CHAPTER II

THE

ESTABLISHMENT

OF

HARMONY

Hardy's ethical resolution of the Metaphysical absurd
I

Preliminary Statement of the Argument

Erich Fromm, the psychologist, explains man's objectless urge for harmony in *Escape from Freedom*¹ as arising from his partial liberation from the clutches of Nature which yet holds tight over the lower animals. This urge is nostalgia for the lost home where in the heart of Nature like other organic beings, content with the given, incapable of wishing what the world could not afford, man obeyed to the instinctual which was absolute in his consciousness. Fromm observes in terms of the Biblical myth that the human history began with man's expulsion from paradise, the world of obedience, when by an act of choice as against the instinctual compulsion, he defied Nature, asserted his freedom and harboured longings which the universe could not fulfil. Since then he ceases to be a citizen of Nature and becomes like Prometheus a prisoner in chains. In his longings and wishes he has risen above its blindness. But he has still no being independent of Nature. He is alienated on the earth, but has no home anywhere. Nature's rigid order is lost to him. But the world harmonious with his cravings is powerless to be born. His being in the world makes existence a discord. He realizes that to be human is to languish.
like an unwanted exile upon this dead planet.

This has been the eternal condition of man. Its lucid awareness is recent. We have seen in the previous chapter that Hardy was one of the first thinkers to define the predicament of man in Nature which is alien to his urges. Hardy's recognition of the absurd was unmistakable though his description did not have that conceptual clarity and the new nomenclature found in Camus or Sartre. That all this is not a presumption can be further substantiated by quoting from Hardy's diary passages which are not different in substance from the absurdist position:

"A woeful fact - that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment. Even the higher animals are in excess in this respect. It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existence. Other planets may, though one can hardly see how."2

Hardy tried infinitely "to reconcile a scientific view of life with the emotional and spiritual, so that they may not be interdestructive". But he could not: His conclusion was:

"Law has produced in man a child who cannot but constantly reproach its parent for doing much and yet not all, and constantly say to
such parent that it would have been better never to have begun doing than to have overdone so indecisively; that is, than to have created so far beyond all apparent first intention (on the emotional side), without mending matters by a second interest and execution, to eliminate the evils of the blunder of overdoing. The emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it.

"If law itself had consciousness, how the aspect of its creatures would terrify it, fill it with remorse." 3

Elizabeth-Jane in The Mayor of Casterbridge reflects clearly her creator's ideas when during her vigil over her sick mother's bed she broods over the painful enigmas:

"......why she was born, why sitting in a room, and blinking at the candle; why things around her had taken the shape they wore in preference to every other possible shape. Why they stared at her so helplessly, as if waiting for the touch of some wand that should release them from terrestrial constraint; what that chaos called consciousness, which spun in her at this moment like a top, tended to, and began in." 4

Naturalists, on account of their faith in the rigid scheme of causal laws, dismissed the discordant notes struck in existence by the aspirations of human consciousness as illusory, and found the new vision of the Godless world together with the forms of life, its superfluous by-products in the aimless mutations of matter, a kind of natural harmony satisfactory to their inquisitive quest for knowledge. In holding conscious-
ness with all its self-alienating aspirations, once it is evolved and so long as it lives, at variance with Nature and irreducible to the absolute subjection to mechanistic order, Hardy is distinguished from naturalists and resembles the thinkers representing the existential movement. A. J. Guerard rightly observes:

"It is certainly true that Hardy had a vision of the cosmic absurd - of man's longing for order and justice outraged by the eternal indifferent drift of things - and his attitude toward this conception of the human dilemma is one of the shaping forces of his work."5

Hardy gave up as hopeless the task of reconciling the absurd born of the antilogy between mind and matter into any kind of metaphysical unity. His quest is emotional, not rational, for the happiness of human notion, not for the philosophical knowledge of the ultimates of phenomenal things. His anxiety for man's fate on earth, banished from the world of Nature on the one hand, and deprived of the comforts of religious belief on the other, is existential. There is a feeling of human loneliness and home-sickness pervasive in all Hardy's novels. Lord David Cecil hits the nail on the head when he observes:

"The most characteristic note in all Hardy's emotional scale - the strain which, as it were, forms an accompanying under-current alike to his scenes of fun and his scenes of tragedy - is its nostalgia; the longing for a world where, if happiness were not really attainable, men were still under the illusion that it could be attained. Nostalgia gentle in "Under the Greenwood Tree", lyrical in "The Woodlanders", romantic
in "The Trumpet Major", bitter in "Jude",
echoes hauntingly through his every work."6

This, however, is not to suggest that on account of Hardy's perception of the cosmic absurd and the consequent feeling of nostalgia his resemblance to the existential thinkers is complete. His concurrence with them is confined only to the rejection of all forms of abstract harmony, rational or religious. Unlike them he has to offer as a conclusion of his philosophy of life which begins with the absurd recognition, a solid harmony not merely to be speculated about, but to be practically achieved by the effort of will. He suggests apart from this, also the deliverance from the sense of isolation in his philosophy of love.

To ease man's situation in the world Hardy spells out a positive attitude to life. He resolves the absurd confrontation into a concrete harmony between man and his parent, Nature, even while living, not only when dead, by sheer fortitude that braves all the odds and vicissitudes of fortune, substituting serene resignation for the fruitless strain of revolt. The chance changes in the world cannot be made to accord with human wishes. But the stern denial of those wishes and expectations may well create a frame of mind which may well accord with the world in peace. That is, though difficult, not quite beyond the power of human will. Nature cannot be
blamed for the division or discord of existence, for it is only the passive term of the absurd. Man's dogged demands from it constitute the responsible active term. The absurd, in fact, is the spectacle of deranged Don Quixote locked in battle with the windmills mistaken for giants. The struggle would end instantly if the windmill is seen clearly as a windmill. It is for man to achieve "truce with trouble" and realize harmony. Hardy, though in changed metaphysical background, belonged to the tradition of stoics who regarded man's state as analogous to a dog tied to a moving cart. There are only two alternatives before him: he would either be dragged along whining and whimpering as most people do; or he should, if he were wise, trot along cheerfully without complaining about the inevitable. The choice is to be made between serene resignation and impotent defiance of the decrees of Fate. Hardy's choice, it is quite obvious to a careful reader, is clearly the former.

Stoical ethics was a creative response of the human will to the exacting conditions of man's existence. If we study carefully the development of the ethical thought, oriental and occidental, we find emerging from it two distinct tendencies: one seeking to establish a healthy relationship between man and his surroundings; the other to remould the social order in such a way that its constituent members will
deal with one another in the spirit of justice. One is
guided by a sense of ultimate individual destiny; the other
by the collective destiny of the community. One arises from
the dissatisfaction with the transitoriness of the sort of
happiness dependent upon the accidents of the external condi-
tions, and from the higher urge for the non-material happiness
which could maintain itself amid all the frowns and favours of
fortune; the other from the desire to keep the social existence
in peace. One lays down the rules and norms of discipline for
the realization of inward peace; the other rules and norms of
conduct towards one's fellow-beings and for the general well-
being of all. In one the criterion to judge between the right
and wrong, the good and evil of an action is whether it leads
towards or away from the individual destiny in spiritual or
higher sense; in the other it is whether an action or omission
of an individual strengthens the social order if it is just, or
offends it, helps other individuals or harms them. One culmi-
nates in some sort of mysticism; the other maintains altruism
in mundane sense. One establishes harmony with the world for
an individual. The other helps easing the pain of the social
absurd. The first should be termed 'metaphysical ethics', and
the second 'social secular ethics'. Stoics and the oriental
ethics represent chiefly the first tendency; the West has
principally followed the latter. In Hardy's novels both the
tendencies are discernible, but the predominant one is former. He, however, does not seem to be intellectually aware of these tendencies which he has spontaneously exhibited.

