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Thomas Hardy's use of physical nature

Constance Rose Nutt

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THOMAS HARDY'S
USE OF
PHYSICAL NATURE

by

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(S. A., Macalester College,
St. Paul, Minnesota, 1931.)

Presented in partial fulfillment of the require-ment for the degree of Master of Arts.

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The purpose of this thesis is to determine the characteristics of Hardy's treatment of physical nature. Hardy uses landscape in the ordinary sense of description, but he does more than merely show us a scene. He puts his own emotions into the picture. His descriptions are impressionistic and leave the reader with definite emotional reactions. Whether Hardy writes of sad, oppressive, or luridly beautiful landscapes, the reader cannot help but perceive Hardy's self-expression. Most of Hardy's descriptions of physical nature have deeper significance than merely to show the appearance of nature at a stated time. They give us atmosphere and heighten the effect of Hardy's dramatic and tragic scenes upon the reader.

Egdon Heath assumes individuality and is almost a character in Hardy's work. The loneliness and gloom of the heath are a source of motivation of the actions of Hardy's human creations. Dark woodlands are frequently used, too, in his work for the same purpose.

Hardy does not use very ordinary aspects of nature; he gravitates to the melancholy or ominous in physical nature, but he frequently uses a very grand or very beautiful scene. Occasionally, Hardy puts a sad incident in the lines of his characters into a cheerful setting, for instance, as he does in Joad's death.
Hardy's outstanding trait in his use of physical nature lies in his tying nature up with the misfortunes of humanity. Only rarely does physical nature appear to Hardy to be of any assistance to human beings. He is quite consistent in showing how, either by its indifference or its malice, nature hinders the plans of man and makes him miserable.

Hardy's characters defeat themselves constantly by rebelling against nature. His peasants alone seem to realize what Hardy intimates—that man does well to adjust himself harmoniously to the purposes of nature and to be contented with the environment in which he lives. His characters who suffer most, among them—Eustacia, Jude, Sue, Fitzpiers, are usually quite intellectual and consequently think enough to be dissatisfied with the landscape they see around them.

Nature means something to Hardy. It does, in certain respects, reflect his own emotions; therefore he loves it. By treating the various phases of Hardy's use of physical nature in his major novels, I wish to show the Hardyesque way of looking at the physical world and discover, if possible, something of his philosophy of nature.
Introduction

In reading Thomas Hardy's books, one is impressed by the great number of times he refers to physical nature. By the way he speaks of landscape, he creates effects of beauty, gloom, maliciousness, grandeur, antiquity, or, more rarely, cheerfulness. Hardy sometimes writes simple description of nature, but this sort of setting usually creates atmosphere by its impressionism. The most typical of Hardy's uses of physical nature is that in which he pictures nature as a vast primal force in the universe, purposeless and utterly indifferent to man's well-being. This indifference frequently extends to cases where man's enterprises are thwarted by the animosity of nature.

Antiquity in Physical Nature

Hardy has little to say about cosmogony, but much about the antiquity of nature. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* there is a fine description of the swarming of the bees in which Hardy likens the bustling swarm to a process somewhat analogous to that of alleged formations of the universe time and times ago. The aspect of antiquity in physical nature is one which appeals strongly to Hardy. Egdon Heath is his favorite example of this sort. He tells us that everything there had been unaltered from prehistoric times. "Civilization was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation."

A powerful and moving description which shows Hardy's interest in the very old in nature is his telling us that Egdon is "a tract of country unaltered from the sinister condition that made Caesar anxious to leave its gloom before autumn...a Homer's Cimmerian land." The reference here to persons of antiquity makes the reader feel even more keenly the great age of the heath. Hardy says of it, "the great inviolate place had an ancient permanence the sea cannot claim." "...With the exception of an aged highway, and a still more aged barrow presently to be referred to--themselves almost crystallized to natural products by long continuance--even the most trivial irregularities were not caused by pickaxe, plough, or spade, but remained as the very finger--toches of the last geological change." In Tess, too, we find Hardy interested in the ancientness of certain localities. He comments that the Chase was one of the oldest woodlands of England, still existing of undoubted primeval date. The Druidical mistletoe still grew in aged oaks, and the great yew trees, "not planted by the hand of man", grew as they had grown long ago. In the same book Hardy refers to the black loam brought "by the river when it was as wide as the whole valley" as "an essence of soils, pounded champagnes of the past out of which

1. Hardy, Return of Native, p. 52.
2. Ibid., 6
3. Ibid., 6
came all the fertility of the mead and of the cattle grazing
there."

Moving through Hardy's treatment of antiquity in nature
is the feeling that there is continuity in nature, a quality
of changelessness that has gone through countless years.
Cities, too, may achieve superiority, in point of age, to man.
Casterbridge was an "antiquated borough untouched by the faint­
est sprinkling of modernism." In Tessa there is a nice con­
trast between the heath, a part of physical nature itself,
and a city, made by the hands of man. The town of Sandbourne
which "had chosen to spring up" near Egdon Heath is called by
Hardy "a glittering novelty" on the very edge of the "tawny
piece of antiquity", Egdon. Within a mile from the outskirts
of Sandbourne "every irregularity of the soil was prehistoric,
every channel an undisturbed British trackway, not a sod hav­
ing been turned over since the days of the Caesars. Yet the
exotic had grown here, suddenly as the prophet's gourd...

this new world in the old." Egdon is changeless; Sandbourne
comes as a work of man thrust into a setting which must re­
main after Sandbourne is gone.

Much of Hardy's interest in antiquity may be in objects
that man himself has built, although these objects are iden­
1. Hardy, Tessa, P. 248.
2. Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, (New York, 1895),
p. 30.
3. Tessa, p. 480.
ified with the landscape. For instance, in _Jude_ we read about a green track leading to the circular British earthbank adjoining. Jude thought about the great age of the trackway. In _The Return of the Native_ Hardy refers to a barrow as a segment of the globe, as perfect as the day it was thrown up. Hardy describes the old churches of Christminster, the ruins of Stonehenge, the Bathsheba's weather-beaten ancient barn, showing us that the building erected by man will crumble and decay, while the soil, rocks, and hills remain little changed.

