feeling and in making others feel, and how far her compass transcended that of her companions in the band? When the disguised Queen of Love appeared before Aeneas a preternatural perfume accompanied her presence and betrayed her quality. If such a mysterious emanation ever was projected by the emotions of an earthly woman upon their object, it must have signified Eustacia's presence to Yeobright now.39

Eustacia, the Queen of the Night, appears as the Queen of Love and Clym is love's victim.

But Eustacia is the final victim. She rebels "in high Promethean fashion"40 and finds herself alone on the night of her death. She, by the hand of fate, died in the weir.

In its central action in the suffering and death of Eustacia Vye... The Return of the Native dramatizes the tragic humiliation, in the diminished world of the modern consciousness, of an heroic, prechristian understanding of life.41

It is Eustacia's conflict with her surroundings and position in life which "is a sure index to the unhappiness and tragedy"42 which befall her.

39 T. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 167.
40 Ibid., p. 302.
42 Elliott, op. cit., p. 34.
In *The Return of the Native*, Hardy tries consciously to observe the ancient Unities.\(^3\) The Unity of Time is observed, although extended from the usual twenty-four hours to one year. Hardy also achieves Unity of Place. The entire tragedy takes place on Egdon Heath, and never outside its boundaries. Unity of Action is adhered to, the conflict centering around the heath and the characters' relationship to the area.

Eustacia, like Medea, made a wish for death. "Oh, what use have I now for life?/ I would find my release in death / And leave hateful existence behind me."\(^4\) But, neither woman clings to this wish for long. However, when Eustacia does die, she adheres to the classical tradition of a tragic heroine because she retained her dignity even in death. Hardy's character in death finally proves to the reader that she is "far nobler than the forces that destroy" her.\(^5\) In death she is noble, and, if possible, more noble than she was during her life. Lascelles Abercrombie asserts that there cannot "be an atmosphere of tragedy if the character who is its victim does not offer resistance."\(^6\) If this is to be the final determiner of a tragic heroine, Eustacia Vye is, indeed, a tragic figure. She resisted her situation until the moment of her death.


\(^6\) Abercrombie, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
"The exact nature of the flaws of Hardy's heroes is usually undefined." However, in the case of Eustacia, it is evident that her emotions are the cause of her tragic end. It is the excess of devotion which cannot bring honor to Eustacia, only tragedy. "When love is in excess, it brings... no honour/ Nor any worthiness." Like Eustacia, Tess falls the victim to her emotions. Tess's emotional rulings, coupled with "her unsophisticated simplicity, and... her innocence" cause Tess to become a tragic pawn in the hands of the "President of the Immortals." Tess also reaches the height appropriate to a tragic heroine when the events of her life are not merely imposed. She incurs these sufferings upon herself because of her decisions or lack of decisions. But, if a character is in the hands of Fate, regardless of the decision made, it will be the incorrect one. Eustacia Vye does not confess to Clym her former relationship to Damon Wildeve, and tragedy is the result. Tess does confess to Angel her betrayal, and tragedy results.

Tess further fulfills the role of a tragic figure because she is a person with whom the reader can identify. She is

47 Spivey, op. cit., p. 184.
48 Euripides, op. cit., p. 45.
51 Joseph Warren Beach, "Bowdlerized Versions of Hardy,"
naive about some aspects of reality, and all persons possess, to a greater or lesser degree, this quality. She is devoted to her husband and resists the temptations her seducer places before her. She is predominantly good, but she falls short of being a perfect woman.

Hardy uses an innovation of Euripides in the story of Tess. Euripides saw the artistic value of depicting first love. It is first love which leads Tess to her sacrificial death because of her blindness to the forces at work around her. "At its best, tragedy is a story of human blindness leading human effort to checkmate itself—a Tragedy of Error." Tess's life is a Tragedy of Error and misjudgment.

Tragedy must also involve some inevitability in the outcome, and Tess's story does have an inevitable finale. "...It was necessary, not that Tess should die, but that she should be hounded to madness and the gallows." Her situation was one of utter frustration in the events in her life. She finally succumbs to Alec's proposals and marries him. Too late, she discovers that she has been tricked into her marriage. In her encounter with Clare, she realizes that what has happened to her is a cruel trick of fate. Her


only choice, as dictated by her emotions and not her reasoning power, is to kill Alec and return to Clare briefly. Her emotions "hounded her to madness" and the tragedy was consummated.