Hardy's presentation of the human predicament, shattering in its lucidity, disturbed so profoundly his countrymen that they could maintain no patience to see if his abandonment of the ontological quest, his stepping out from the metaphysical arena of controversy down to the ethical plane was followed by any positively reassuring establishment of harmony though strikingly novel and creative. Mrs. Virginia Woolf, for example, sees little further than the predicament when she observes:

"Each man or woman is battling with the storm, alone, revealing himself most when he is least under the observation of other human beings.... If we do not know his men and women in their relations to each other, we know them in relation to time, death and fate. If we do not see them in quick agitation against the lights and crowds of cities, we see them against the earth, the storm and the seasons. We know their attitude towards some of the most tremendous problems that confront mankind."*

But she fails to see how the actual relationship of these men and women with the world of time, death and fate, of the earth, storm and seasons, which is that of battling, is in the end constructively transformed, in some cases at least, into truce and tranquillity. She also ignores that Hardy's detachment in viewing history like an onlooker from outside its current,
his fortitude, contentment and resignation, are not merely life negating qualities but affirmative virtues which resolve the absurd into a surpassing harmony of existence.

These stoical virtues cultivated in a meliorist response to the naturalistic world view, shorn of even slightly sustaining belief in the cosmic Intelligence of the stoical concept, constitute Hardy's attitude to life which deepens positively into a kind of mysticism. David Cecil, of course, is not wrong when he maintains that

".....there was nothing of the mystic about Hardy. He had no personal sense of a spiritual world to support him against the attacks of rationalist critics on Christian doctrine. His intellect found their arguments unanswerable. By the age of twenty-seven he had already lost his faith.”

Hardy himself sensed superstitions in 'Mysticism' which, he like David Cecil thought, formed a part of Christianity. He could entertain no belief in God or spiritual presence of any kind. But mysticism is a profound feeling, either of serenity or of bliss, which has little to do with superficial belief, and the feeling is not always that of communion with the Divine. W.T. Stace in his Mysticism and Philosophy divides mystical experience into two kinds: extrovertive and introvertive. Mystics of the first category do not think and infer building up one premise upon another in a process of ratiocination, but see imaginatively the visions which those without their passion
for the Divine cannot see. They are akin to poets, and on "the viewless wings", not of simple poesy, but more consummate inspiration they fly to Heaven more real to them than the concrete existence though unseen to the uninspired. Hardy could not appreciate this kind of mysticism on account of his loss of faith.

But there is 'Introvertive mysticism' of which both Hardy and David Cecil seem to be knowing nothing, and the tendings towards which Hardy himself displayed. Its characteristic feeling is not that of bliss or beatitude, but of ineffable serenity. Lord Buddha who did not believe in God in any extrovertive sense was yet a mystic in this sense. The Buddhist Nirvana is a state of consciousness cleansed of all its contents, rid of all the desires that held it in turmoil. Its tranquillity is born, not from the fulfilment of wishes actually or imaginatively, but from the rejection of all wishes as the root cause of sorrow. It arises from the detached attitude to the world without active emotional involvement in its affairs. Stoical 'apathy' carried to consummation becomes mystical in the characteristic of its serenity. Krishnamurti's concept of 'choiceless awareness' in our own age assumes mystical serenity of experience despite his disowning all creeds, scriptures and faith. Hardy's equanimity and resignation similarly deepen, surely and discernibly, into a mystical state
of consciousness as in the case of Clym in The Return of the Native who communes in an ineffable feeling of serenity and compassion with insects and dell-snakes while cutting furze and singing cheerfully upon the heath under the scorching sun.

The ending of the absurd confrontation, the establishment of positive harmony, it seems, has eluded the grasp of even Hardy's sympathetic critics, for in their anxiety to defend him against the charge of pessimism, as we have seen in the first chapter, they only attribute to him a faint hope in happy future indefinitely distant in time, instead of vindicating the uniqueness of his position which is neither optimistic nor pessimistic in the traditionally accepted sense of the terms. On account of his detached outlook on life, his concentration on philosophy as a way of life leading out of sorrow as against the speculative philosophy of the Western notion, inspired by the sense of wonder, aiming at the intellectual comprehension of the cosmos, Hardy so unlike his countrymen ever seemed a stranger to them. That is, perhaps, why, while Hardy has critics both hostile and sympathetic, he has had no serious followers or detractors. Both in his art and thought Hardy remains a lone, baffling phenomenon in the history of English literature who forced the recognition of his genius by his startlingly unique vision.
This much for a brief preliminary statement of Hardy's position to be substantiated in the succeeding pages in this chapter by close critical examination of some of his major novels.

II

Three Groups of Hardy's Characters

A note on Hardy's characters in general is necessary before we turn to the critical examination of particular novels, for it is characters, their actions and omissions, that largely spin the plot. It is not true to say that Hardy deliberately contrives miserable ending for his characters by introducing at critical moments of their career through the novel strange coincidences which upset all things that are about to be righted at those moments. Coincidences only symbolise the indifferent drift of things that often converge positively towards or diverge fatally away from the human hopes and ambitions, either to spell brief moments of happiness after heart's desire or catastrophes that lay waste the labours of their lives. But coincidences alone, we feel, would not have disintegrated them if the forces from within their being, which could have been controlled by the exercise
of will and wisdom, had not conspired actively with the co-incidences. As with Shakespeare, so also with Hardy, character is destiny.

There are, broadly speaking, three kinds of characters to be distinguished in Hardy's novels.

(1) There are, first, the simple clowns blissfully unaware of the human predicament, happy with the world, never looking beyond the boundaries of Wessex. They have but slightly diverged from the kingdom of Nature. Their limited wants and lukewarm wishes do not confront the silent universe. They bow humbly to the inevitable. Therefore, they see no absurd, and do not feel alienated. "Now 'tis very odd, but I never feel lonely - no, not at all," says Grandfer Cantle wondering at Mrs. Yeobright's acute feeling of loneliness in The Return of the Native. "I am as brave in the night-time as a' admiral." This apart from being a causal remark has a wider value indicating the rustic view of life. Such rustics rarely get depressed, are easily consoled by the comforts of religion and recover fast from depression when occasionally they sink into it. They stand for the average humanity, unawakened to the plight of man in Nature, who toil with endurance through the dust and din of life enjoying the bliss of ignorance. They eat and drink and talk in monotony even without a touch of melancholy of
"Longer coffins" that "were never made in the whole country of south Wessex" wherein "'tis said that poor George's knees were crumpled up a little e'en as 'twas."\(^{12}\) Over the dead body of Fanny, Coggan says in *Far from the madding Crowd*, "Drink, shepherd, and be friends, for tomorrow we may be like her (dead Fanny);" to which Mark Clark drinks greedily and sings:

"Tomorrow, tomorrow!
And while peace and plenty I find at my board,
With a heart free from sickness and sorrow,
With my friends will I share what today may afford,
And let them spread the table tomorrow.
Tomorrow, tomorrow."\(^{13}\)

A song of 'tomorrow' different in tone from Shakespeare's passage in *Macbeth*. Christopher Coney in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* digs up "four ounce pennies" buried in the garden after Susan Henchard's death in accordance with her last wish, and spends them up for liquor. Then charged with 'cannibalism' by his fellow rustics for thus disrespecting the dead, he declares:

"I say it to-day, and 'tis a Sunday morning, and I wouldn't speak wrongfully for a silver sixpence at such a time. I don't see noo harm in it. To respect the dead is sound doxology; and I wouldn't sell skellintons - leastwise respectable skellintons - to be varnished for 'natomies, except I were out o' work. But money is scarce, and throats get dry. Why should death rob life o' fourpence? I say there was no treason in it."\(^{14}\)
Hardy wrote in an article:

"It is among such communities as these that happiness will find her last refuge upon earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be longest postponed."