**Indestructibility of Physical Nature**

Mankind, Hardy shows us, is unable to change the heath. To bear this out, Hardy tells us that Egdon defied cultivation by man. It was, in fact, an obsolete thing which had "slipped out of its century generations ago, to intrude as an uncouth object into this." Clym, a true son of the heath, derived a certain barbarous satisfaction from reflecting that no amount of cultivation prevented the heath from "slipping back into its furze growths again." Egdon Heath was, according to Hardy, an ancient country whose surface never stirred to a finger depth. Nature is, to Hardy, indestructible in comparison with the ephemeral quality of humanity. As time goes on, man passes and his works fall away, yet nature itself

1. Thomas Hardy, _Jude the Obscure_, (New York, 1895), p. 58
2. P. 14.
4. Mayor of Casterbridge, 381.
remains in the world, a force to influence the next generation of men. For instance, Horcombe Hill is cited by Hardy as being one of the most indestructible places to be found in all physical nature. The hill, which formed a part of Horcombe Eweleaze, "was one of the spots which suggest to a passerby that he is in the presence of a shape approaching the indestructible as nearly as any to be found on earth. It was a featureless convexity of chalk and soil--an ordinary specimen of those smoothly outlined protuberances of the globe which may remain undisturbed on some great day of confusion, when far grander heights and dizzy granite precipices tumble down." Egdon Heath has the same sort of durability and forms a background for all humanity which has ever lived upon its gloomy surface.

Through the passage about Horcombe Hill runs the idea that even the most permanent things on earth may cease to exist. The passage indicates that Hardy feels that some aspects of nature are more eternal than others, but that there will probably come a time of general destruction of physical nature in the universe. The possibility that nature is not everlasting is even more clearly evidenced in the Return of the Native where Hardy describes the heath in these words, "Every night the titanic form of the heath seemed to wait for something, unmoved during so many centuries--through the crises of so many things that seemed only to await its final overthrow."

2. Return of Native, p. 4.
In the *Return of the Native* Hardy makes an interesting observation, "To know that everything on Egdon had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead gave ballast to the mind adrift on change and harassed by the new." ¹

It would be an exaggeration of visible facts to suppose that nature is fixed in its details. There are certain changes which Hardy observes, but it is interesting to note that there is a pattern of regularity even in these. The general contours and outlines of nature remain the same throughout the centuries. Some of the changes come in cycles, year after year, as a part of the recuperation of physical nature. Hardy sometimes mentions these cases casually while speaking about something of a different character. For example, in the *Mayor of Casterbridge* he speaks of the skimmity riding as one of the excitaments which leave a permanent mark in the history of a country town, as "a warm summer permanently marks a ring in the tree trunk, corresponding with its date." ² "The highway of Weydon-Priors was "carpeted with dust and the trees put on dingy green of yore," the cycle of change in the trees from a winter bareness to budding out into leaf each spring. Hardy continues, "Change was only to be observed in detail; but here it was obvious that a long procession of years had ³.

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¹ *Return of the Native*, p. 6.
² *Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 302
³ Ibid, 20.
1. passed by."

If animals may be considered a part of physical nature, we may observe that their homes are closer to the soil than those of men, and consequently, they live more in contact with the earth. Being close to nature, as they are, animals are subject to cycles of change. Hardy mentions spring, the time of year "which brings great changes to the world of kin."

2. As there are cycles in the recurring leafing out of trees each spring, the growth of the same leaves each autumn, so cycles in the animal world, corresponding to the physical nature. We find the idea of springs in June, the flying of birds from the north with the coming of summer. Reproduction is another example of cycles in the animal world, and Hardy alludes to this, too.

at Hardy's reference to the eternal manifest, considering his feeling of physical nature and the closeness of animals to it. There is something significant in the symbolism of the "eternal night-hawk" whose coarse whirr "burst serenestically from the top of a tree" while Suke and Fitzpiers remained silent on the bay. In the Mayor of Casterbridge Hardy speaks of a weak bird "singing a trite old song that might have been heard on the hill at the same hour and in the

Cf. Thesis p. 6, Note
2. Teas, p. 256
3. Wood, p. 177
same way for centuries untold? Here the eternal in nature it-
self becomes significant through being reflected in the essence of one little song of a bird.

The Malice in Physical Nature

To Hardy nature often assumes the aspect of a vast relent-
less force that encompasses man and is responsible for his mis-
fortunes. Hardy never uses the malicious in nature for pur-
oposes of pure description. Indeed, the subject could not, 
from its implications, lend itself to such treatment. There 
are three chief ways in which Hardy uses nature. Some of his 
settings are technical and create atmosphere, others achieve 
aesthetic ends, and those which most nearly indicate his phil-
osophy of nature show it in its sinister character affecting 
mankind.

One sort of technical effect Hardy portrays is that in 
which superstition is rampant. There is the Blackmoor country 
through which Tess walked at night. She looked from the height 
of Bulbarrow into the abyss of chaotic shade which was all that 
revealed itself of the vale where she was born. Soon she came 
to a different sort of soil, the heavy clay soil of Blackmoor 
Vale where turnpike roads had never penetrated. Hardy tells us 
that superstition lingers longest on those heavy clay soils, 
probably because of their isolation. Hardy emphasizes depend-
ence of the mind on physical nature by saying, "The harts that 
had been hunted here, the witches that had been pricked and 
ducked, the green-spangled fairies that whickered at you as you 

1. Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 3.
When Hardy has a sad event happening to one of his characters, he usually sets the scene in harmonizing surroundings. Nature at times exhibits an ominous appearance, not auspicious for individuals in that particular vicinity. Such an atmosphere is noticeable in Dixen Lane, which Hardy terms "mildewed leaf", close to the open country. Hardy creates another such background on the occasion of Tess's unfortunate visit to her husband's relatives. "The shrubs on the Vicarage lawn rustled uncomfortably in the frosty breeze"...The ivy-leaves were "weazened and gray from the nipping wind." Cross-in-Hand was an even more evil appearing place. Hardy emphasizes the sinister aspect of that lonely place where Tess swore never to tempt Alec again, feeling, even as she swore it, that something evil would come of their meeting. We are told that Cross-in-Hand was the most forlorn of all spots on that bleached and desolate landscape. The place was "so far removed from the charm which is sought in landscape by artists and view lovers as to reach a new kind of beauty, a negative beauty of tragic tone." The name Cross-in-Hand came from a stone pillar, a rude monolith which could not have been hewn in any local quarry.

and on the pillar was carved a human hand. The origin of the stone was rather uncertain. It might have been a boundary or meeting place, perhaps a sort of altar. "Whatever the origin of the relic, there was and is something sinister or solemn, according to mood, in the scene amid which it stands, something to impress the most phlegmatic passer-by." The weird feeling Hardy conveys is intensified when we learn that criminals had been hanged at that place.

Another landscape picture in which we see potential ill fortune is that of Egdon, "a lonely face suggesting tragical possibilities". Upon the occasion of Buntacia's flight from home, Hardy tells us that "never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without." Lumps of "fleshy fungi, which at this season lay scattered about the hearth like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal" lay in her path, and the moon and stars were obliterated by clouds of rain.

