The Unique Place Given to Nature in the Wessex Novels of Thomas Hardy

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A thesis submitted to the department of English and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts.
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1871 Desperate Remedies
1872 Under the Greenwood Tree
1873 A Pair of Blue Eyes
1874 Far from the Madding Crowd
1876 The Hand of Ethelberta
1878 The Return of the Native
1880 The Trumpet Major
1881 A Laodicean
1882 Two on a Tower
1886 The Mayor of Casterbridge
1887 The Woodlanders
1891 Tess of the D'Urbervilles
1895 Jude the Obscure
1897 The Well-Beloved.
Contents.

Introduction,-

1. Grouping of the Novels
2. Description of Novels in Group I.
3. Topics to be discussed.

I. The picture of the surrounding world
   1. Nature pictures
   2. Color descriptions
   3. Primitive Background
   4. Spectacular Variation of Human Moods
   5. Separateness of this world

II. Unity Between Man and Nature
   1. Intricate relations
   2. Nature as harmonious Setting to Action
   3. Beautiful Figures of Speech
   4. A Close observer of Natural Phenomena

III. Nature as Moulding Force in character
   1. General influence
   2. Two contrasted instances

IV. Power to Determine Fate of Actors
   1. Eustacia and the Heath
   2. Mr. South and the Elm Tree

V. Hardy's Apparent attitude toward Nature.
The Unique Place given to Nature in the Wessex Novels of Thomas Hardy.

The Wessex Novels may be grouped into three clearly marked divisions:-

I. Novels of character and Environment
   1. Tess of the D'Urbervilles
   2. Far From the Madding Crowd
   3. Jude the Obscure
   4. The Return of the Native
   5. The Mayor of Castorbridge
   6. The woodlanders
   7. Under the Greenwood Tree

II. Romances and Fantasies
   1. A Pair of Blue Eyes
   2. The Trumpet Major
   3. Two on a Tower
   4. The Well-Beloved.

III. Novels of Ingenuity
   1. Desperate Remedies
   2. The Hand of Ethelberta
   3. A Laodician

In each of the novels of the last two groups occasional passages occur that are illustrative of Hardy's
peculiar use of Nature, but no single novel of either of these two groups stands out as a whole as an example of Hardy's characteristic treatment of nature and environment, as do the novels of the first group. It is therefore with group I that we are especially interested in this study of the unique place given to nature in the Wessex Novels. Each novel of this group is marked in some special way by the association of inanimate objects, hills, plains, heaths, and woodlands, with the lives of the actors. This application of nature varies in the different novels from that of merely a harmonious setting, to that of a presiding genius that broods over and shapes the destiny of each actor in turn.

In "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," we have an example of perfect harmony existing between the setting and the action of the story. It is with more than logical propriety that the setting changes with the progressive remotion of the story, turning bleaker and harsher as the tragic stress deepens. From first to last this story is one relentless onward movement; the human narrative, the surrounding nature, the accompaniment of intellectual and emotional significance—all weave inextricably together and go forward dominated by a single unit of purpose. They unite in a single epic statement formidable in its bare expression of the conflict between the personal and the impersonal.
"Far From the Madding Crowd", is an example of Hardy's ability to give a description at the opening of the story, and make it serve as a prelude to the sonata that follows, embodying, as it should, the motif that is to be often repeated and further developed in what follows. This novel opens with the description of a night storm, as seen from the lovely hill-top, when the earth seems to be perceptibly swinging through space. This admirable prelude forshadows the tragedies and constant turmoil, which marks the progress of the story. Here also we have a harmonious setting, starting as the story does in the large open air of pastoral life and passing from this upland atmosphere to the placid delicious region of farm life in the lowlands.

On "Jude the Obscure" we have a story of the terrible struggle caused by personal desires asserting themselves against the vast unconcerned current of existence. It is a careful, exact and sincere presentation of the interaction of nature on life, through the medium of primitive passions. In this story the silent, pitiless forces of nature interblend with the mighty forces of the human will to determine the fate of the animolicule man.