Clym's tragedy in *The Return of the Native* is that he has come to teach "how to breast the misery they are born to" to those who do not feel the prick of that misery, who are not awakened from their stupor, and are already at peace with themselves and the world. Clym's wisdom and their complaisance born of ignorance, are both alike in their characteristic of peace. But one is the peace of enlightenment surpassing the tension of frustrated longings amid dead Nature; the other is the peace of inertia which has never grown aware of the pain of the predicament. So the clowns naturally dismiss his scheme with a remark:

"'Tis good-hearted of the young man.... but for my part, I think he had better mind his business."

David Cecil describes this group of characters as "the chorus to the main drama" in Hardy's novels who, by their close juxtaposition with the heroic characters vest the latter with tragic grandeur, and observes:

"The chorus is the symbol of the great majority of humdrum mortals, who go on living through their
uneventful day, whatever catastrophes may overtake the finer spirits placed among them. Henchard and Eustacia may love and suffer and die; but the rustics go on. It is they who bring the children to birth, dance at the wedding, mourn at the graveyard, and speak the epitaph over the tomb. They are eternal as the earth by which they live. And their very prosaicness anchors the story to reality. It gives the reader a standard of normality by which he can gauge the tremendous heights and depths to which the main characters rise and fall. In his last two big novels, "Tess" and "Jude", he leaves them out. And they lose by it.... Taken individually, they may seem exaggerated, but taken - as they are meant to be taken - in a corporate mass, they build up a picture of average mankind in its rural manifestation that is carved out of the bedrock of life."

(8) Then there are the characters through whom Hardy feels. They are his tragic heroes or heroines. Eustacia Vye Michael Henchard, Tess and Jude, and such others their kith and kin of the same kind. By their dogged assertion of the will to be happy they set themselves in opposition to the whole of Nature and thus spell the human predicament. They have the dubious distinction of being at once right and wrong. There is no reason why their reasonable hopes and ambitions which Nature herself has planted in the human heart should not come to fruition in the world of Nature. Their attitude in that sense is quite justifiable. But they merit blame for their failure to see that the Law which has evolved human consciousness without prevision or intention is powerless in its blindness to see
the injustice done to man or to respond positively to man's reasonable desires. Their obstinate attitude which is natural and therefore not wrong, is also unwise and therefore not right. In dubiousy deserving thus both justification and blame they fully exhibit the characteristic required of a tragic hero.

On account of their own dreams and desires they strike a discordant note in the world of 'neutral tints', feel lone and alienated, reel or revolt under the blows of Fate, sink in despair, ascribe their misfortune and failures to the contrivance of some malicious being presiding over and sporting with their destiny, wish never to have been born in such defective world and having been born talk now and then of committing suicide. Father Time in Jude the Obscure not only commits suicide, but kills his brothers in a philanthropic mood.

Of these characters Jude is most representative of Hardy's disturbed moods and feelings. In his "perception of the flaw in the terrestrial scheme," in his tenderness of heart and universal compassion, sincerity and ambition, Jude is almost Hardy in disguise. Jude the child, in the first part of the novel, lying in the sun, pulling "his straw hat over his face", peering "through the interstices of the plaisting at the white brightness" reflects vaguely:

"Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought."
Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for.
That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty
towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As
you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre
of your time, and not at a point in its circumference,
as you had felt when you were little, you were seized
with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around
you there seemed to be something glaring, garish,
rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the
little cell called your life, and shook it, and
warped it.”

Obviously this Jude is Hardy himself in his boyhood. Mrs. F. E.
Hardy records in The Life of Thomas Hardy the same event that
actually occurred in his early childhood. Needless to say
that the following description of Jude's tender regard for all
forms of life is also a self-portrayal of Hardy:

"Though Farmer Troutham had just hurt him, he was
a boy who could not himself bear to hurt anything.
He had never brought home a nest of young birds
without lying awake in misery half the night after,
and often reinstating them and the nest in their
original place the next morning. He could scarcely
bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a
fancy that it hurt them; and late pruning, when
the sap was up and the tree bled profusely, had
been a positive grief to him in his infancy. This
weakness of character, as it may be called, suggest­
ed that he was the sort of man who was born to
ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain
upon his unnecessary life should signify that all
was well with him again. He carefully picked his
way on tiptoe among the earthworms, without kill­
ing a single one.”

And mark Jude's reasons for not scaring away the birds for
which Farmer Troutham had beaten him:

"They (birds) seemed, like himself, to be living
in a world which did not want them. Why should
he frighten them away? They took upon them more
and more the aspect of gentle friends and
pensioners...
"
A magic thread of fellow-feeling united his
own life with theirs. Puny and sorry as those
lives were, they much resembled his own."21

This undoubtedly is Hardy's all embracing compassion born of
the awareness, not only of man's alienation in the world of
natural laws, but the alienation of all the forms of life which
are united into one family by their common characteristics will
to live which is surely and inexorably to be thwarted by Death.
To quote Evelyn Hardy:

"Jude Fawley may be regarded as a heart-breaking
caricature of what Hardy, but for his talents,
his mother's ambitions, and the good fortunes of
having Isaac Last, William Barnes and Horace
Moule to guide his intellectual growth, might
have been."22

Jude is the most sensitive of this group of Hardy's characters.
He voices with all the intensity Hardy's own anguish at the
absurd perception. But neither he nor any other tragic character
of this group represents the sanity of Hardy's thought in its
maturity, his melioristic response to the neutral world of Nature.
One mistake which most of Hardy's critics make is that they
confuse his thought with his feeling, often take up the characters
of this group - Tess or Jude or Eustacia or Henchard - as
representing his philosophy, and call him consequently a pessi-
mist. But these characters only express Hardy's outraged heart,
not his assuaging wisdom.
Finally, there are the characters through whom Hardy thinks. They are heroic, not tragic-heroic, in that they survive the ordeals and tribulations which would break or despirit the ordinary human beings, by virtue of their inherent strength. They have learnt to temper their passions and emotions to make them suitable to the reliable promises of the surroundings and circumstance. They have fully understood the anatomy of the absurd, and even while maintaining ever undimmed lucidity, they manage to resolve its consequent anguish into unruffled serenity. They have developed the consciousness of a hermit who does not suffer from the ache of loneliness in the alien universe but enjoys positively the tranquillity of solitude. They substitute self-abnegation for self-indulgence, renunciation for ambition, resignation that restores harmony between man and the conditions of his being, in place of revolt of the previous group of characters which spells the human predicament. They are Clym Yeobright, Elizabeth-Jane, Gabriel Oak, Ethelberta and their nearer kin of the same kind. In all of Hardy's major novels except 'Tess' and 'Jude', there are such characters together with the 'feelers' and the unenlightened clowns, who stand apart and show their triumph over dead Nature with its blind 'artistry of circumstance' by matching in a sort of harmony their indifferent attitude with the indifferent drift of things all around them. They represent Hardy's mature melioristic wisdom.
If Jude is partially autobiographical and expresses his disturbed emotions that loom anthropomorphic as they endow the neutral universe with the wilful hostility to man, voiced incoherently in blasphemous pronouncements, Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native* is likewise partially autobiographical expressing Hardy's wisdom which consistently underlies all his disturbed moods. That is, perhaps, why Clym, not Jude, was Hardy's most favourite hero. Clym is the most perfect among the characters of his kind.