Another scene pervaded with gloom is that in which Angel Clare and Tess arrive at ancient Welchester Bridge, while running away from the scene of her crime. As they fled from the sure justice which was to overtake her. "The night grew as black as a cave...all around was open loneliness and black

1. Tess, p. 396.
2. Return of the Native p. 5.
solitude, over which a stiff breeze blew."

More distinctly Hardyesque is his treatment of the deliberately malicious in nature. There was a certain sinister character about the sea at Budmouth. Hardy tells us ironically that the people there prayed frequently for a dry death, but their prayers were unanswered.

Probably Hardy's most perfect example of the malice of nature to humanity is the death of Mrs. Yeobright. All nature seemed in conspiracy against her. Heartbroken at her son's supposed denial of her, she began her journey home. The sun was like something merciless to consume her. She seemed pinned to an earthly ball that caused her misery. When she had sunk down, completely exhausted by the heat, a poisonous adder crept up and gave her the bite which caused her death. It is interesting to note a typical Hardy touch here. The heath folk tried to counteract the effect of the poison by applying the fat of another freshly killed adder.

The power of the heath is great enough to counteract any human efforts to change it. Hardy has one man dying while trying to cultivate Egdon, another dying while fertilising it, then Wildeve coming "like Amerigo Vespuccio." The heath proved just as obstinate to human aggression in his case. Wildeve was always unhappy there and finally met his death upon the heath

2. Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 370.
3. Return of the Native, p. 291.
4. Ibid, p. 35.
while trying to escape it.

Hardy describes certain places in nature which seem particularly malicious to mankind. One such place was that to which Jude went, after Sue had left him. It was "a dreary, strange, flat scene, where boughs dripped and coughs and consumption lurked, and where he had been before." In connection with this incident Hardy describes the spot in Wessex known as "the crest of down by Brown House, where the road to Alfredston crosses the old Ridgeway. Here the first winter sleet and snows fall and lie, and here the spring frost lingers last unthawed. Here in the teeth of the northeast wind and rain Jude now pursued his way, wet through, the necessary slowness of his walk from lack of his former strength being insufficient to maintain his heat." He spread his blanket on the ground and lay down to rest. It was dark when he finally arrived at Alfredston, and he had a cup of tea, "the deadly chill that began to creep into his bones being too much for him to endure fasting."

It is not remarkable that Hardy's characters believe it is the malice in nature that frequently takes toll in human life. Joseph Poorgrass thought that Fanny's death might have been caused by "biding in the night wind," for she used to cough a great deal in the winter time.

2. Jude, p. 466
3. Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 327.
In Hardy's work nature is unfriendly to the ordinary needs and conveniences of human beings. In the Woodlanders we read of a house, the situation of which is "prejudicial to humanity", although "a stimulus to vegetation." The place was built in times when humanity only desired shelter from the boisterous, and "its hollow site was an ocular reminder by its unfitness for modern lives of the fragility to which these have declined." When Grace and Felice were trying to brave the storm in the woods together, nature is the source of discomfort to them too. Upon turning away from Felice, Grace was encircled by deep darkness and experienced the "cold kiss of the wind" where Mrs. Charming's warm fur had been, and she did not know which way to go.

In Far from the Madding Crowd is a description of the coming of cold weather. "It was a time when in cottages the breath of the sleepers freezes on the sheets...many a small bird went to bed supperless that night." In Far from the Madding Crowd Hardy says that the rain reduced Gabriel to a "homogeneous sop".

To be warm and well-housed are but two of the fundamental needs of man. Another even more important one is food for the body. Christopher Correy in The Mayor of Casterbridge senses some fault in the nature of the country where he lives when he

1. Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, (New York, 1887)
2. Ibid, p. 293.
3. Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 22.
complains of his many children and "God's Mighty sending his little toties so terrible small to fill them with." In the Mayor of Casterbridge, a Scotchman has been curing bad corn. He says, "To fetch it back entirely is impossible; Nature won't stand so much as that."

When man is in despair, Hardy indicates that nature may be the cause of such a state of mind, or it may augment the condition. After Sergeant Troy had planted flowers on Fanny's grave, as a last and tribute to her, rain dripped through the old gargoyles and washed the plants away, leaving little pools of water in place of the upturned roots. Troy's grief was of no concern to nature.

The Indifference of Physical Nature
Nature's indifference to the feelings of man is illustrated in a different fashion in "Tess. Nature reflects no sympathy in the following instance: After Tess's death, 'Liza-Lu and Clare tried to console each other, silently and uselessly: "Though they were young, they walked with bowed heads, which gait of grief the sun's rays smiled on pitilessly." Another such instance is found in Jude. This is the setting briefly: Jude lay on his cot, dying of consumption, and Arabella, realizing that he would soon be gone, tried to mask her impatience.

1. Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 60.
2. Ibid, p. 53.
3. Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 360-3.
to regain her freedom. In the street a celebration was in full swing, so Arabella, tired of the atmosphere of death, closed the door behind her and joined the crowd. While Jude was dying, the sun shone brightly and the sky was brilliant. Hardy again mentions the beauty of the day when Jude had passed away, as if to show the lack of sympathy which nature has for man. This cheerfulness out-of-doors on the occasions of Tess's and Jude's deaths intensifies the feeling that man can expect nothing from nature. The lack of harmony between events and surroundings makes human grief seem the sadder.

Hardy rarely writes of nature being friendly to man, but there are three such instances in which the implication is that nature may exhibit kindness. In Far from the Madding Crowd, Gabriel is concerned about the effect Fanny's death will have on Bathsheba. He hoped that "the whole truth of the matter might not be published until the girl had been in the grave a few days, when the interposing barriers of earth and time would deaden the sting that revelation and insidious remarks would have for Bathsheba right now." In the Return of the Native, as is mentioned again in this paper, Clym sees the friendliness and geniality of the hills. Hardy has his peasants fearing night, but there is another aspect of night on the heath. "In lonely districts night is a protection rather than a danger to

1. Jude, p. 481.
2. Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 332.
3. Return of the Native, p. 117.
noiseless pedestrians," and, knowing this, Tess pursued the nearest course along bylanes that she would have feared in the daytime. One could not say that Hardy was impressed with the kindness of nature, due to the predominance in his work of instances of its unfriendliness.

Incidentally, we find the elements showing malice to man's works, as well as to man himself, indicating that they are impartial to everything on earth. In the Return of the Native, Hardy speaks of old churches on a rainy night. Their cracks widen, and stains on the ceilings of decayed manorhouses increase. The expanse of the whole heath had a subdued hiss under the downpour of rain, although the heath would, of course, recover from the deluge, whereas the old houses and churches would retain their injury.