In the "Return of the Native" as in "Far from the Madding Crowd" a bit of nature serves for a prelude. We never lose the vision of Egdon Heath given us in the first pages of the book. Its brooding, shaping presence touches the life
of each of the characters in turn; and we see the barrenness and beauty, feel its awe and separate and peculiar solitude and its immense antiquity until there is subtly conveyed to us the feeling that this drama of the Yeobrights and Eustacia is of equal antiquity and grandeur with that of the heath. This most extraordinary and unique power of creating and maintaining perfect unison between the physical world and human characters is to be found in varying degrees in all of the Wessex Novels, but it is most perfectly displayed in "The Return of the Native".

In "The Mayor of Casterbridge", we are given the tragic history of Honchard, in whose nature the dualism of personal and impersonal forces is so intensified that his whole career so far as it is injurious to him, seems but the objectification of his own self injuring nature.

The story of "The Woodlanders" is placed under the dominance of a very kindly aspect of nature. This time it is the influence of the surrounding woods. The trees even assume the characteristics of individuals. We do not forget that the woods surround us any more than we forget that Eustacia lives near the heath.

In "Under the Greenwood Tree", we are brought into a very close friendship with the earth. We first gain this feeling of nearness to nature in the picture of Dick as he walked along home that Christmas night listening to the
voices of the trees and singing of the daffadowndillies. This feeling remains with us until the happy final scene, the marriage of Dick and Faney, as it is celebrated "Under the Green Wood Tree" with its spreading branches.

Hardy's treatment of nature is as varied and undefinable as Nature herself; yet some very striking characteristics may be pointed out. After reading any of his novels we have a feeling that he considers environment as atmosphere, influence and often fate itself, the closing words of "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" shows this feeling, "Fate had played its last little jest with poor Tess".

In all of the novels we see a nature imbued with sentient life and akin to the world of pagan thought, in which hills, streams and trees were the abode of or manifestation of duty, though he makes us feel that the spirit behind the universe is an impersonal and heedless power. He displays nature as an ironic expression with even malignant moods and a supreme indifference to the fate of that animolecule, man.

A careful and detailed study of all of the passages in all of the novels, referring to nature, or the aspects of nature, or to environment has developed five general topics or plans in his treatment of surrounding nature:
(1) The picture he gives us of the surrounding world of heath, wood, hill and plain;

(2) the close relation that he points out as existing between this environment and the members of the human race;

(3) the part played by this environment in moulding and shaping the characters in the several dramas;

(4) the ability under certain conditions of this environment to determine the fate of these actors; and

(5) lastly, what seems to be his attitude toward this environment and its apparent influence upon mankind.
Nature Pictures.

There is no book of Hardy's that does not abound in nature pictures, some delicately etched, and some composed of broad masses of color. Few writers make us feel more intensely the grave simplicity and dignity of heath, hill and field. He has the faculty for combining detail with broad effect; we can feel the weather, the wind, and the atmosphere; we can see the lights and the shadows cross the land; and the scene is impressed on our minds as a single whole. What could be more real than his description of the storm, and the sinister aspect of the night. We feel the heated breeze that slowly fanned the summits of lofty objects. We see the dashes of buoyant clouds sailing in a course at right angles to that of another stream, and neither of them in the direction of the breeze below, and the fields shallow with impure light, and the moon with its metallic lure. To this he adds the description of the sheep trailing home, head to tail; sheep as shown in their going to sleep with their tails turned toward that half of the horizon from which the storm threatened; the behavior of rooks and horses, the toad and the brown garden slug.

In the "Hand of Ethelberta"\(^2\) occurs this remarkable, detailed description of "one of those hostile days

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1. Far from the Madding Crowd, p. 281
2. Hand of Ethelberta, p. 29
of the year when chatterbox ladies remain miserably in their houses, to save the carriage and harness, when clerk's wives hate living in lodging; when vehicles and people appear in the street with duplicates of themselves underfoot, when brick-layers and other journeymen sit in a shed and drink beer, when ducks and drakes play with a hilarious delight at their own family game, or spread out one wing after another in the slower enjoyment of letting the moisture penetrate to their innermost down".

How well we see the contrast between the two sorts of weather, which Ethelberta beheld pervading nature at the same time; or the dull stagnant after-noon when she first crossed the threshold of Euckworth court; or feel the gloomy prospect when Sol Chickerel and Houble Mountcleve waited for the boat to start; or see the strange light in the atmosphere when Christopher tries to call on Ethelberta.