The rebellious movement of feeling in Hardy's novels, manifest in the characters of the second group, seems right reaction to the world when considered against the background of the dull stupidity of clowns. Recent existential literature of revolt embodies this movement exclusively with greater vehemence, shattering conceptual clarity and in a sweeping style that sends us reeling off our feet. The movement of ethical thought, manifest in the words and action of the third group of characters in Hardy's novels, has to be considered with reference to the movement of feeling. This alone will enable us to understand and appraise duly the sanity and superiority of Hardy's thought in philosophical sense to the writers of revoltive literature.
III

The Return of the Native

Now let us consider in detail some of the major tragic novels of Hardy embodying the theme of man in relation to the world for the purpose of gathering his positive response to the perception of the cosmic absurd. Let us begin with The Return of the Native. It represents Hardy's thought in its fullest maturity. Chronologically Jude the Obscure is the conclusive work of his career as a novelist. But it is wrong to assume that the last work of an author is always the best, most consummate, and fully representative of his ideas. Moreover, 'Tess' and 'Jude' embody the theme of 'man in relation to society' and Hardy's unresolved anguish at the sight of the social absurd. Artistically as well as philosophically 'The Return' is a masterpiece where he has maintained composure in the style and treatment of the subject, and exhibited the inward mood of peace with the world. All the trends of thought and emotion - one or the other of which we find prevailing in each of his novels - stand distinct and proportioned here.
Kgdon Heath, timeless in character like "the stars overhead", is the setting in this novel. Its brown, barren landscape represents conspicuously Nature's true character of dead neutrality. Its aspect is dull, sad, sombre.

"The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread."23

Hardy thus starts painting descriptive picture of the heath. But it becomes evident as we read further that the plain description here assumes several symbolic meanings. Hardy never introduced symbolism consciously in his novels like the later English and continental novelists. He was interested in the narrative for its own sake though his obsessions and ideas crept in along. He did not believe that literature is philosophy put into images. His brooding spirit, however, intrudes when there is a chance, investing his situations or setting with deeper significance not less striking than symbolism painstakingly contrived in the works of other novelists. As Hardy progresses in the description of the heath the stream of his somber thought mingles with it to
find in the heath now the Nature of his view, and then a symbol of the human nature in general. Hardy's critics have also perceived as much in the dull scenery of Egdon. H. C. Webster, for example, observes:

"From the first description of Egdon Heath until the close of the story, this dreary and unfertile waste seems to symbolize the indifference with which Nature views the pathetic fate of human beings. Occasionally the reader is likely to look upon the long enduring barrenness and apparent purposelessness of the heath as a sign of its kinship to man, to feel that it is like man, slighted and enduring. More frequently, its sombre beauty, which, Hardy tells us, is the only kind of beauty that thinking mankind can any longer appreciate, reminds us that man is of no more significance than an insect against its far-extending barrenness. It is the unsympathetic background for the human scene. What happens to man is not its concern. Like the forces of Nature, it has participated passively in man's slow and unhappy progress through disillusioned centuries, unconcerned with the joys or sorrows of petty human kind."24

On this account Mr. Webster and a host of critics like him see in The Return of the Native from first to last the disturbing statement of Hardy's pessimism. It does sound pessimistic to those brought up in the optimistic tradition of the West with the conviction entrenched in their consciousness by the custom of centuries that man is the roof and crown of creation in the cosmic teleological scheme nearer to the
Divine Creator and distinguished from other creatures who are a part of the world meant for his enjoyment. Yet they could not deny what Darwin stated in contravention to their belief, and Hardy confirmed that man and insects alike are the accidental product in the onrush of the terrestrial evolution. Nor could they admit it without reservation. Consequently Hardy's novels disturbed them. But was Hardy himself equally disturbed? Or if he was initially, did he dissolve the disturbance into a healthier feeling ultimately or not? These are very pertinent questions which his critics did ask but wrongly concluded by saying that despair remained a constant state of his mind. Conditioned by the traditional ways of thinking as they have been, the only remedy of despair they could recognise was some form of hope and the belief in its possible fulfilment, either today or on some future date, be it after generations. The fact is that Hardy had resolved the disturbance, not into a hope, but into a sort of peace with the vision of the world as it is, by rejection of all hopes as childish, and their objects as paltry. Overlooking his mood of positive reconciliation with the world, perhaps unable to understand it, his critics continue to blame him for not colouring up the world with the wishful paints for the readers' satisfaction. What still disturb them no longer disturbed Hardy. What has escaped the notice of these critics is the full impress of harmony.
which the whole description of the Egdon Heath bears. In one of its symbolic meanings, in fact, the heath stands for the harmony which Hardy established with the world. His slow and silent rhythm of style, the choice of words and phrases, analogies and metaphors here reveal, not the feeling of outrage or anguish which is pervasive in Tess and Jude, but that of unruffled serenity. Hardy's state of mind, manifest upon the Egdon waste at the commencement of the story coincides well with the nature of conclusion. There has been the regular reiteration of the same throughout the novel. The movement of revolt is also, of course, presented in the action, but only to be dismissed as a suicidal attitude.

Such meanings intrude and withdraw inspite of Hardy rather than on account of his conscious efforts, while upon the surface it remains consistently the description of a part of Wessex topography. Let us examine the description of heath further:

"In fact, precisely at this transitional point of its nightly roll into darkness the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste began, and nobody could be said to understand the heath who had not been there at such a time. It could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen, its complete effect and explanation lying in this and the succeeding hours before the next dawn: then, and only then, did it tell its true tale. The spot was, indeed, a near relation of night, and when night showed itself an apparent tendency to gravitate together could be perceived in its
shades end the scene. The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. And so the obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternization towards which each advanced half way.25

So far it is a beautiful description of the heath. The author's serene mood, however, is evident in the tone, style, the underlined phrases and a sentence summing up the total impression of the whole passage which emphasises the feeling of harmony, not the perception of discord. But then intrudes imperceptibly Hardy's brooding spirit to read in the heath a meaning of which this form of Nature alone could not tell us in its sombre objectivity.

"Every night its Titanic, form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis - the final overthrow."26

Man's waiting for Nothing like "waiting for Godot", while toiling tediously through generations at Sisyphian tasks, is attributed here to the external nature.

Hardy then reads in the heath the neutral Nature of his notion coinciding in peace with his own well-cultivated neutral ascetic like frame of mind from which all the longings and
expectations straining in fruitless confrontation with the world are rooted out. He proceeds to write:

"It was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of a peculiar and kindly congruity. Smiling champaigns of flowers and fruit hardly do this, for they are permanently harmonious only with an existence of better reputation as to its issues than the present. Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the facade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the facade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting. Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but alas, if times be not fair! Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surrounding oversadly tinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to 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 sombreness 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 a nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle-gardens of South Europe are to him now; and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he hastens from the Alps to the sand-dunes of Scheveningen."
Consider the expressions "black fraternization" of the land and air "towards which each advanced half-way"; "the sombre stretch of rounds and hollows" rising and meeting "the evening gloom in pure sympathy"; the description of the spot as "a near relation of night"; the spot wearing "an aspect of peculiar and kindly congruity" to "those who loved it"; the harmonious combination of twilight "with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity"; and finally his generalisation that beauty being the perception of harmony between the external Nature and the inner emotion, only such surroundings will appear beautiful to the human race, no longer young, and mature with the wisdom of age and experience, whose very emotion at the sight of Nature has changed, or is changing fast. The disillusioned vision of Nature, robbed of the Divinity behind it, "distasteful to our race when it was young", will gradually win our emotional acceptance as much as it has forced our rational admission today. Then it will establish harmony between man's wishes from the world and his knowledge of it, between his head and heart, in short, between himself and the world. Harmonising of emotions with the new vision of Nature will dispel the human predicament. "The moods of the more thinking among mankind" are those of philosophic detachment and resignation as distinct from both forms
of the aspirational reaction - prayer and revolt -, which accords well with the Nature as it is.

"Haggard Egdon" is a picture of harmony. The landscape being obviously accordant with the "more recently learnt emotion", easily conveys the sense of repose. However, to those like Eustacia Vye in this novel who have yet not learnt that emotion, who still cherish the traditional wishes and aspirations, it does present a discord. The whole description of the heath here has expressionational value. It exhibits Hardy's state of mind which is certainly not that of despair. In the external nature we often see what we project there ourselves. It is especially so of poets who often endow the outward objects with their inward moods and feelings. Hardy accordingly finds embossed upon the heath - upon the world at large through that recognizable symbol - only "a peculiar and kindly congruity" of his own profound experience surpassing anguish and dread. He projects here no flaw in the scheme of things, no "viewless, voiceless Turner of the wheel", nor a benevolent Deity of the easy aspirational belief. He discovers, on the contrary, in the heath an "external equivalent" of his serene feeling of harmony.