The Cruelty of Nature

There is a constant struggle in nature among its creatures for superiority over each other. The struggle for existence is in all forms of life, from the lowest animals up to man, the stronger overcoming the weaker in the common will to live. Hardy observes the results of this struggle in plants in The Woodlanders, "Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was an obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum....The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted, the lichen

1. Tess, p. 440, Thesis P.

2. Return of the Native, p. 365.
ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling.” The struggle for existence, then, is present in plants much as it is among the lower classes of humanity. In the realm of animal life, too, we find the same struggle. It produces a stranger effect in Clym during his wild walk back to Underworth after discovering that Bastaïa had refused his mother admittance into their house. “He had once before felt in his own person this overpowering of the forvild by the inanimate....All the life visible was in the shape of a solitary thrush cracking a small snail upon the door-stone for his breakfast, and his tapping seemed a loud noise in the general silence which prevailed.”

Besides in men, plants, and animals, there is a struggle for existence in man’s works. The sensitive Jude felt the effect of the cruelty of nature upon certain aged erections. “The condition of several moved him as he would have been moved by maimed sentient beings.” They were wounded, broken, sloughing off their outer shape in the deadly struggle against years, weather, and man.” So we find the same struggle for existence going on all through the universe, in physical nature itself, in animals, man, and even in man’s works.

Because of their direct contact with nature, animals may be said to be closer to physical nature than man. Still, Hardy does not feel that nature is any kinder in her provision for

1. The Woodlanders, p. 59.
2. Return of the Native, p. 328.
3. Thomas Hardy, Jude, p. 95.
them for this reason. Jude, for instance, was obliged to sound a clacker to frighten away the birds from the farmer's grain. "He sounded the clacker until his arm ached, but at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds' thwarted desires. They seemed, like himself", to be living in a world which did not want them." Always tender-hearted toward creatures, in later years, when Jude was compelled to butcher a pig for Arabella, "the white snow, stained with the blood of his fellow-mortal, wore an illogical look to him as a lover of justice." Sue felt the same sort of sympathy for her pigeons when she knew they must be sold and would be killed to furnish money for Jude and herself. Gabriel's grief at the loss of his sheep, although no doubt tempered by the loss of profit in them, showed the sympathy of man for creatures weaker than himself. This would indicate that Hardy feels deeply how animals suffer from life, in common with man, and that man, consequently, experiences a feeling of compassion for his fellow-creatures.

The malice of nature may seem cruelty to some persons. Jade found, upon growing up, that events did not rhyme as he thought they would. "Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy toward one set of creatures was cruelty to another sickened his sense of harmony." There seems to be

2. Ibid, p. 73.
no hope that nature ever will be kind. Even if it were, its kindness to man might be the source of wretchedness to other creatures.

The same idea, that malice toward one set of creatures may prove kindness to another is brought out in the case of Jan's and Gabriel's hunting for the gypsies who had supposedly taken Bathsheba's horses. The rain obscured the horses' hoof-prints so that there were "little scoops of water which reflected the flame of the match-like eyes." Here unfriendliness toward Gabriel would naturally be kindness to the gypsies, who would then be able to get the horses away. The effect of this passage upon the reader is implicit.

Eustacia Vye was another victim of nature. The wings of her soul were broken by the cruel obstructiveness of all about her. Hardy has her say, "The cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world--I was capable of much, but I have been injured and blighted by things beyond my control," and we feel that she is right. A good share of the things beyond Eustacia's control was the environment in which she found herself obliged to live. Here, clearly, is an instance of a woman whose entire life was injured by circumstances around her.

At certain times we find the people in Hardy's books longing for death as the only sure release from the tyranny of life.

2. Return of the Native, p. 368.
Unable to make adjustments to their surroundings, they turn to nature to give them the relief of oblivion. In death we find Eustacia attaining that peace which was never hers in life. Thus the passivity and lack of resistance which death brought her was the only way she had of conquering an uncongenial environment. Hardy’s implication was that Eustacia, in her despair, actually drowned herself. He says, “Venn vanished under the stream, and came up with an armful of wet drapery enclosing a woman’s cold form, which was all that remained of the desperate Eustacia.” Clym observed the eternal rigidity on her face. She looked at home at last, though she had never belonged to the earth in life. Clym felt that he should have died and Eustacia to have lived.---“It is I who ought to have drowned myself,” said Clym. “It would have been a charity to the living had the river overwhelmed me and borne her up. But I cannot die. Those who ought to have lived lie dead, and here I am alive.” Susan, Farfrai, Lucetta, and Elizabeth had all gone from Fanchord. He considered that he might have as many as thirty or forty years yet to live. "The thought of it was unendurable. He made his way to the weir-hole at a place called Ten Hatches. "For a second or two he stood beside the weir-hole where the water was at its deepest. He looked backwards and forwards, and no creature appeared in view. He then took off his coat and hat, and stood on the brink of the stream with his hands clasped in front of him.

"While his eyes were bent on the water beneath, there slowly became visible a something floating in the circular pool formed by the wash of the centuries; the pool he was intending to make his death-bed. At first it was indistinct by reason of the shadow from the bank; but it emerged thence and took shape, which was that of a human body, lying stiff and stark upon the surface of the stream." To his horror, Henchard perceived it was his own effigy, and his sense of the supernatural overcame the lure of the water for him.

Nature's malice seems oddly calculated at times. She refused to grant Jude the respite of death. Unable to jump through the ice, "he supposed that he was not a sufficiently dignified person for suicide. Peaceful death abhorred him as a subject and would not take him." Consequently, he considered the next best thing, getting drunk. "Drinking was the regular, stereotyped resource of despairing worthlessness. He began to see how why some men boozed at inns." 2

There seems to be a recurrence of malice in Hardy's work, like the rolling of the earth around the sun. The bonfires of the Return of the Native seem to Hardy to indicate a promethean rebelliousness of the "fettered gods of the earth against the fiat that this recurrent time shall bring foul times, cold, and death. "The situation, then, lacks the possibility of alleviation, if misery is to recur again and again. Seeing 1. Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 341-342.

2. Jude The Obscure, p. 79.
the bonfires reminds one of ages ago when men suffered from the cold and other forms of natural malice, just as the characters in the Return of the Native did throughout their lives.