Hardy seems to chide the ruler of the universe for sporting with its child Tess. "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the d'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing." What better setting for Tess's apprehension than ancient Stonehenge surrounded by fog which makes the setting "solemn and still." Tess accepts the arrival of her captors without resistance, as though realizing that Fate had finally left no route for her escape.

Hardy handles the same essential problem the Greeks handled. Man was viewed as being "beaten down by forces within and without himself" and the tragic writer attempts "to record man's eternal struggle with fate." However, Hardy differs from his Greek predecessors in one very distinct way. Thomas Hardy was against the gods, or the forces which prevail blindly, while the Greeks were essentially on the side of the gods. But, very much like the Greeks, Hardy

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may often allow his characters to be frustrated in their ambitions and even die in their resistance, but he never allows them to be crushed by their circumstances. Their decisions remain their own, however incorrect their decisions may be. The Greeks had a conception of man avoiding annihilation by living correctly; Hardy had no such conception of a just Fate. Hardy's conception of the Immanent Will was that "whether antagonistic or neutral... it was certainly not friendly to man."  

Hardy sets out to create neither a miasma of misery nor an ethereal level of enjoyment, but to present and represent life as he viewed it, a period of tragedy. And "if Hardy failed to produce a formal and structural parallel with Greek tragedy, he managed to achieve, consciously or unconsciously, a reasonable artistic equivalent."  

The heath, which up to this point has been shorn as a character in the drama, an emotional setting, the hand of the Immanent Will, and a sympathetic viewer of those who did not rebel against it, now takes on the character of a classical stage for a tragic representation of life.

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60 Spivey, op. cit., pp. 185-186.
61 Elliott, op. cit., p. 25.
62 Paterson, "The 'Poetics' of The Return of the Native," n. 216.
CHAPTER VII

NATURE, FATE AND HARDY'S COSMIC VIEW

The fictitious country of South Wessex in Hardy's novels is in reality the county of Dorset. Egdon Heath, according to Thomas Hardy, is a unification or typification of many heaths, at least a dozen, but all of them are "one in character and aspect."\(^1\) The creation of Egdon Heath was the magnification into epic proportions of one typified heath.

Egdon Heath served Hardy's aim. It helped him in his incarnation of an abstraction. He personified Fate so that Fate could play a role in the human dramas he portrayed.\(^2\) Without the heath, Hardy would have been unable to place man in the situation he thought was inherent to man's nature, that of a minute object within the boundaries of some vast power, benevolent and/or malevolent. Nature plays "a vast impassive organism, living her own immense life, multitudinous but obscurely unanimous..."\(^3\) Hardy envisioned that nature "was neutral, an abundance of good and bad forces and chances in chaotic disorder, waiting for man to impose some order

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\(^1\) Harold Orel, *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings* (Lawrence, 1966), p. 11.


\(^3\) Abercrombie, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
upon it". Hardy's characters are placed within these bounds, but Hardy shows his characters frustrated by their inability to bring order, in his most dramatic characters, and by their submersion into the forces, in his weaker characters. The vital characters, who are frustrated by the forces and try to oppose them, are brought into submission with crushing blows.

The people of Egdon Heath and the heath country are unimportant people, but Hardy makes of these people "a suggestion of the inescapable one-ness that enfolds all human affairs." It is the universality of them which gives the reader the ability to picture them as one and a part of all men and their frustrations.

Hardy succeeded in recording nature in its relationship to the existence of man. Egdon Heath without its inhabitants would have provided no insights into humanity; therefore, they are "an essential feature in his picture of the natural world." Nature is most important when it can be used to show the similarity or contrast which is inherent in the life of man. Usually, as has been noted, as the tragedy in life deepens, the more sinister qualities which are on the heath are dwelled on increasingly, showing that these similarities between the man and nature are prevalent; the descriptions of

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5 Chew, op. cit., p. 32.  
6 Cecil, op. cit., p. 106.
7 Ibid., p. 97.
the heath at these times become symbolic of personal misery.\(^8\)

But the heath served as more than a mere reflecting pool to Hardy. He saw that nature's influence was not merely an external one, but that it is an "inherent condition, itself governed by the same forces that sway the destinies of mankind."\(^9\) In the heath country, men are seen as mere inhabitants of the earth,

Imagining that they influence events, but in reality completely ignorant of the mighty forces that hold sway in the 'ghast depths of unlimited space.' The race of men is transient and insignificant in a scheme of things that embraces 'endless time.'\(^10\)

Man's power, in its relationship to the power of nature, is insignificant; man's ability to change the nature which surrounds him is severely limited. Man's duration on the earth is too fleeting to bring any lasting order to the world of nature.