Hardy finds the heath analogous to a prison, not a palace. Generally a prison owing to its painful associations
of bars and fetters, torture and humiliation, evokes in us a sense of repulsion. The palace signifies, on the contrary, fullest freedom, peace, plenty and power. That lend sublimity to this heath are the "qualifications which frequently invest the facade of a prison with far more dignity than is to be found in the facade of a palace double its size." Egdon Heath, the symbol of the world of Nature, the only habitation of human beings soon to appear on it, bears, according to Hardy, the points of similarity with a prison wherein man's freedom-based aspirations break in frustration, and where the inexorable law, indifferent to human wishes, executes itself without a gaoler. The impossibility of escape makes even revolt which is instinctive in a prisoner, quite an irrational attitude. Apparently with both, the fetters of human condition and the attitude of revolt in view, Hardy writes later in the novel of the bone-fire which the rustins of the heath light upon the Rainbarrow:

"Moreover to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at winter ingress, the curfew is sounded throughout Nature. It indicates a spontaneous, Promethean rebelliousness against the flat that this re-current season shall bring foul times, cold darkness, misery and death. Black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the earth say, Let there be light."28

Men are "fettered gods", i.e., godlike in their aspirations who would make good citizens in heaven. But they are virtually the prisoners in the world of Nature which does not accord with
their wishes. Lighting fire seems to Hardy a symbolic act suggesting "Promethean rebelliousness". It comes spontaneously to a man who becomes aware of his situation in the world. But revolt is meaningless since it yields no positive results. While it profoundly disturbs the soul of man, even breaks him down, it leaves Nature indifferent as ever. Jude Fawley whispers on his death-bed, "his parched lips scarcely moving", the pathetic words of Job smitten by Satan with sore boils from head to foot:

"There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor......Therefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul."29

Jude perceives the prison-like conditions of the world. But his ambition is a form of revolt which breaks him down. Such revolt always leads to pessimism, for it is directed not against a sensible Supreme Being, but against the Universal Nothing. Hardy's initial bewilderment as expressed in Hap, a poem, already quoted in the First Chapter, was that there does not exist even a malevolent Deity to make his revolt meaningful. He therefore dismisses revolt as an unreasonable attitude. Jude bears a remarkable contrast to Clym Yeobright, and Hardy's mood in Jude the Obscure to that in The Return of the Native. It is obvious that Hardy feels with Jude and thinks with Clym, and also that while Hardy has successfully resolved the cosmic
absurd into a harmony, as manifest in the earlier novels, he stands nonplussed in utter anguish at the sight of the social absurd which is spelt by the cruel indifference of society to the right kind of aspirations of an individual member of it, to his sorrow and suffering, as manifest in the last novels. Therefore, the version of prison-house Hardy sees through Jude whose obstinate whys and wherefores die of their own passion, is a significant contrast to the chastened sublimity of the heath that is likened to the dignified facade of a prison. Here he seems to imply that wisdom lies in adapting our emotions, limiting our wishes to the rigorous conditions of the prison which is our only home, and that the attitude of resignation as against revolt can convert even the darkest dungeon into a serene hermitage.

In "smiling champaigns of flowers and fruit" we have Nature's positive response to our needs. Its aspect being congenial to our usual expectations from it appears beautiful. Hardy describes one such scene in *Far from the Madding Crowd* when he writes:

"It was the first day of June, and the sheep-shearing season culminated, the landscape, even to the leanest pasture, being all health and colour. 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."50
But this delusive harmony disappears when Nature assumes its usual aspect of stark neutrality which shatters our confidence in the promises we were inspired to read in her colour and kernel. "Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but alas, if times be not fair!" And generally the chance changes of times are not fair enough to accord with fair prospects. That is why happiness is an "occasional episode in a general drama of pain." Wet weather is the narrative of life, "and fine days are the episodes." The harmony born of Nature's congeniality with man's wishes and wants is rare and brief. Only the harmony born of man's congenial approach to all the aimless changes of Nature, of the outward events proves lasting. Its fruit is not happiness but repose.

Hardy does not love the "Orthodox beauty", Nature's cheerful aspect, for it encourages wishful thought, an easy optimism, and inspires poets like Wordsworth to endow it with the palpable presence of God. But in the event of disillusionment which is sure to occur, optimism changes into pessimism, and the Divine presence is metamorphosed into equally palpable and anthropomorphic presence of the Devil. So Hardy says: "Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surrounding oversadly tinged." The barren
heath conspicuously represents Nature's neutrality which harmoniously coincides with Hardy's stoical 'apathy', i.e., an attitude in which man has ceased to yearn, expect or demand anything from Nature.

"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." All beauty lies in the perception of a peculiar combination of sensuous qualities in the external world which responds well to our especial longing. It is positive correspondence, not contradiction, between emotions and objects. In the words of George Santayana, "Beauty is an emotional element, a pleasure of ours, which nevertheless we regard as a quality of things......It is the survival of a tendency originally universal to make every effect of a thing upon us a constituent of its conceived nature." Since emotions differ in kind and degree from individual to individual, the beauty of an object, of a landscape, entrancing to one might be imperceptible to another. And so, while others might find the swarthy aspect of Egdon Heath dull, monotonous and contrary to their emotions, it corresponds well with Hardy's "scarcer instinct", the "more recently learnt emotion", and therefore, appears satisfactorily beautiful to him. Despite various concepts of Beauty in abstract, what is common in
its actual perception is a sense of fulfilment as against want, a degree of joy as against sorrow, the recognition of "a value positive, intrinsic and objectified." Hardy's plastic emotion tempered to a state suitable to Egdon Heath which is representative of the universe surrounding the being of man, finds beauty and fulfilment in it. If his critics have failed to perceive positive satisfaction which the heath - the world - yields to him, it is because they share, not his or his Clym's emotions, but those of Fustacia Vye. But they are not to be blamed. The reading of his fiction causes in most readers an ambivalent reaction: the intellect generally as enlightened as his gladly accepts his vision of life stripped of all illusions, while emotions far more backward than his still in our times recoil in horror from it. Our rational understanding of the world as it is does not postulate its emotional acceptance. Heart is not reconciled with what head has discovered as true. We have learnt to accept the world without God and life without meaning. But the acceptance has left us emotionally disturbed, and dissatisfied. The true is not pleasing, and what might please us is not, unfortunately, true. That is why in contravention to the light of reason we may still cherish a belief in a happy world for the comfort of the traditional emotions that yet linger in us, rejoice only in Nature's transitory
aspect of health, colour and bloom, and seek to give it a sort of permanence imaginatively in the works of art for aesthetic indulgence. Hardy appears disturbing because he does not allow us to do so. But it would be wrong to conclude from this that he himself must have remained equally disturbed for ever. As for himself, he had overcome the disturbance by resolving the inner paradox between heart’s longings and head’s illumination. His emotions have learnt to be perfectly in tune with whatever response the world of his view could offer. As for the rest of us who are not like him quick enough to overcome the state of disturbance at least for the present, it will remain, unless we betake ourselves to the evasive ways of naive optimists, a passing phase indefinitely but not for ever. It will be over when long custom of lucid vision will transform the traditional emotions into a form happily harmoniously with the world’s naturalistic character. Then our concepts of beauty, of harmony, also will likewise change as Hardy’s have changed. Then mankind will feel, as he does, positively satisfied in such beauty as that assumed here by the world’s heathery symbol in his view. Hardy clearly prophesies such general healthier change in the aesthetic tastes and emotions when he writes:

"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 sombreness 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."35

Sylvia Lynd in her introduction to the novel comments on this passage:

"We may smile a little at his choice of words and that rather priggish phrase, 'the more thinking among mankind'; but we must admit the correctness of the prophesy. Loneliness, in the overcrowded world, has come to delight us."36

But it is not the feeling of loneliness in the midst of the crowds of men that is intended to be expressed here. What is prophesied is the initial perception of man's alienation in the world of Nature resolved ultimately into peace and positive satisfaction of solitude in it by the substantial transmutation of emotions which in their present form conflict with the world which has never promised to gratify them. The sorrow, in this new experience of harmony to be won and established stoically by the discipline of will, is dispelled by bold acceptance of it more effectively than the evasive ways of the so-called optimists. Hardy's mood of triumph over sorrow is
indicated on the title page itself where he quotes a poem summarising the central idea of the novel:

"To sorrow
I bade good morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind;
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly;
She is so constant to me, and so kind.
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But ah! she is so constant and so kind."