Influence Upon Humankind

Since nature is a force of such power in Hardy's work, we expect it to exert influence on the lives of his characters. It is interesting to note the effects nature has upon characters of different temperaments and social standings. Eustacia Vye is the outstanding example of an individual whose outlooks and activities are determined and changed by the physical nature surrounding her. Eustacia was a melancholy, beautiful, discontented woman—one with many innate possibilities which were crushed by the oppression of her environment. Hardy seems to think that Eustacia was meant for the heath, however, rather than for Budmouth, for he says that the isolation of the heath makes vulgarity impossible, whereas a narrow life in Budmouth might have completely demeaned her. Although Eustacia was a more splendid woman for having lived on Egdon, she was an unhappy one, lacking adjustment to her surroundings. Egdon was her Hades, and she imbibed much of what was dark on it. "To dwell on a heath without learning its meaning is like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue." The subtle heath beauties were lost on Eustacia, and she got only its vapors. "An environment which would have made a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, made a rebellious woman satur-

1. Return of the Native, p. 15.
2. Ibid, p. 69.
1. Eustacia was inclined to hate the people on the heath. Clym urged her not to blame them, but rather to blame what produced them, "Nature." After Eustacia's encounter with Mrs. Yeobright, which resulted in an impassable gulf between them, she begged Clym to take her to Paris, for she was the "sharer of his doom." When Clym's blindness incapacitated him for the life of a gentleman and he began to cut furze, Eustacia still clung to the forlorn hope that she might escape the gloom and loneliness of Egdon. Still, she was not afraid to walk on the heath at night, for it held no terrors for her, due probably to her temperament which also impelled her to walk on the heath with Wildeve," to flout the miserable inhabitants of Egdon." Eustacia had premonitions about the heath, however. She felt that it was her misery, her cross, and would be her death.

Wildeve, like Eustacia, abhorred the heath. "'God, how lonely it is,'" he said. "'What are picturesque ravines and cliffs to us who see nothing else?'" Hardy makes the power of the heath evident when he compares Eustacia and Wildeve to two horns which the sluggish heath had put forth and now drawn in like a mollusc. Thomasin senses Wildeve's feeling of being penned in

1. Return of the Native, p. 70.
5. " , p. 266.
7. " , p. 86.
on Egdon when she says that he looks upon it as "somebody's jail" instead of a "nice wild place to walk in." Thomasin, of course, was born on the heath, whereas Wildeve and Eustacia came as strangers. Thomasin's attitude is in decided contrast to that of these other two. She called Egdon "a ridiculous old place" and told Diggory she could not be happy anywhere else. Hardy tells us that she was almost a part of it, like a bird.

Mrs. Yeobright was affected by the heath in a different way. She had an estranged mien, the solitude of the heath in her face. Hardy seems to feel that she was interesting, for her said of her, and other strongly individualized people, "persons with any weight of character carry, like planets, their atmosphere with them."

Joseph Poorgrass, a comparatively unintelligent person, read into nature meanings which quite took away his calm. While he was transporting Fanny to her final resting place, a weird feeling crept over him. "The air was as an eye struck suddenly blind, "and the wagon rolled along through a monotonous pallor...." Joseph looked at his sad burden, then at the unfathomable gloom amid the high trees on each hand, indistinct, shadowless, and specter-like in their monochrome gray. He felt

1. Return of the Native, p. 352.
2. Ibid, p. 400.
4. Ibid, p. 31
anything but cheeffful. The nearer boughs were beaded with the mist to the grayness of aged men, and the rusty-red leaves of the beaches were hung with similar drops like diamonds on auburn hair. "The gloom of the whole scene and the fact that Joseph was carrying a corpse in his wagon made him feel more than melancholy.

The effect of the heath upon Clym was quite different from that upon Eustacia. He was drawn to it. Although Fairway said that a man who does well elsewhere would not live in Egdon unless he had a project in his head, Clym, who had been quite successful in Paris, returned to the heath through preference. A well-proportioned mind would not have allowed Clym to throw over his business there, Hardy tells us, but there was a stronger attraction pulling Clym back to Egdon. He was a product of the heath, and his estimate of life was colored by it. Clym noticed a friendliness and geniality in the hills, a friendliness that did not exist for Eustacia. The fascination was rather humbling for him, however. Although Clym was aware of the beauty of summer, something in the oppressive horizonality of Egdon Heath too much reminded Clym of the arena of life and gave him a sense of bare equality with and no superiority to a single living thing under the sun. This must have been a de-

1. *Far From the Ladding Crowd*, p. 331.
2. *Return of the Native*, p. 172
3. Ibid, p. 175.
4. Ibid, p. 117.
pressing feeling for Clym to believe that he was no higher than even the lower animals. The heath was a cruel taskmaster to Eustacie, but it had no worse effect on Clym than to make him a philosopher, for what had proved the source of misery to her had not done so for him, although Nature did not exert herself to please either of them.

There is much of the reaction of depression from some of the aspects of nature. Fitzpiers, in the Woodlanders, felt the ill-will of nature toward himself and human life in general. The early morning of this particular day was dreary, and "upon looking out in the gray, dim dawn, Fitzpiers had observed some of Melbury's men dragging away a large limb which had been snapped off a beech tree. Everything was cold and colorless. "My good God!" he said... 'This is life."

Little Hintock House, which was "vegetable nature's own home" was a spot to inspire the poet and painter of still life, but still it could draw greens from the morosely disposed. Fitzpiers came as an outsider to the wood and failed to grow to love it. Grace was surprised that he disliked the old-fashioned wood, which was all the dearer to her as the scene of their courtship. Mrs. Charmond was, like Fitzpiers, not a native of Hintock; she watched the rain flooding the window panes and considered the futility of her love for Fitzpiers. "'O,' she murmured....'Sorrow and bitterness in the sky, and

1. The Woodlanders, p. 263.
2. Ibid, p. 66.
floods of agonized tears beating against the panes. O, why
were we given hungry hearts and wild desires if we have to live
in a world like this:

There are some interesting emotional reactions which Hardy
attributes to humans in the presence of certain aspects of na-
ture. Gabriel Oake, uncultivated in comparison with these others,
could feel the power of nature, especially when his own aims
and wishes appeared to be thwarted. In Far from the Madding
Crowd we have Gabriel considering dubiously the value of his
own person to the universe. "He wiped his weary brow, and look­
ed again at the black forms of the unprotected stacks. Was
his life so valuable to him after all? What were his prospects
that he should be chary of running risk when important and ur-
gent labor could not be carried on without risk?" Hardy says
that "love, life, everything human seemed small and triffling
in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe."
This, perhaps, explains why Gabriel did not feel justified in
even sacrificing a crop of hay to the elements in order to save
his own life from danger. Hardy shows another emotional reac-
tion to nature in The Woodlanders. We read, "It was a calm
afternoon, and there was everywhere around that sign of great
undertakings on the part of vegetable nature which is apt to
fill reflective human beings who are not undertaking much them-

1. The Woodlanders, p. 236.
2. Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 292.
selves with a sudden uneasiness at the contrast!" Nature, then, continues her enterprises whether people attempt much or not.