On Egdon Heath nature has the capacity to manifest cruelty and indifference.\(^11\) Hardy did "not believe that these powers are actively antagonistic to man," for the most part, but he did believe "their effect is the same as that of malicious forces."\(^12\) He seems to imply that the indifference of nature makes it responsible, just as if

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\(^8\)Evelyn Hardy, op. cit., p. 164.
\(^9\)Brennecke, op. cit., pp. 67-68.
\(^10\)Ibid, p. 74.
\(^12\)Webster, op. cit., p. 106.
nature, itself, had taken the active part of malevolence. No action whatsoever leaves the powers of man as helpless as if nature had actively sought to bring about that state. It is this fact "that man, a being endowed with an unlimited capacity for consciousness and suffering, is made to live out his life in a universe ruled by an unconscious and indifferent Will," that "lies at the base of all of Hardy's so-called pessimism." It is also this fact which makes man's life one of tragic endurance.

Although man has been able to adapt himself to his environment, he holds "no privileged position." Hardy "saw no evidence of a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness, no sign of an order corresponding to man's moral values." Hardy shows the folly of man's attempts to live by his moral values in an order of things which does not itself live by those moral values, nor does it recognize them as such. For man to continually try to impose these values was tragic. The power, or the Will, was untouched and remained indifferent to these values and to the creators of these values.

Will, or Fate, plays a heavy role in Thomas Hardy's works. "The landscape is obscured by the heavy mist of doubt, the mortals who wander about this landscape appear to be governed by a cruel chance that gives them no option as
to the direction of their wanderings." The incessant reappearance of this idea would seem to leave little doubt that Hardy took some delight "in suggesting that we are really pawns, quite unable to obey rational instinct, swayed by vague and treacherous emotions." Hardy did, indeed, make his most vital characters the victims of their emotions. The confrontation between an individual's reasoning powers and his emotional powers has but one outcome; man is subject to the whim of his emotional makeup and this fact causes him to fall the victim to fate. The implication seems to be that, if man could assert his reasoning powers, he would be able to bring some semblance of order out of the existing chaos. But this order is not seen in Hardy; therefore, the results of asserting the reasoning abilities over emotional controls must remain conjectural.

The reader can

Never feel the characters to be isolated in a purely human world; the conditions of their being and their being itself, are always 'engaged' with an immense background of measureless fatal processes, a moving, supporting darkness more or less apparent...

The fatal processes, however, Hardy believed always maintained a disinterested attitude toward mankind. It is the disinterest Hardy condemns; it is not the existence of Fate that he condemns.

15 Braybrooke, op. cit., p. 156.  
16 Ibid., p. 27.  
17 Abercrombie, op. cit., p. 27.  
18 Elliott, op. cit., p. 17.
This disinterested power Hardy saw as a control, an influence, or at least a hindrance to man's life, simply because of its presence, which was either consciously or unconsciously indifferent to man.\(^1\) "Natural law leads man from one mistake to another. Chance, in the shape of accident and coincidence, joins itself with these other unsympathetic powers to assure man's unhappiness.\(^2\)
The powers do not have to possess an unsympathetic attitude. Hardy believed that their attitude of indifference would produce the same unhappiness as their unsympathetic attitude.

The ironic situation man finds himself in was a source of irritation to Hardy. He saw man "faced with a mechanism which can pound him to atoms, without ever revealing the secret of its gear. He is at once witness and actor in a tragic affray which forces him, as a conscious being, to come to grips with the world of phenomena."\(^3\) When man does see his status in the world, he is forced into trying to find some hint of order, or some explanation of the forces which he sees arrayed against him. It is in this position that Hardy found himself. He saw man's position, and, through the eyes of nature, he tried to "come to grips with the world of phenomena."