In the aching sense of alienation which even an average man has already started feeling in the world, Hardy's prophecy has so far proved only half correct. The traditional metaphysics aided by the scientific researches has come to the sorry conclusion today that nothing more in the ontological sense can be known of the external Nature than what we now already know, and what is learnt so far does not correspond to our human aspirations. The aspirational line of thinking has found its way blocked by the insurmountable walls of the absurd. The consequence is existential anguish and despair. But Hardy's prophecy is that this emotional disturbance born of the aspirational line run into a blind alley will gradually subside in course of time as the mood of resignation will replace the mood of revolt. Man will learn to adjust emotionally with the naturalistic vision of Nature, and establish harmony with the world. The prophecy has yet not come fully true, and it remains to be verified by the
future generations whether finally it comes true or not.
But literally, of course, it shall never come true, nor is it intended to be taken literally. It is obvious that Hardy deliberately makes an overstatement in order to state emphatically when he writes: "And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle-gardens of South Europe are to him now; and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he hastens from the Alps to the sand-dunes of Scheveningen!"

Hardy proceeds in his description further to confirm what is discussed before:

"The most thorough-going ascetic could feel that he had a natural right to wander on Egdon: he was keeping within the line of legitimate indulgence when he laid himself open to influences such as these. Colours and beauties so far subdued were, at least, the birthright of all. Only in summer days of highest feather did its mood touch the level of gaiety. Intensity was more usually reached by way of the solemn than by way of the brilliant, and such a sort of intensity was often arrived during winter darkness, tempests, and mists. Then Egdon was aroused to reciprocity; for the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend."37

Thus the sort of beauty Hardy prefers is quite what a "thorough-going ascetic" would prefer, and the future man would love. It touches the level of serene gaiety at the highest, or solemn indifference at the lowest. But as in the
mind of an ascetic, so also here in the "external equivalent" of that mind, the heath, the extremes of exuberance of joy or utter blackness of despair are equally ruled out. It is remarkable that even storm and wind, described as lover and friend respectively of the heath, are shorn of their terror. The whole landscape is imbued with Hardy's spirit which stands manifest in all the metaphorical usages commoting harmony. The style also exhibits repose, the philosophic calmness of mind.

Hardy then, again, sees in the heath an equivalent of human nature as it is:

"It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature - neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring, and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities."58

Hardy does not speak here of the human nature as it ought to be or shall be in future, but of its present state of alienation in the world. It is "colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony". It defies clear definition in philosophical terms, and remains baffling. Of its one character, however, we can be sure. It is "slighted and enduring" - slighted by
the Nature which has created consciousness without prevision, and enduring because in a world of chance and change its only destiny is to endure, not to be happy. There is no communication between man and his world, no dialogue at all. His addresses to Nature, or to an anthropomorphically conceived 'Friend' or 'Enemy' behind phenomena, sound like a senseless monologue. Yet even here there is nothing to betoken disturbance in Hardy at man's condition in Nature. He speaks of the slighted and enduring character of human nature like a philosopher untouched by its anguish.

To cap it all comes finally a scene, beautiful in outline, artistic in unity and finish, and profound in symbolism. It is Musstanda's first appearance in the novel. Hardy sees her through Diggory Venn whose eye, looking around, ultimately settles upon "a noteworthy object up there."

"It was a barrow. This bossy projection of earth above its natural level occupied the loftiest ground of the loneliest height that the heath contained.... It formed the pole and axis of this heathery world.

"As the resting man looked at the barrow he became aware that its summit, hitherto the highest object in the whole prospect round, was surmounted by something higher.... The first instinct of an imaginative stranger might have been to suppose it the person of one of the Celts who built the barrow, so far had all of modern date withdrawn from the scene. It seemed a sort of last man among them, musing for a moment before dropping into eternal night with the rest of his race."
"There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe.

"Such a perfect, delicate, and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification of their outline. Without it, there was the dome without the lantern; with it the architectural demands of the mass were satisfied. The scene was strangely homogenous, in that the vale, the upland, the barrow, and the figure above it amounted only to unity. Looking at this or that member of the group was not observing a complete thing, but a fraction of a thing.

"The form was so much like an organic part of the entire motionless structure that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon. Immobility being the chief characteristic of that whole which the person formed portion of, the discontinuance of immobility in any quarter suggested confusion."39

The scene has pictorial qualities and poetic value. Its symbolic structure of meaning is profound, complex, difficult to analyse as all symbolism worth the name generally is, yet unmistakable in its suggestions. 'All of modern date' is withdrawn from the scene to give it in abstract the timeless character of an idea in the Platonic sense. Its silence and immobility bespeak Hardy's inward unruffled calm. In one of its suggestions Estacia's ethereal shape, mounted upon the eternal Death mouldering beneath the barrow, symbolizes life's evanescence beauty and mystery. The poetry of it, mute and
picturesque, eloquently conveys the sense. The scene appears to wear a pathetic expression to those to whom the undimmed lucidity has come but recently, and whose emotions have not yet matured correspondingly to find in it enough satisfaction. But Hardy, for himself, had transmuted the feeling of pathos into that of peace by constant brooding over it. Therefore, the principal and predominant significance invested to the scene is more philosophical. Eustacia's figure upon the barrow, then, becomes a picture of eternal existence, Life and Death ever existing in changing forms cancelling each other. The architectural unity and strange homogeneity of the being of humanity with the Nature surrounding it, are emphasised. The heath, the hill, the barrow, and beautiful Eustacia at the top of it, silhouetted against the dusky, darkening sky, are transfigured palpably into a harmony. Its beauty is impressive. There is nowhere a sign of strife in sight. Everything in this scene, instinct with Hardy's inward mood, exudes serenity. It is because he does not observe only "a fraction of a thing", only "this or that member of the group", does not identify himself with life to view Nature, but comprehends, appreciatively as it were, the pattern of existence in its wholeness, himself standing in the manner of a spectator upon the never changing bank of its flux.
In one more suggestion Eustacia clearly represents here the elemental urges of human consciousness which has broken the primal harmony of Nature, the paradise of obedience, referred to at the beginning of this chapter. She moves, glides, yearns and asks upon the immobile heath which does not respond to her cries, turns herself into an ill-treated exile and creates "confusion". Hardy, her creator, stands detached in helpless compassion while he observes her little might at strife with her inexorable Fate.