Hardy's description of Cym as a product of the heath permeated with its scenes, its substances and its odors, constitutes a very perfect pen picture.

How forcefully we have impressed upon us the vaporous warmth in the air, when he(Cym) went to their favorite nook to meet Eustacia. How typical is the description of the thirty-first day of August.

"The Hand of Ethelberta" p. 273
3. " " " " " " , p. 401
4. " " " " " " p. 48
Color Descriptions.

The descriptions of Egdon Heath are the best examples of broad masses of color. Egdon is first described as wearing an antique brown dress, the unvariable garment of that particular formation. Later the moist hollows of the Heath passed from their brown to their green stage and still later the July sun turned its crimson heather to scarlet. At another time we are told that "in a certain season and a certain weather of that season the Heath was gorgeous." Eustacia could not endure the heath except in its purple season.

The different backgrounds of Hardy's pictures are described as being primitive, or a spectacular variation of human moods, or as possessing certain peculiar and characteristic features.

Primitive Background.

In "The Return of the Native" he tells us that "the sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages and the people changed, yet Egdon remained".

In speaking of the barrow and its surroundings he gives us these weird ideas. The person standing on top of the barrow looked, to an imaginary person, on the impulse,
as one of the Celts who built the barrow, because all of modern appearance had withdrawn. It would seem as if the boys and men who appeared later had chosen the hour and deed that had been familiar to this scene, and the ashes might have been from funeral piles of long ago, belonging to Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies, or to festival fires to Thor and Woden.

A few other choice bits are these ideas; civilization was an enemy to the heath; Eustacia had "pagan eyes full of nocturnal mysteries, "chym thought about his favorite nook when lizards, grass-hoppers and ants were the only living things he beheld, that 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 monstrous extent of herbage amid which no bird sang.

To Tess "the occasional heave of the wind became the sigh of some immense sad soul, counterminous with the universe in space and with history in time". In the same book he tells us that "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." While Jude draws the water for his Aunt he tells us "the well into which he was looking was as ancient as the

2. The Return of the Native. p. 184; 3. p. 6;
4. " " " " " p. Ch. VI.
5. " " " " " p. 252
village itself".  

In his various allusions to Portland he gives us these facts: the old Roman Highway enters the island here; the church had risen near the foundations of the Pagan temple; and the evening and the night winds were charged with a presence, an imaginary shape or essence from the human multitude lying below. "there could almost be felt the brush of their huge composite ghost as it ran a shapeless being on the isle, shrieking for some good God, who would disunite it again."

9. Jude the Obscure, page 5  
10. The Well Beloved, page 167  
11. " " " page 178
Nature as Spectacular Variation of Human Moods.

Nature is presented in these passages as a spectacular variation of human moods and she and the characters often express the same thoughts. In "The Return of the Native" Hardy says of Egdon Heath, "The place seemed full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank brooding to sleep, the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen". Another time he says "It was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly coquetry".

"Only in summer days of highest feather" he tells us, "did its mood touch the level of gaiety", and again he says "It was a place perfectly accordant with man's nature; neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning nor tame; but singularly colossal and mysterious in its swathy monotony. Solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face suggesting tragic possibilities". At another time the heath had "an apparent repose of incredible slowness".

Eustacia had "only caught its vapours", but Thomasm's "dislike of its worst moods was reasonable".

The sinister aspect of the night in Far from the Madding Crowd suggest evil.

"A message came along the wind", to Jude 'We are happy here' and Hardy tells us it was a windy whispering moon-

1. The Return of the Native, page 4
2. " " " " " " " " 5
3. " " " " " " " " 5
4. " " " " " " " " 6; p.13, 5; 6 p.83;
8. Far From the Madding Crowd, pl 281. 7 p. 229.
Separateness of the World of Hardy's Characters.