\(^1\)Duffin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 193  
\(^2\)Webster, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 121-122.  
\(^3\)Pierre D'Exideuil, \textit{The Human Pair in the Work of Thomas Hardy}, translated by Felix Crosse (London, 1930) p. 36.
Hardy saw all things as being part of a unified system. It was necessary in this viewpoint to see the magnitude of nature and the minuteness of man. Man was but a minor part of the whole. It is almost ironic, from Hardy's viewpoint, that man should seek to understand the workings of the whole, and, finally, to impose any duties or values upon it and to bring it into some kind of a working order.

The unfortunate position many of Hardy's characters find themselves in is one of misconception. They believe that "things are the way we want them to be," rather than seeing that "things are the way they are." One characteristic element in Hardy's works is the nostalgia, "the longing for a world where, if happiness were not attainable, men were still under the illusion that it would be attained." This is most evident in his rustics. They are under the misconception that "things are the way we want them to be," and these rustics present the happiest view of mankind in Hardy's writings. They seem to be oblivious to the world and its changing aspects and they are content. They do not fight the natural phenomena and they live secure in their heathery world. Clym, although educated and more cosmopolitan than the rustic, may still return to this world of peace because he was born into it.

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22 Brennecke, op. cit., p. 73.

Hardy views the world as distorted by the Universal Will, and sees that what the Universal Will has left whole, man and civilization have managed to warp. Man's inquisitive probings have managed to distort all phases of life; there is no portion of life which retains its old, secure ideas. Man and civilization have fallen victim to their own questions. There are no more delusions which are able to invade the empirical mind.

There are four aspects of Hardy's nature:

First, Nature is an organic living whole, and its constituent parts, even the inanimate parts, have a life and personality of their own.

Second, it is unified on a great scale through both time and space.

Third, it is exceedingly complex and varied, full of unexpected details of many different kinds—details that are sometimes even quaint or bizarre.

Fourth, for all that, these heterogeneous things are integrated, however obscurely, into a system of rigid and undeviating law.

As seen in Hardy's novels, Nature may play a living role; it may become an actor in the narrative. Second, it is immutable, causing it to evoke both centuries and history to the mind as well as the here and the now. Third, its manifestations may appear to take on an active part in the lives of others, often a bizarre part, reflecting their

25 Richards, "Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision" Part One, p. 35.
26 Holloway, op. cit., p. 252.
darkest emotions. Fourth, nature is undeviating in its laws. What it adhered to in the times of the Greeks, it adheres to in the present. The assumption is clear that it will be the same a millenium from the present.

Hardy is concerned "with the gratuitous event, which proves that human nature is powerless for all its illusory freedom." It is this event which finds its way into Hardy's narratives time and again. This uncalled-for event binds Tess to the wishes of her parents, links her to Alec, and drives her, at the reappearance of Clare, to commit a murder. Eustacia's life is not without these events. She innocently meets Wildeve at Alderworth and is forced to hide from Mrs. Yeobright. The message from Clym arrives too late and the signal fire at Mistover brings her lover back into her life. Both women were helpless in the face of these events.

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native* there is an "element of doubt—a sense of good intentions gone wrong, of noble qualities misapplied, of values squeezed dry of their proper meaning." Neither woman is equipped to combat these forces for any duration of time. Their good intentions are diverted into the wrong channels; their nobler qualities are not recognized until it is too late to forestall the inevitable. In Thomas Hardy's world of

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28Evelyn Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
the heath "the bad most frequently fail, although the
good rarely succeed." Both Tess and Eustacia are good
women, and both fail. Tess had an unsophisticated nature,
but an honest one filled with a conscience that led her
to ruin her one chance of happiness. Eustacia's scheming
and passions are counterbalanced by the fact that she has
honor; she refuses Wildeve's advances because her marriage
vows hold a deep meaning for her, one which she could not
violate. Both women were gifted with good qualities and
both were, seemingly, hounded to their destruction and
to their failure.