There are other scenes in nature, which Hardy indicates as inspiring people with awe or fear. Such a one was "Marshcombe Bottom, intensely dark with undergrowth and popularly supposed to be haunted by spirits." We can imagine Christopher Correy hurrying to pass this place quickly on a dark night, whereas Fitzpiers would scarcely admit to himself more than a momentarily unpleasant feeling at the prospect. Night out of doors brings to human beings sentiments of varying natures, depending upon the person and the locality. There is one such scene on Egdon Heath, typically a Hardy description. "It was a night which led the traveler's thoughts instinctively on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world, on all that is terrible and dark in history and legend--the last plague of Egypt, the destruction of Sennacherib's host, the agony in Gethsemane." Gabriel was the sort of person who would not desire company to relieve solitude, whereas most people would wish it. In Far From the Madding Crowd Gabriel discovers Bathsheba and her aunt, working close by him in the very early morning. "To find themselves utterly alone at night where company is desirable and unexpected makes some people

1. The Woodlanders, p. 159.
2. Ibid, p. 305.
3. Return of the Native, p. 358.
fearful, but a case more trying by far to the nerves is to discover some mysterious companionship...." Tess and Clare achieved a quality of aloofness from all humanity. Hardy says, "The spectral, half-compounded light which pervaded the open mead, impressed them with a feeling of isolation, as if they were Adam and Eve."

Another example of man's emotional reaction to nature occurs when Keibury walks out into the woods. "He set out to look for Giles on a riny evening when the woods seemed to be in a cold sweat...the sky had no color, and the trees rose before him as haggard, grey phantoms whose days of substantiality were passed." "It was a night when sorrow may come to the brightest without causing any great sense of incongruity, when, with impressible persons, love becomes solicitousness, hope sinks to misgiving, and faith to hope; when the exercise of memory does not stir feelings of regret at opportunities for ambition that have been passed by, and anticipation does not prompt to enterprise." After Sergeant Troy had deserted Bath-shabba, she spent the night in a swampy place whose general aspect was malignant, although she had not realized it until it stood revealed by the light of day."

3. The Woodlanders, pg. 270.
4. Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 95.
sery of pestilences great and small and in the immediate neighborhood of comfort and health, and Bathsheba arose with a tremor at having passed the night on the brink of so dismal a place." Then we have Jude going out into the rain to see Sue, full of sadness at the uncertainty of the outcome of his attachment for her. "The trees overhead deepened the gloom of the hour and they dripped sadly upon him, impressing him with forebodings, for, though he knew he loved her, he also knew he could not be more to her than he was."

Sue, one of Hardy's intellectual characters, observed that the place of martyrdom, chosen by Jude for their meeting place, was ominous. "So horrid", she said. "I suppose I ought not to say horrid--I mean gloomy and inauspicious." Hardy has created an atmosphere here, but he also definitely indicates Sue's emotional reaction to the depressing surroundings. Elizabeth Jane would also be considered one of Hardy's more intelligent characters. She did not hate nature, for she loved the sea. "She could not herself account for it fully, not knowing the secret possibly to be that, in additional to early marine associations, her blood was a sailor's." Little Abraham, influenced by what Tess had told him of our "blighted star", justified the catastrophe of the death of their horse by saying,

1. Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 348.
2. Jude, p. 126.
"'Tis because we live on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn't it, Tess?" Tess agreed with him. When Troy witnessed the havoc the rain had made of the flowers he had planted with such care on Fanny's grave, "the sight, coming as it did, superimposed upon the dark scenery of the previous days, formed a sort of climax to the whole panorama, and it was more than he could endure."

In Tess we have an instance of Nature affecting a whole group of people. "Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization; it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate. The ready bbsoms existing there were impregnated by their surroundings." Thus, in Tess, nature predisposes humans to particular emotions at the July season of the year.

Man is not always conscious of the appearance of nature, if his own sorrows exclude them from his mind. Jude wished to marry Sue, now that he had a legal right, but Sue still demurred, distrusting what marriage might do to their love. The landscape was colorless as they walked along. "The pair, however, were so absorbed in their own situation that their surroundings were little in their consciousness."

1. Tess, p. 34.
2. Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 35-363
3. Tess, p. 190
4. Jude, p. 305
Throughout Hardy's work he has certain of his characters quite in harmony with Nature and her plans, and others who rebel against these plans. Usually, the field folk think it useless to resent the scheme of things, and consequently, fare better than those who realize too keenly the difference of aim between nature and themselves. Clym is in harmony with nature, while Eustacia revolts against it. He finally becomes "a parasite on the heath...thinking the regulation thoughts of a furze-cutter, to judge by his motions." For this reason he is able to sing, while Eustacia only curses the fate which detains her in Egdon.

The reactions of foolish Christian Cantle to nature are typical of the extremely simple mind. He has a certain superstitious terror of the heath at night, because he cannot see it as he can in daytime. Still the heath never hurt him, as it did Eustacia and Wildeve, neither of whom feared it.

Hardy thinks that people who are more or less gregarious have a different attitude toward nature than those alone with it, the latter being almost pantheistic at times. "Those who live close to Nature," he says, "especially in lonely places, too, have a different outlook from those in cities." Women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of out-door nature retain in their souls more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion

1. Return of the Native, p. 279.
taught their race at later date." This might be due to their being allowed to draw their own conclusions about such matters more than are those who associate extensively with other people. Tess began to develop similar ideas, too.... "Her naturally bright intelligence had begun to admit the fatalistic convictions common to field-folk and those who associate more extensively with natural phenomena than with their fellow-creatures...." Here we recognize a passive submission which is common in Hardy's peasants.

Instead of human experiences being affected by nature, Hardy shows nature here as a reflection of these experiences. The effect nature has upon an individual depends somewhat upon his state of mind at the time of the impression. Tess had always noticed the beauty of the "familiar green world."..."It was always beautiful from here; it was terribly beautiful to Tess today, for since her eyes last fell upon it she had learned that the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing, and her views of life had been totally changed for her by the lesson." The other times when Tess had beheld this scene, she was but a child, and her estimate of its beauty had been the childish one of simple pleasure, but now that her experiences of the world had embittered her outlook, her feelings about even this lovely scene in nature were altered and more thoughtful. Sometimes the natural processes around Tess seemed a part of her own story. "The midnight air and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs, were formul

A wet day seemed to Tess to be a direct expression of grief at her weakness in the mind of "some vague ethical being she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other." So we see Tess feeling that nature mirrored her own experiences, a tribute to nature that time had taught her.

Hardy's Use of Description in Physical Nature

Hardy describes physical nature to show its various manifestations. One such aspect he uses is that of gloom. Hardy, of course, excels in the portrayal of melancholy scenes in nature. A great deal of the monotony and grayness, which is the effect we get from such passages, comes from the season or times of day he chooses. In the Woodlanders there is a description of this type. Grace is going on an errand for poor old Grammer. "The morning looked forbidding enough when she stealthily edged forth. The battle between show and thaw was continuing in mid air, the trees dripped on garden plots where no vegetables would grow for the dripping, though they were planted year after year with that curious mechanical regularity of country people in the face of hopelessness..."