The following passages are typical descriptions or pictures of the separateness of the world in which Hardy's characters move. "It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually he found more meditation than action and more passivity than meditation. Where reasoning proceeds on narrow premises and results in inferences widely imaginative, yet where from time to time no less than in other places dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely knit interdependence of the lives therein. This place was the Little Hintock of the Master Barbours search. The coming night gradually obscured the smoke of the chimneys, but the position of the sequestered little world could still be distinguished by a few faint lights winking more or less ineffectually through the leafless boughs, and the undiscerned songsters they bore, in the form of balls of feathers aroost among them". 1

In "The Well-Beloved" Somers says to Pierston of the island 2 "What a romantic place- and this island altogether, a man night love a scarecrow or a turnip-lantern here"

While Viviette and Swithin are taking turns gazing through their telescope Hardy explains, "Thus the interest of

1. Woodlanders, p. 6
2. Well-Beloved, p. 171.
their sidereal observations led them on, till the knowledge that scarce any other human vision was traveling within a hundred million miles of their own, gave them such a sense of the isolation of that faculty as almost to be a sense of isolation in respect of their whole personality causing a shudder at its absoluteness at night, when human discords and harmonies are hushed in a general sense for the greater part of twelve hours, there is nothing to moderate the blow with which the infinitely great the stellar universe strikes down upon the infinitely little, the mind of the beholder, and this was the case now. Having got closer to immensity than their fellow creatures they saw at once its beauty and its frightfulness. They more and more felt the contrast between their own tiny magnitudes and those among which they had recklessly plunged, till they were oppressed with the presence of a vastness they could not cope with even as an idea and which hung about them like a nightmare. 3

Unity Between Man and Nature.

Thomas Hardy's power of creating unity between man and the scene in which he moves is most unique. This is because he set out to do a definite thing and has done it with rare perseverance and skill. He selected as his setting the southwestern part of England--Wessex is the ancient name he

3. Two on a Tower, p. 69.
gave to it—because he felt that the types of humanity, and the view of life that he wished to show could best be thrown out against this primitive background, certain elementary truths, about men and women, he believed lost sight of in the Kaleidoscopic attractions of the town, might there be clearly seen. The bond between man and nature as he shows it, is that man works for his living upon the bosom of the great mother earth and draws his sustenance from her. He not only renders the spirit of the different bits of scenery but he renders it through human personifications in whom its peculiar qualities are concentrated. Scenes with him are the auxiliary expressions of man's dominating thought. This intricate relation of his characters to their natural surroundings is shown in these passages.

The Ascetic on Egdon Heath.

"The most thorough going ascetic could feel that he had a natural right to wander on Egdon Heath; he was keeping within the line of legitimate indulgence when he laid himself open to such influences as these" ¹

Moods of Thinking Mankind.

"The time seemed near at hand, if it had not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moon, a sea or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping

¹ The Return of the Native, p. 5.
with the moods of the more thinking of mankind". 2

Satire on Human Vanity.

"On its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human variety in clothes. A person on a heath in a raiment of modern cut and color had more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the simplest clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive". 3

Product of the Heath.

The silent being who thus occupied himself seemed to be of no more account in life than an insect. He appeared as a mere parasite of the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment, entirely engrossed with its product, having no knowledge of any thing in the world but furz, heath, lichens and moss". 4

A Convincing Comparison.

"But to attempt to gain a view of her (Cytherea) 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 a full chord of music by piping the notes in succession" 5

The Effect of Environment.

"The countryman who is obliged to judge the time of day from the changes in external nature sees a thousand suc-

2. The Return of the Native, p. 5; 3, p. 6; 4, p. 343; 5, Desperate Remedies, p. 8.
cessive tints and traits in the landscape which are never discerned by him who hears the regular chime of a clock because they are never in request". 6

In the selection above there is remarkable harmony and unity between the mood and state of mind of the human characters and their natural surroundings, which must be apparent to the most casual observer. In the following passages this peculiar trait of the author stands out in even bolder relief:

"Thus they reached the foot of the column. Ten thousand spirits in prison seemed to gush their griefs from the funeral houghs over head and a few twigs scratching the pillar with the drag of impish claws as tenacious as those figuring in St. Anthony's temptation. And when I walk home afterwards I also fear it for what I know is there but cannot see, as one naturally fears the presence of a vast formless something that only reveals a very little of itself. Thats partly what I meant by saying that magnitude which up to a certain point has grandeur has beyond it ghastliness". 7

"Eustacia stood there to think--it was raining--the tearfulness of the outer scene was repeated upon her face". 8

"Never was harmony more perfect than that between her mind and the chaos of the world without". 9

Nature as a Harmonious Setting to Actions of the Story.