Such is, then, the heath where "everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead". It is the setting of the action to follow. Under its descriptive surface, it is vaguely suggestive of so many meanings. In all these Hardy's thought lies strewn upon the rounds and hollows of the heath. It stands for the human nature as it is. It signifies the peace Hardy has made with the world. But principally throughout the novel it symbolizes the indifference of Nature to man. That it forms as Nature the meaningful backdrop to the suffering characters who stand for humanity, becomes clear from the suggestive title of the second chapter: "Humanity Appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble". As discussed before, man's arrival upon the scene of Nature brings troubles and tears, and reduces the existence into a state of strife.
Characters: the movements of revolt and resignation in the construction of plot

Just as the Egdon Heath, inspite of its descriptive vividness of detail, stands in its rich poetry symbolically for several meanings; each valid in its own right, so also the characters - at least two or three of them - inspite of their sound individuality are more than individual in what they suggest and signify. What is implicit in the heath-setting itself is spun out explicitly in the plot through the aspirations and action of the principal characters. The author's philosophy of life, the practical resolution of the absurd into a new kind of harmony, gathered from the lyrical expression of the serene state of his consciousness in the poetry of the First Chapter of the novel is further substantiated in the drama that follows. The characters in their own lives and situation work out a conclusion which coincides well with what Hardy himself has revealed as an initial statement at the commencement. The human situation in the universe, the existential alienation of the native from the homeland, and his return to it in bolder philosophical sense are found illustrated in the occurrence of events and the reaction of the characters to them. Yet nowhere the conscious intention to preach or propagate is betrayed. The grip of the narrative is not affected in the least, and the artistic beauty of the whole is not impaired.
The Hellenic zest for life of the human race when it was young, the longings for happiness and harmony of the traditional notion conflicting with the new heathery vision of the world, resulting in anguish, are embodied in the person of exquisite Eustacia Vye. The more recently learnt emotion finding harmony and fulfilment in what the world in its sombre aspect of indifference affords to man is embodied in the person of Clym Yeobright. Eustacia's Olympian beauty unmistakably signifies sanguine expectations which, though excellently in keeping with the Pagan view of existence populated as much by men as by gods and presided over by Zeus, the God of gods, at the dawn of civilization, appear forlorn in the context of the enlightened vision of the world of "Crass casualty". The zest for life, however positive and sustaining, must depart along with the replacement of the view of life as creation by the more plausible one of evolution, and the dethronement of purpose from the universe. Its persistence, as in the person of Eustacia Vye, is a sign of emotional immaturity. It spells the absurd division of existence, and the person who cherishes it succumbs in the end to the strain and tension of the self-created absurd.

Clym's face does not satisfy our traditional sense of beauty. Yet it is beautiful enough in accordance with the new concept of beauty as discussed in the 'Setting'. Its features symbolizes not only lucid awareness of the sombre nature of
existence, but also the achievement of emotional satisfaction with it. It betokens a mind wherein wishes do not revolt against but are duly tempered and guided by the intellectual knowledge of the world as it is. The consciousness which finds kinship and harmony with the "external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young", has fashioned expressively the features of Clym's face. The changed aesthetic vision in which new emotions have developed to accord in fulfilment with the naturalistic world-view discovers beauty alike in the faces of Egdon Heath and Clym. Hardy observes of Clym's face:

"Should there be a classic period of art hereafter, its Pheidias may produce such faces. The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was no intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitution of the advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure."41

Eustacia and Clym are thus representatives respectively of the Promethean and the neo-stoical approaches to the human situation in a deeper current of significance, while superficially the round portrayal of their characters as a part of closely knit traditional structure of this novel is interesting in its own right to those who fail to grasp the more profound meaning. In Eustacia is illustrated the alienation of the native in the very heart of the homeland; in Clym the native's return to harmony with the homeland after the painful experience
of alienation. She revolts against her situation, while he is resigned to it. Paradoxically, the obstinate desire for "what is called life" in the face of lucidity paves the way towards suicide as in the case of Eustacia, while the seeming negation of that life and rejection of revolt, towards a strikingly novel but substantial affirmation of life. Hardy has shown consummate skill in handling these diametrically opposed movements in the unity of artistic thought pattern. But his critics, it seems, have failed to grasp it in its wholeness. They have, in this novel, generally concentrated upon the character of Eustacia so exclusively that they find little significance in Clym's heroic greatness. Hardy's identification as much with the revolutive impulses of Eustacia as with the calm energy of Clym is not in doubt. But how the same author could identify himself with the characters temperamentally so opposed to one another has baffled the critics. Mr. Albert J. Guerard, for example, misreads in this the ambivalence of mind typical of the modern writers, the conflict "between sympathy and judgment, between unconscious allegiance and conscious commitment, between unmoral identification and rational preference. We may dislike those we admire, and feel drawn towards those we condemn."42 He writes further:

"Expressed more academically - he (Hardy) envied rebellion and nonconformity, and thought he approved of them. But (here exactly reversing the order of the nominally conservative Conrad)
Hardy in fact identified rather with the docile and the unaggressive. But Mr. Guerard's analysis is erroneous. Contrary to his opinion, Hardy's sympathy, not his approval, lay with the rebellious in relation to the cosmic absurd. But far from envying the attitude of revolt, he consciously rejected it as futile, and approved, as in life so also in letters, of the unaggressive wisdom as a means to the realization of harmony. Besides, the characters torn in the tension of their own fruitless revolt themselves find the equanimity of the stoical characters under the stress of misfortune, truly enviable. Eustacia and Wildeve envy in *The Return of the Native* Clym's resignation and luxury of content. Boldwood and Bathsheba in *Far from the Madding Crowd* envy Oak's remarkable way of making truce with the trouble.

John Holloway reads in the tragic plots of Hardy's major fiction the disintegration of the old rural order of England, sound and vital, but unfit for survival in the struggle against the inroads of urban industrialism owing to certain intrinsic defect. The disintegration of an individual hero or heroine is but symptomatic of it. Holloway sees "Hardy's deepening and harshening gloom as not a mere self- ingraining philosophical bias, but rather as something in most intimate
relation to his vision of the passing of the old rhythmic order of rural England. Once the novels are seen from this point of view, they suggest a surprising development in Hardy's thought. They suggest not just a growing preoccupation with the rural problem, nor even a growing sense that an earlier way of life was inevitably vanishing. They suggest something more disquieting: a gathering realization that that earlier way did not possess the inner resources upon which to make a real fight for its existence. The old order was not just a less powerful mode of life than the new, but ultimately helpless before it through inner defect. 44

With special reference to The Return of the Native, Holloway writes:

"The Return of Native (1878) has a half-tragic ending in its present form; and Hardy's original intention seems to have been to have made it more tragic rather than less so. Yet throughout the book, the stress falls on the revitalizing power of rural life, and on how its vitality is intrinsically greater than that of modernity. Eustacia and Wildeve, and at first Clym too, are alienated from it; indeed, this very alienation lies behind their ostensible successes (the marriages, for example). But because of the alienation, the successes are ill-placed and precarious, they are the successes of those who have lost the soundness, the inner strength, the power to choose and to achieve wisely which belongs to men whose life is in harmony with their world. By contrast, Venn the reddleman suffers reverses, but they do not impair his integrity; his vitality runs submerged, but it runs with
the tide of life......Moreover, the whole rural ambience can ultimately assert a greater vitality than the city life from which Clym has come. As he gives himself to it, he is regenerated from a basic source. By the end, Egdon has triumphed, even if on its own stern terms. The renegades have been destroyed or won over: even if Venn had never married Thomasin, the faithful would have been in possession. The novel resolves in an assertion of the old order, its regenerative austerity, its rewarding unrewardingness."45