Man is predominantly the creature and the
victim of lost opportunities, of the tricky
fatalities that lurk in obscure impules, of
accidents that have backward and forward
connections, all working through the blind
force of circumstance in a world of riddles. 30

Man's powers pitted against his circumstances are ineffective,
lead to frustrations and missed goals. The irony inherent
in this is that the characters in Hardy's novels could
attain some degree of success if they responded to their
best faculty, reasoning, but they fail time and again to
follow reasoning and its guidance and plunge headlong into
the abyss of emotions and passions. However, Hardy does not
dwell upon the forces which bring about the disaster in

29 Webster, op. cit., p. 71.

their lives; he believes the artist should study the "crumbling of the aspiration" and not necessarily to "classify the physiological processes that may have been a major factor in its destruction." He depicts vividly the "crumbling of the aspiration" and shows how misguided elements, which could produce an opposite result if indulged in moderately, bring about the inevitability of the downfall. Emotions, if balanced with the power of reasoning, could be made to bring order to the chaos.

Hardy arrived at the same conclusion at which he accused the man of science of arriving. He saw "that of all dogmatists the man of science is the most terrible, because the most unconscious, and that the latter in all honesty must end in the confusion that the universe is an enigma." Hardy saw the universe as an enigma. His probings into these meanings left him in a quandary; he found no meaning to the universe or to the powers which controlled the universe. His question was an honest one. He questioned the "entire conception of a benevolent God. . . ." This questioning "caused Hardy to forsake Christianity. . . . It was too much for him to reconcile the idea of beneficence in an omnipotent and omniscient deity to the fact of omnipresent


32Piror, op. cit., p. 40.
evil..." because he saw that man's circumstances led, inevitably, to his own unhappiness.  

Hardy recognized man's limitations. Man, the inquiring man, must find a system explaining his place in the cosmos. The rational man's mind "impels him to impose some sort of comprehensible significance on phenomena. And any such system entails the concept of unifying power of some sort, spiritual or mechanical, conscious or unconscious." Unfortunately, as evidenced in Hardy's works, he did not arrive at his goal. He could not find a power which unified the world, only one which seemed to destroy it, because that portion of the world which man dealt with seemed destroyed. Hardy continually tried to explain and interpret life within the boundaries of scientific theorizing. He was unable to evolve an empirical explanation of man and his position in the universe.

In Hardy's works there evolved a twofold view of the universe. There was a determinism implied by the pragmatists of his generation accompanied by an illusion of man that his will was a free one. The second view of nature was that man was a sensitive organism with aspiration and the universe was indifferent to these aspirations.

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33 Elliott, op. cit., p. 20.  34 Stevenson, op. cit., p. 260.  
36 Richards, "Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision," Part One, p. 269.
In all of his searching for a systematic appraisal of the universe, Hardy found no sign of orderliness. He found no indication that there was a direction or a plan for the man in the universe. Hardy, in a letter dated January 29, 1890, wrote: "I have been looking for God 50 years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him." Hardy's frustration in not finding a God is apparent. His search for some meaning, some plan, can be clearly seen in his works. His frustration is evidenced when the good persons of his narrative seem to fall the victim to injustice and suffer the same penalties exacted upon those characters which can be called unworthy of pity. In his novels, nature becomes the personification of the Immanent Will, and nature is indifferent to man's state.

Hardy's frustration at finding no purpose to the universe and to man's confrontation with the universe led him to a pessimistic view that "This Will is without purpose, and... that it rules a purposeless world as yet." Hardy interpreted the human situation then as "A struggle between man on the one hand and, on the other, an omnipotent and indifferent fate." Hardy was left without the Victorian faith in the plans which God had for the British empire, and he found no other belief or interpretation to replace this lost faith.

\[37\] Chew, op. cit., p. 15.

\[38\] Florence Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1928), p. 293.
Hardy's Will "is not so much an answer as an embodied question: instead of resolving the paradox, lightening the mystery, he puts paradox and mystery at the heart of things."*  
If it had been within his power to resolve the paradox, he would have done so. But the question before him was too vast, and he found no proof to substantiate a belief in any benevolent governing power. He does resolve that the power is not necessarily malevolent, but he cannot find in the Will any benevolence toward mankind. The powers are inscrutable because the embodiment of the Will, nature, is inscrutable. The powers are immutable and men's efforts are, seemingly, impotent to change this factor in the universe.