Over and over again in the Wessex novels the conditions of Nature seem to be a harmonious setting to the action of the story. This is especially true in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" where we have a most perfect harmony of the two throughout the whole book. Tess' childhood and youth were spent at Marlott, an unsophisticated village, somewhat isolated from the outside world, and remote from any large town, where she had little chance to be prepared to cope with such a man of the world as her cousin Alec D'Urberville. Crauborn chase the spot where her betrayal took place Hardy describes as being dark with its primeval yews and oaks. Her love for Clare developed in the Froom Valley within sight and sound of the crystal streams, where the grass grows lush and the air is fragrant with the scents of many flowers.

"The world was drawn on a larger scale here. The birds eye perspective-- -- was not so luxuriantly beautiful -- -- yet it was more cheering". 10

"Either the change in the quality of the air from heavy to light, or the sense of being amid new scenes, where there were no invidious eyes upon her, sent up her spirits

wonderfully. Her hopes mingled with the sunshine in an photosphere which surrounded her, as she bounded along against the soft south wind. 11

Her repulse by Clare came at Wellbridge that ancient home of her ancestors. A place filled with associations of a mouldy past, the home of gruesome portraits where the very atmosphere seemed to be charged with things sinister. The phase of her hopelessness finds her at Flintomash, a spot cursed by sterility, where nature looks with an inkindly eye, and blesses not the labour of man's hands. When in utter despair she becomes callous and joins D'Urverville, she is at Sandborne, a place of fashionable promenades and new villas, and the climax, when the officers of the law demand her as a victim to the merciless recrimination dictated by a lust for revenge, takes place at Stonehenge, where the ancient Druids, the representatives of a God whose anger and love of destruction could only be appeased by the shedding of innocent blood, had sacrificed their thousands.

Beautiful figures of Speech.

Nature and man seem to be so closely interwoven in Hardy's mind that he finds it almost impossible to think in

one except in terms of the other. This characteristic of his writings is seen in his frequent use of similies, metaphors and impersonations of nature, which not only set forth in a terse and vivid way, the ever present unity between man and his surroundings, but also constitute a distinct contribution of beautiful figures of speech to adorn and enrich English literature. It would be difficult, in the writings of any other English writer to parallel the following figures gleaned from Hardy's books.

"Trees have inquisitive eyes" 1
"Eyes--blue as corn flowers" 2
"A bright, hope inspiring afternoon" 3
"The never speechless sea" 4
"Mute procession of trees and hedges" 5
"Summer days of lightest feather" 6
"The soil had worn the same antique brown dress" 7
"His eyes--blue as autumn mist" 8
"Every species of tree had its voice as well as its feature" 9
"Heave of wind became sigh of some immense sad soul" 10
"pleasant voice in every breeze and in every birds note a joy" 11
"The pupils of her eyes dilating like circles in a pond" 12
"Trees on right and trees on left warbled or chanted to each other" 13
"Night herself seemed to have become a watcher". 14

1. Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 53
2. The Woodlanders, p. 260. 3. (p36.
6. Return of the Native, p. 5
7. Return of the Native, p. 6 8. Return of Native, p. 10
11. Tess of D'Urbervilles, p.34 12. Under the Greenwood
"Modern developments have shaken up the classes like peas in a hopper" 15

"A curve of smoke dropped over the roof like a blue feather in a lady's hat" 16

"When a smart gust raised a fitful glow which came and went like the blush of a girl" 17

"The road bisected that dark surface (the heath) like the parting line on a head of black hair" 18

"You look as unnatural out of your shop as a canary in a thorn hedge" 19

"John Smith, brown as autumn as to skin, white as winter as to clothes" 20

"He was white headed as a mountain" 21

"Night is the coldest of winter winds" 22

"The tongue of the trees fruits and flowers" 23

"To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature at the passing of the breeze the fir trees bob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amid its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall; and winter which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves does not destroy its individuality" 24

"Her heart rose from its sadness like a released bough; her senses reveled in the sudden lapse back to nature unadorned" 25

"Elfride's melancholy was shown in trees and flowers; even her pots looked wistfully into her eyes" 26

"He stretched out his hand on the rock beside him. It felt warm. That was the islands temperature when in its afternoon nap as now. He listened and heard sounds — saw, saw, saw, those were the islands shores— the noise of the quarymen and stone cutters" 27

A Close Observer of Natural Phenomena.