It is difficult to conceive of a more uninteresting time of the year than an early March morning. The snows of winter are gone, yet there is no green to replace the bareness left in their wake. "The dawn of a March morning is singularly inexpresive, and there is nothing to show where the eastern

2. The Woodlanders, p. 144.
horizon lies. Against the twilight rises the trapezoidal top of the stack, which has stood forlornly here through the washing and bleaching of the wintry weather."

The forest in *Far from the Maddening Crowd* was, in some parts, capable of emanating gloom at almost any time of the day. Hardy says of it, "By reason of the density of the interwoven foliage overhead, it was gloomy there at cloudless noontide, twilight in the evening, dark as midnight at dusk, and black as the ninth plague of Egypt at midnight. To describe the spot is to call it a vast, low, naturally formed hall, the plumy ceiling of which was supported by slender pillars of living wood, the floor being covered with a soft dun carpet of dead spikelets and mildewed cones, with a tuft of grass-blades here and there." Dead and mildewed are typical words for Hardy to use in this.

These preceding paragraphs serve to show Hardy's use of darkness and gloominess in physical nature. Hardy, by using a tragic situation of human life, creates an effect of forlornness when he tells us that Tess's baby was buried in "...that shabby corner of God's allotment where He allows the nettles to grow, and where all unbaptized babies, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned are laid."

Hardy makes this scene in nature unpleasant by referring to nettles which grew there.

2. *Far from the Maddening Crowd*, p. 165.
A scene not especially pathetic, but almost weird in its quiet colorlessness, is found in the *Return of the Native*.

"The air was warm with a vaporous warmth, and the stillness was unbroken. Lizards, grasshoppers, and ants were the only living things to be beheld. The scene seemed to belong to the ancient world of the carboniferous period, when the forms of plants were few and of the fern kind, when there was neither bud nor blossom, nothing but a monotonous extent of leafage, mid which no bird sang."

Hardy's description of the scene Gabriel witnessed after the death of his sheep fascinates us by its very uncanniness and inhumanity. "By the outer margin of the pit was an oval pond, and over it hung the attenuated skeleton of a chrome yellow moon, which had only a few days to last--the morning star dogging her on the right hand. The pool glittered like a dead man's eye, and as the world awoke a breeze blew, shaking and elongating the reflection of the moon without breaking it, and turning the image of the star to a phosphoric streak upon the water. All this Oak saw and remembered." This picture, with its suggestions of death is a fine illustration of Hardy's impressionism.

Man may sense something of the eternal in the universe if the time and setting is right. "To persons standing alone on a hill during a clear midnight such as this, the roll of the world eastward is almost a panoramic glide of the stars past 1. *Return of the Native*, p. 207.

2. *Far From the Madding Crowd*, p. 41.
earthly objects, which is perceptible in a few minutes of stillness, or by the better outlook upon space that a hill affords, or by the wind, or by the solitude; but whatever be its origin, the impression of riding along is vivid and abiding. The poetry of motion is a phrase much in use, and to enjoy the epic form of that gratification it is necessary to stand on a hill at a small hour of the night, and, having first expanded with a sense of difference from the mass of civilized mankind, who are horizontal and disregardful of all such proceedings at this time, long and quietly watch your stately progress through the stars. After such a nocturnal reconnoitre among these astral clusters, aloft from the customary haunts of thoughts and vision, some men may feel raised to a capability for eternity at once." When Tess observed the "mute procession" of trees and hedges which passed her shoulders during her early morning ride to sell the milk for her father, this vegetation seemed to her to be "attached to fantastic scenes outside reality, and the occasional heave of the wind became the sigh of some immense sad soul, conterminous with the universe in space, and with history in time." Nature at such times, Hardy realizes, is sometimes most silent and meaningful, being dissociated from the bustle and stir of humanity that usually takes place in the daytime.

One of Hardy's most splendid and terror-inspiring pictures of physical nature is that of the coming of the storm in Far 1. Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 9-10; Tess, p. 34.
From the *Madding Crowd*, in which nature ostentatiously destroys what is a season's crop for many farmers. While Gabriel was absorbed in his meditations, his thought was suddenly broken by the sound of the weather-vane on the coach house turning around, the signal for a disastrous rain. "A hot breeze, as if breathed from the parted lips of some dragon about to swallow the globe, formed in the south, while directly opposite in the north arose a grim misshapen body of cloud, in the very teeth of the wind. So unnaturally did it rise that one could fancy it to be lifted by machinery from below. Meanwhile, the faint cloudlets had flown back into the southeast corner of the sky, as if in terror of the large cloud, like a young brood gazed in upon by some monster..." "The night had a sinister aspect. A heated breeze from the south slowly fanned the summits of lofty objects, and in the sky dashes of buoyant cloud were sailing in a course at right angles to that of another stratum, neither of them in the direction of the breeze below. The moon, as seen through these films, had a lurid metallic look. The fields were sallow with the impure light, and all were tinged in the monochrome, as if beheld through stained glass....Thunder was imminent and taking some secondary appearances into consideration, it was likely to be followed by one of the lengthened rains which mark the close of the weather for the season. Before twelve hours had passed a harvest atmosphere would be a bygone thing."

1. *Far from the Madding Crowd*, p. 298.
A very interesting and imaginative description is given in *Tess*, in connection with the coming of winter to Flintcomb-Ash. "After this season of congealed dampness came a spell of dry frost when strange birds from behind the Northpole began to arrive silently on the upland of Flintcomb-Ash; gaunt, spectral creatures with tragical eyes—eyes which had witnessed scenes of cataclysmal horror, in inaccessible polar regions of a magnitude such as no human being had ever conceived, in curdling temperatures that no man could endure; which had beheld the crash of icebergs, and the slide of snowhills by the shooting light of the Aurora, been half-blinded by the whirl of colossal storms and terraqueous distortions, and retained the expression of feature that such scenes had engendered."

It would be unfair to suppose that Hardy has no eyes for pure beauty unmixed with melancholy, in the out-of-doors world. One of his most delightful passages is one in which he tells us about summer in the country. "It was the first day of June, and the sheep-shearing season culminated, the landscape, even to the leanest pasture, being all health and color. Every green was young, every pore was open, and every stalk was swollen with racing currents of juice. God was palpably present in the country, and the devil had gone with the world to town. Flossy catkins of the later kinds, fern fronds, like bishops' crosiers, the square-headed moschatel, the odd cuckoo-pint, like an apoplectic saint in a niche of malachite, clear white ladies' smocks, the toothward, approximating to human flesh, the enchanter's night-
shade, and the black-petaled doleful-bells, were among the quaint-
er objects of the vegetable world in and about Weatherbury at 
this teeming time...."