The rustics in Hardy's novels show, perhaps, a latent desire of Hardy's to look "forward with complacency, if not delight, to a future of endless unconsciousness whereby the harmony between human life and the unconsciously governed universe will be re-established." For the most part, however, Hardy's philosophy is not constructive; he offers no final solution. Hardy "makes no attempt to suggest any way out. His prose work vibrates with sorrow; tears are spread over all; the world is dark."  

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* Knickerbocker, op. cit., p. 324.  
* Brennecke, op. cit., p. 141.  
* Braybrooke, op. cit., p. 140.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Hardy's searching for an answer to the question posed by the Victorian dilemma is viewed in his works. The Victorians were unable to resolve the apparent conflict between the teachings of the church and the teachings of science. In Egdon Heath he sought an answer. He personified the heath. The heath became a character, an emotional setting, and a stage for tragedy.

Thomas Hardy was searching for a relationship between the God of the pre-scientific enlightenment and the inhabiters of His creation. If the ancients had a profound belief, Hardy believed he might find a solution if he were to place "pagans" on the heath. He failed to find his solution and Eustacia Vye fell to the power of the Will. If unsophisticated people who held a childish, naive view of the forces could survive in "God's" world, Hardy believed he could find a solution if he placed the naive upon the heath. He failed to find the answer. Tess was doomed as was her predecessor. Tess was as doomed as her "pagan" counterpart. In two of his major novels, with two different characters, he failed to visualize any meanse of obligation toward men.

Inevitably, the heath became a setting for tragedy, regardless of the character who was placed in its midst and
who opposed, in any degree, the influence of nature. It would seem, from *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and from *The Return of the Native*, that only the rustics and those who acclimated themselves to the heath and its influences were able to find contentment and happiness on the heath. It would seem that the world free of though was the world which provided happiness. But this solution is a poor one as evidenced by the figure of Clym, who is in no way left as an ideal example of what man should be. Clym succumbed to the heath and its influences completely, and he was not a noble figure to Hardy. Hardy viewed him as an idealist who had found disillusionment and was unable to combat it effectively. In his inability to cope with the realities, he turned to and found solace in the heath.

From *Desperate Remedies* comes an insight into Hardy's definition of Wisdom. "But what is Wisdom really? A steady handling of any means to bring about any end necessary to happiness."\(^1\) Hardy was not wise by his own definition because he failed to find a means to attain a degree of happiness. He was, as Clym, a disillusioned idealist, but, unlike Clym, he could not find solace in submission to a force which seemed to him to be indifferent to his happiness or to his attainment of any goal. Hardy resolves that there was no wisdom possible because, from his coign of vantage,

\(^1\) T. Hardy, *Desperate Remedies*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
there was no happiness in life. Life was punctuated by a series of tragedies which man found himself unable to change or to understand.

Hardy sought an appraisal of the values by which man lives and their agreement with the values of the Will. He found that man's values rendered him helpless when man faced a power which did not recognize nor honor his values.

Hardy felt that the individuality of man was of the highest importance; yet, man's individuality was the instrument of his destruction as evidenced in the life of Eustacia and Tess. If individuality was of primary importance and individuality was crushed by the Will, then man's single most important aspect was crushed by the Will. Hardy could not believe that the Will was benevolent and omniscient if it could destroy such a facet of man's life. Omniscience would imply that the Will knew the importance of such individuality; the destruction of that aspect would make of the Will a malevolent force.

The existence of a benevolent God could not be proved by the conditions in which man lived. He was doomed to live in a world which made his existence one of trial, frustration and defeat. This could not be the intent of a benevolent creator of man. A creator would not wish to see suffering if it were indeed benevolent. If the force were unknowing, then it could not be omniscient, and this was Hardy's thesis. The Will was not omniscient because it allowed man
to suffer unknowingly. This unknowing power, which may or may not have created man, was indifferent to man's predicament.

The disillusionment which had aroused Hardy's interest to find an answer to the Will led him to create in his novels persons of varied character, facing situations of differing natures, all of which led to the inevitable end. Regardless of the character, resistance to the Will means doom for that individual. Resistance, it may be concluded, was futile, but Hardy had to resist the existing doctrine to satisfy his empirical mind. He was never satisfied. He did not find "God" nor the reasoning behind the universe and man's place in the universe. The question he posed found no answer: the problem he faced had, for him, no solution.
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