Any one who reads the novels knows without being told that the author is a lover and student of nature, as well as a close observer of natural phenomena. His eye is alert, and his ear acute, and he sees and hears a thousand and one manifestations of nature that entirely escape ordinary individuals who, having eyes see not and having ears hear not. His characters partake of these same attributes. Eustacia revel and Wildeve / in nature and are responsive to song of bird and voice of tree. Their remarkable powers for close observation is illustrated in the signals used by them to acquaint each, of others presence, or as a call one for the other. Eustacia signals to Wildeve by means of a bon-fire; Wildeve calls Eustacia by the sound of the waves from a rock thrown into the pond. Even the errand boy shows like observing aptitude, for hearing these same waves and being innocent of their true meaning, he announces that a hop-frog has jumped into the pond and so it is going to rain. Again, Wildeve lets a moth into the room and Eustacia recognizes his call. At another time he lets a little gravel fall in at the crevice at the top of the window shutter. This intimate knowledge is

1. Return of Native, p. 64
2. " " " p. 64
3. " " " p. 334
4. " " " p. 120
also shown in Mr. Falls prophesy concerning the weather which reads "By the sun, moon and stars, by the clouds, the winds, the trees and grass, the candle flame and swallows, the small of the herbs; like-wise by the cats eyes, the ravens, the leeches, the spiders, and the dung mixen, the last fortnight in August will be—rain and tempest". 5

Nature as a Moulding Force in Character.

Every one believes more or less in the influence of environment. There may be"a divinity that shapes our ends rough-hew them how we will." However, it is generally considered that the agencies contributed by environment exercise a potent influence in the formation of ideas, in the cultivation of moral qualities, and even in physical nature. Thomas Hardy magnifies the effect of natural environment to such an extent that nature becomes, with him, a moulding force in the formation of character. His men and women seem to be the vital growths and manifestations of nature. His best characters from a moral standpoint, live closest to nature. The silence of the brooding quiet of the woods passes into their lives and tinges their thoughts with a passive melancholy; they become patient and charitable, childlike simplicity marks their words and actions, and a fine sense of honor permeates their being.

5. The Mayor of Caslorbridge, Ch. XXVI, p.
Gabriel Oak and Diggory Venn are, on the whole, his noblest characters because their sincerity, charity and finer sense of honor have never been injured by what is called polite society. They have lived in close touch with nature and their lives have been thus ennobled.

Hardy's peasants are as much the product of a peculiar soil as are the glades in which they live, and they are as much a product of her inscrutable will, as the leaves upon the trees or the crops upon the fields. The childlike sincerity of these shepherds and farmers, the candor of their repartee, and their appraisal of gentle folks are as irresistible as their patience and equable temper.

The scenery of the woodlands is essential to the understanding of such characters as Giles and Marly; taken away from it they are meaningless, moving in it they are so much a part of it that they express, in their lives, its primeval grandeur. There exists an actual sympathy between them and the surrounding woodland. "The casual glimpses which the ordinary population bestowed upon that wonderous world of sap and leaves called the Hintock woods had been with these two, Giles and Marly, a clear gaze. They had been possessed of its finer mysteries as a common place."
knowledge; had been able to read its hieroglyphics as ordinary writing. To them the sights and sounds of night, winter, wind storm mid those dense boughs, which had to Grace a touch of the uncanny and even of the supernatural, were simple occurences, whose origin, continuance and laws they foreknew. They had planted together, and together they had felled, together with the run of the years, mentally collected those remote signs and symbols, which seen in few were of runic obscurity, but together made an alphabet. From the light lashing of the twigs upon their faces, when brushing through them in the dark, they could pronounce upon the species of the tree whence they stretched; from the quality of the winds murmur through a bough, they could in like manner name its species afar off — — — The artifices of the seasons were seen by them from the conjurors own point of view and not from that of a spectator" 1

There is an interestingly marked contrast between the two characters, Eustacia and Clyme, as regards their relation to the heath, their interpretations of its aspects, and their sympathy with its moods.