Hardy has several pleasant passages in which he describes 
the coming of day. One of these is found in Far from the Mad-
ding Crowd. "It was very early the next morning—a time of sun 
and dew. The confused beginnings of many birds’ songs spread 
into the healthy air, and the wren blue of heaven was here and 
there coated with thin webs of incorporeal cloud which were of 
no effect in obscuring day. All the lights in the scene were 
yellow as to color, and all the shadows were attenuated as to 
form."

There is one sunrise in particular which, although a little 
weird, is remarkable for its beauty of color effects. "It was 
one of the usual slow sunrises of this time of the year, and the 
sky, pure violet in the zenith, was leaden to the northward, 
and murky to the east....the only half of the sun yet visible 
burnt rayless, like a red and flameless fire shining over a 
white hearthstone. The whole effect resembled sunset as child-
hood resembles age...Over the west hung a wasting moon, now dull 
and greenish-yellow, like tarnished brass."

There is a single line in Tess which expresses Hardy’s 
appreciation of the beauty of the sky. He calls the dawn a 
"band of silver paleness."

1. Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 164.
3. Ibid, p. 41.
Conclusion

After all, Hardy is somewhat of a philosopher and translates experiences of the exterior into meanings which satisfy his own nature. There is a statement in *Tess* which expresses Hardy's idea of beauty, "Beauty to her, as to all who have felt, lay not in the thing, but in the thing symbolized." Out of twenty-two of Hardy's descriptions of beauty, which I have examined carefully, eighteen definitely show symbolism.

Hardy feels the beauty of physical nature, but its beauty is often to him a mask behind which lurks potential evil and a disregard for human welfare.

On the one hand, Hardy shows us physical nature, ageless and abiding; on the other hand is humanity with its petty conflicts and tragedies, petty in comparison with the power of nature. Still, humanity is the same in all ages. *Tess* says, "The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands and thousands that your coming life and doings'ill be like thousands and thousands." Marty South says implicitly that human beings have a certain likeness to each other when she says of Mrs. Charmond, "So rich, and so powerful, and yet to groan. Then things don't say with her any more than with we." There is a nice comparison of the heath and man in the *Return of the Native*. Egdon was like man,

slighted and enduring."

Hardy indicates that nature is supremely indifferent to human vicissitudes, when it is not deliberately malicious, as it was in the case of Mrs. Yeobright's death on the heath. Tess realized the fallacy of believing that nature cared about her situation. "The trees were just as green as before; the birds sang and the sun shone just as clearly now as ever. The familiar surroundings had not darkened because of her grief, nor sickened because of her pain. She might have seen that what had bowed her head so profoundly—the thought of a world's concern at her situation, was founded on an illusion." Even the river seemed to her to say, "Why do ye trouble me with your looks?" If the river did not reflect Tess's sorrows, nature was equally indifferent to all humanity, good and evil. "I shouldn't mind learning why the sun do shine on the just and the unjust alike...But that's what the books will not tell me," said Tess. Hardy feels that it is not nature which judging the acts of humanity, but rather it is men who condemn each other. A deed which might be wrong in the eyes of humanity is not necessarily against the laws of nature. In Tess "Every see-saw of her breath, every wave of her blood, every pulse singing in her ears, was a voice that joined with Nature in revolt against her scrupulousness."

1. *Return of the Native*, p. 5.
3. Ibid, p. 162, 228.
Nature is no less indifferent to man in happier moments. Hardy makes such an observation in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Gabriel's fancy has painted Bathsheba a beauty. "By one of those whimsical coincidences in which Nature, like a busy mother, seems to spare a moment from her unremitting labors to turn and make her children smile, the girl now dropped the cloak, and forth tumbled ropes of black hair over a red jacket." Nature appears friendly here, but we cannot conclude that Hardy thinks of her as a kindly power, disposed to make her creatures happy. The instances in which nature is cruelly indifferent to human welfare too far outweigh the above evidence. Even in this case, Hardy calls the sympathetic mood of nature a "whimsical coincidence."

Tess, Henchard, Jude, Balthazar, and Wildeve could all trace their misfortunes to the influence of nature. Tess's tragedy was partially brought about by the darkness and lure of physical nature at the time of her ride home with Alec. Henchard's financial reverses were the result of the inclemency of the weather. Jude contracted the disease which led to his death from exposure to dampness and cold. Balthazar said that not Wildeve, but the place she lived in was her ruin. The young

1. *Far from the Madding Crowd*, p. 18.
The innkeeper himself was made unhappy by the loneliness of Egdon Heath because, like Eustacia, he possessed a temperament suited for surroundings less bleak and desolate. Hardy tells us that Paris was suited to gaiety and Egdon to young philanthropy. Lacking the qualifications for philanthropy, Eustacia and Wildeve were, of course, misfits.

Hardy realizes that the effect nature has upon man is largely the result of the attitudes of man himself. The quotation, mentioned above, to the effect that the heath could make a pious woman a peasmine, and a suffering woman a devotee, but make a rebellious woman saturnine, expresses best the way the same environment can affect different types of people. Those characters of Hardy's who are close to the earth and who were born in the country seem to suffer less from their surroundings than do those who come as strangers to the same scene. Gabriel Oak, Christopher Correy, Thomasin, and Diggory Venn were all quite happy in the country. The effect of nature upon such people as Mrs. Churmond, Eustacia, Wildeve, and Fitzpiers has been indicated in former pages. They made a part of their own unhappiness by rebelling against nature. The natives of the heath, were, without an exception, contented with their surroundings.

Neither does Hardy's conception of physical nature favor

1. Return of the Native, p. 242.
the sentiments of man. Melbury had noticed Grace's footprints while he was walking out-of-doors and he thought of her tenderly. Hardy said, "Nature does not carry on her government with a view to such feelings and when advancing years render the open hearts of those that possessed them less dextrous, than formerly, in shutting against the blast, they must inevitably, like little celandines, suffer buffeting at will by rain and storm." Hardy shows us how tame and insignificant human woes can seem when set against the aspect of Egdon Heath. Clym had perceived in his mind Eustacia and another figure coming toward him. "Instead of there being before him 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 the wildest turmoil of a single man." Clym had a consciousness of "vast impassivity" when he returned home.

In spite of Hardy's feeling that physical nature dominates the universe and that man only exists as best he can, Hardy does respect the dignity of the individual. In The Woodlanders Hardy tells us that it would be impossible to describe Grace Melbury with precision; he continues, "Nay, from the highest point of view, to precisely describe a human being, the focus of a universe, how impossible."

In The Return of the Native there is a nice instance of

1. Woodlanders, p. 19
2. Return of the Native, p. 328.
3. Woodlanders, p. 42.
the aspects of physical nature which Hardy himself prefers. This passage indicates Hardy’s reason for portraying so much of the gloomy aspect of nature. He says, “Men have often suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings oversadly tinged. 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.

“Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule; human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a somberness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind.”

1. Return of the Native, p. 4.
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