"Egdon was her (Eustacia's) Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto. Her appearance

1. The Woodlanders, p. 415.
accorded well with this smouldering rebelliousness". 2

"To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtler beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she caught only its vapors; an environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman an devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine". 3

"If any one knew the heath well, it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substances and with its odors. He may be said to be its product, his eyes had opened thereon, with its appearance all of the images of his memory were mingled; his estimate of life had been colored 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 animal kingdom the snakes and croppers; his society, its human hauntings. 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 wide prospect and was glad." 4

(Eustacia) "Do you mean nature? I hate her already

- - - - I cannot endure the heath except in its purple

2. Return of Native, p. 79; 3, p. 83
4. Return of Native, p. 213.
season. The heath is a cruel taskmaster to me" 4

(Clym)" Can you say so! To my mind it is most exhilarating and strengthening and soothing. I would rather live on these hills than anywhere else in the world". 5

They viewed the heath with widely differing deductions; yet each was moulded and influenced by it in thought, feeling and moral character. The one was rendered morose, severe, rebellious, superstitious, discontented, and unhappy; the other serene, joyful, trustful, gentle, sympathetic, contented and happy.

Thomasin too, interpreted nature, in a manner at variance with Eustacia's dread fears and moody dislikes. "To her there were not - - - demons in the air and malice in every bush and bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain. Egdon in the moss was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its moods reasonable. At this time it was in her view a windy wet place in which a person might experience much discomfort, lose the way without care, and possibly catch cold". 6

Examples could be multiplied illustrative of Hardy's ideas of nature as a moulding force of character and as a de-

4. Return of the Native, p. 229
5. " " " p. 229
6. " " " p. 453
termining influence upon the moods and actions of human beings. What they thought, what they felt, what they did—what they were, was due largely to their attitude towards nature to their interpretation of her manifestations and to their reception of her teachings. The closer they communed with nature, the more she revealed her hidden meanings to their minds; the freer their surrender of themselves to her tuition, the fuller the influence upon their lives and actions; the higher their love of her beauties and mysteries, the more ennobled and chastened were their minds. There seemed a sort of reciprocity in the interaction between nature and the human faculties. Harmony with her begot certain benign qualities of heart and mind, and these qualities, once possessed, made for greater unity, which in turn deepened and strengthened their being.

Power to Determine Fate of Actors.

As already stated, Thomas Hardy thought and wrote in terms of nature; natural phenomena colored and controlled his descriptions; the mental states of his characters found sympathetic harmony in the surrounding attitudes of nature, and their situations whether tragic or commonplace ever sought unity of environment. In some instances, he goes even farther and attributes to natural objects an almost uncanny influence or power to control the destiny of his actors or at least to be a determining factor in their lives, as though Fate herself
were employing inanimate objects of the physical world to inflict doom, ruin and death. Two striking examples of Nature exercising the function of Fate are seen in Eustacia, that shuttlecock of her own emotions, whose whole life and death were unseparably linked to Egdon Heath; and in the story of Mr. South and the Elm tree.

(Wildeve) "You hate the heath as much as ever--" 1.

(Eustacia) "I do 'Tis my cross, my misery and will be my death" 2

This strong expression of Eustacia's feeling toward the heath prepares the way in our minds for all of the misery that follows in her life. As the tragic stress grows deeper and deeper we, like Eustacia feel that it is the heath, that is that unyielding and unsympathetic force which drives her on, and when in final desperation; on that almost unendurable night, being torn and bruised by her conflicting passions, she jumps into the weir, we have reached the maximum limit of this weird and tragic influence of the heath. It is with the greatest relief that we turn to the saner and more simple childlike existence of Thomasin, as she returns with her child to her girlhood home to ministrations of love for her cousin Glyn.

1. Return of the Native, p. 101
2. " " " " p. 101
The tree was a tall elm, familiar to him from childhood, which stood at a distance of two thirds of its own height from the front of South's dwelling. Whenever the wind blew as it did now, the tree rocked naturally enough; and the sight of its motion and the sound of its sighs had gradually bred the terrifying illusion in the woodman's mind that it would descend and kill him. Thus he would sit all day in spite of persuasion, watching its every sway and listening to the melancholy Gregorian melodies which the air wrung out of it. This fear it was rather than any organic disease, which was eating away the health of John South. 3

"As the tree waved South waved his head, making it his man with abject obedience. "Oh! when it was a small tree" he said "and I was a little boy, I thought one day of chopping it off with my hook to make a clothes line prop with. But I put off doing it, and when I again thought; but I forgot it, and didn't and at last it got too big, and now tis my enemy and will be the death of me. Little did I think when I let that sapling tree stay, that a time would come when it torment me and dash me into the grave".

Thus the old man fretted and struggled with his dread fear and gradually grew worse and worse, repeating over

3. The Woodlanders, p. 92.
and over "I could bear up, I know, if it were not for the tree-- Yes, the tree, 'tis that's killing me. There he stands threatening my life every minute -- "

In the hopes of bringing relief to the almost crazed and rapidly sinking old man, his friends decided to cut off some of the branches from the tree so that it might present a less menacing aspect to his frenzied mind. But, alas, the new aspect of the elm served only to intensify his dread and fear, by making the tree seem taller than ever and to threaten to come down on him and cleave him like the sword of Gideon.

"There the old man sat, staring at the now gaunt tree as if his gaze were frozen to the trunk", until finally at the order of the attending physician, they cut the tree down and removed all trace of it, early in the morning before the old man was awake.

When he awoke, he began at once to complain of the tree, and the danger to his life. "Sse, they said to him, "it is gone and need trouble you no more". As soon as the old man saw the vacant patch in the sky in the place of the branched column so familiar to his gaze, he sprang up speechless, his eyes rose from their hollows till their whites showed all round, he fell back and a bluish whiteness overspread him.
As soon as he recovered somewhat from this fit, he gasped "O! O! It is gone! Where! Where!" His whole system seemed paralyzed. He lingered through the day and died that evening as the sun went down. 4

**Hardy's Attitude toward Environment.**

Thomas Hardy's sympathy with nature is more or less obvious to the most casual reader and to the thoughtful reader it is most impressive. His books, tho' read and re-read many times reveal new manifestations each time they are opened. He is in this respect as inexhaustible as nature herself, and he grows stale no faster than the repetitions of the seasons. A perfect knowledge of rural life was his by heritage and training. This scenery of "Wessex" was truly felt by him and slowly absorbed. The secret of his power in rendering these scenes lies in the fact, that he loved them and knew them--they are part of his own blood and fibre, and belong to his heritage as peasant and woodlander.

He does not show the passionate faith of Wordsworth in the friendly influences of Nature; nor the fine sentiment of Bryant. True he too, "holds communion with her visible forms", but to him they speak a less various language--a language of unity, harmony and creative power. While keenly conscious of all sentient life, he is not a joyous dweller in the woods. His imagination is severe and

4. The woodlanders, p. 128.
the influences of natural surroundings while harmonizing with the mental states of his characters, seem rather to intensify them than to soothe and subdue. To him the groves are not "Gods first temples" but rather the abode and impersonation of the Gods themselves. Not a place for worship, but things to be worshiped.

Nature worship controls and colors all of his writings but creates no halo of sentiment to soothe, strengthen and ennoble the human soul. He seems rather, to stand aloof from the drama of action, making no effort to guide, nor strengthen his characters in times of temptation, folly and disaster, and offering no explanation to the spectators, who, themselves, are thrilled with pity and fear.

Hardy is a pagan whose faith and sentiments are rooted in a world, so ancient that thought of the last two thousand years fails to find any contact with them. Toward religion in the conventional sense, his temper is hostile. His religion is a philosophical fatalism. Fate with him seems to be so largely the impersonal thing, environment allied with temperament and opportunity. In his view man cannot be the architect of his own fortune, as Shakespere teaches, but rather man is the sport of the Gods, his fortune depending on a combination of fate and luck for which he, himself, is in no wise responsible.
It is perhaps, a rather curious fact, that a man who finds nature so absolutely inexorable and indifferent to human suffering, should love her so well. But every man must love something greater than himself and as Hardy had no God he felt drawn close to the world of flowers, plains and rivers.