The rural-urban conflict as one of the legitimate readings is sound enough. But it is not the only one theme, nor the theme of principal importance in any of the novels of Hardy. Corporeally Hardy belonged to the rustic soil of Wessex, and he chose the physical details of his drama from within its narrow province. The industrial invasion of the country mode of life, therefore, could not escape his observation. But his brooding spirit "too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions" found even spatio-temporal immensity of existence stifling like a prison-cell as his aspirations wandered freely beyond its timeless stellar confines. Rooted ever steadfast upon the rugged country ground of Wessex, he frequently darts towards stars, sound and blighted, usually travels backward in time even up to prehistoric antiquity to reflect over the chance-dominated terrestrial history, and often ventures cautiously into the future to see there prophetically the possible shape of the general human situation so wretched today. "The scale of Hardy's drama is as vast as its setting is confined."46
His anxious thought roaming about within the hollows of the universe, conditioning and crushing the alien development of the being of man in it, in quest of an order dearer to heart's desire for home, be it in some remote quarter; upon a far away 'sound' planet not governed by the blighting effects of the defective Law, or in distant future when Law itself might awaken into consciousness to right the wrongs prevailing upon the earth, finally abandons; the metaphysical adventure in utter failure. It is, however, only to undertake a different adventure not so spectacular but more difficult, not to discover a ready-made home, but to make one by melioristic effort. If the universe assumes the aspect of alienation by virtue of its stark indifference to certain natural demands of human consciousness, it can as well be creatively transformed into a harmonious home by the willing withdrawal of those demands, by substituting instead of the suitable ones, by following the neo-stoical discipline of desires. We must not seek what we want but be satisfied with what we get. This amounts to the rejection of revolt, acceptance of the world itself as the safe homeland, the bold return of the native, the conquest of Nature by the power of resignation, the ending of the absurd strife, the establishment of harmony. The plots of Hardy's novels embodying the theme of man in relation to Nature unfold the movements of revolt and resignation, of confrontation and harmony.
with the world. The renegades who turn their gaze from the isolated hamlets to the buzzing townlife, therefore, suggest not only the disintegration of the rural order as Holloway makes out, but also, and principally, in wider significance the alienation they realize from the earth which is symbolized by the Egdon Heath. These renegades are destroyed. Those who return to the earth in the spirit of reconciliation survive and achieve peace.

It is altogether wrong to assume as Holloway does that Venn's integrity and vitality spring from the faithfulness to the parochial culture of Wessex. Boldwood in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Mrs. Yeobright in *The Return*, though in harmony with the country soil like Venn himself in their ways of life and wishes, disintegrate miserably, while Christopher Julian in *The Hand of Ethelberta* which has its setting largely in London, is yet in possession of Venn's powers. The fact is that both Venn and Julian belong to the category of Hardy's characters delivered from alienation by the power of love, the unconditional devotion to the beloved which develops mystical depth and intensity. Town or country has nothing to do with it. Hardy's philosophy of love as distinct from the stoical resolution of the absurd, is equally positive and profound, and demands elaborate treatment. We are to discuss it in the next chapter. For the present it must suffice to say that Holloway
is far from convincing in ascribing Venn's vitality to a source in the rural order.

The plot, then, unfolds in *The Return of the Native* naturalistic order of the universe disturbed by the alienation of human consciousness from it. The impersonal mechanism of the causal world, incapable of anger, ill-will or sympathy, rolls on relentlessly destroying those that offend its blind power by impotent revolt. Not those rooted in the rural order and its vitality as envisaged by Holloway, but those belonging to the first group of characters, the chorus of average humanity whether in town or country, who are still not conspicuously expelled from the paradise of Nature's primal harmony, survive. They - Fairway, Christian and Grandfather Cantle, Sam and other rustics -, ignorant of the wretched plight of man in Nature, represent dull placidity of mind happy with its ignorance. Eustacia Vye, and to certain extent even Mrs. Yeobright, belong to the second group of characters listed before, representing the movement of the feeling of revolt in response to the recognition of the human situation. They are deadlocked with the world in irresoluble absurd. They cry, conceive anthropomorphically in fits of anger or despair a 'Colossal Prince of the World' to lay down him the blame for their misfortune, to relieve their absolute loneliness in the midst of Nature. Their incoherent raving expresses the anguish of the absurd, but not
clear thought rid of all the clouding and colouring of impulses. Hardy fully sympathises with them, in feeling almost identifies himself with them, but does not approve of their rebellious reaction. The third movement, that of sober thought and brave resignation which resolves as it approaches the cosmic absurd, is represented in this novel by Clym Yeobright whose calm energy of will and lucid thought are expressive of Hardy's own philosophy of life. He belongs to the third group of characters who have Hardy's approval. There is one more group of Hardy's characters, that of dedicated lovers, which is not listed previously as it is to be discussed separately in due detail in the next chapter. Venn and Charley in this novel represent such devoted lovers whose devotion to the beloved is so unearthly, disinterested and all-absorbing that the permanent possession of her image in their hearts makes them indifferent to, even oblivious of, all the reverses of fortune they seemingly suffer, and lifts them up above the turmoil of life into the mystic light of love. The dull unmoved placidity, and the movement of revolt, resignation and love of Hardy's notion are the serious undercurrents which artistically weave the thought pattern of this novel. The rustic placidity, already introduced at length in an earlier section dealing with the types of characters in Hardy's novels, is elaborate enough, and needs no further treatment here with special reference to The Return of the Native.
Venn's sustaining power of love is to be discussed in the next chapter under the caption 'Deliverance from Alienation' along with other characters of the same kind. So, for the present let us follow closely the movements of revolt and resignation as manifest respectively in the characters of Eustacia Vye and Clym Yeobright.

Eustacia Vye is a woman of exquisite beauty with correspondingly higher demands from life for happiness. She is "the raw material of divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman."47 Utterly this worldly zest for life sparkles in her dark pupils. She affirms Hellenic urges which spell the absurd with the realization of the impossibility of their fulfilment in our exacting conditions of existence. The colour of her soul is imagined to be "flame-like" in its luminosity. The divine dignity about her in Pagan sense is described as "the gift of Heaven - a happy convergence of natural laws."48 Even like a fallen hero or heroine of the Greek tragedy she sees behind phenomena a cruel Divinity, "some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot."49 In appearance, aspirations and outlook to life she embodies the spirit of an ancient Greek demanding much from life. But she has been existing "in a suppressed state, and not in one of languor, or stagnation."50
That is because she is not living in a place harmonious with her longings.

"Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereunto. Her appearance accorded well with this smouldering rebelliousness, and the shady splendour of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her."

Egdon's character symbolic of the world of the naturalistic view must be clearly borne in mind. She could not be reconciled with it. She had not learnt, was not even willing to learn to temper her longings to the degree suitable to what her situation and surroundings could afford.

"To have lost the godlike conceit that we may do what we will, and not to have acquired a homely zest for doing what we can, shows a grandeur of temper which cannot be objected to in the abstract, for it denotes a mind that, though disappointed, forsweares compromise."

Upon the heath "she felt like one banished", revolting against her situation, dreaming of her imaginary home-land symbolized by Paris, "but here she was forced to abide". The absurd is thus emphasised with obvious sympathy of the author for her dogged demands in her state of exile.

"To dwell on a heath without studying its meaning was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtle beauties of the heath were
lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapours. An environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine. "54

She saw in love her deliverance from the suppressed state of her desires.

"To be loved to madness — such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than any particular lover."55

She had learnt "by prevision what most women learn only by experience" that "love was but a doleful joy. Yet she desired it, as one in a desert would be thankful for brackish water."56

But she was not aware of the true nature of her longing. Love was only a small part of sensuous joys and luxuries which, if realized, would resolve her predicament into the harmony of her expectations. It was a sort of love that eluded her grasp at close approach to the person of lover in whom it had appeared so alluringly before. Love alone in romantic sense finding fulfilment in the loved one, or in sublime Platonic sense, or the sort of love Hardy has favoured as a practical ideal in all his novels which as "a lantern glimmer" in serene conjugal life should burn steadily and "last long years" would not and did not
satisfy her. Yet she continued the passionate pursuit of will-o’-the-wisp. For want of more promising object, she centred her affection on Wildeve who had nothing in him to absorb her affection. But, in fact, it was not possible for her nature to love him or anyone else solely for his individual worth. She had looked upon her would-be lover, if not clearly as a means to material happiness, sub-consciously at least as a devoted conductor and companion into the realm of Parisian splendour. She could regard her lover as one among many objects of happiness, but not as the sole person reducing in her overwhelming emotion everything else to irrelevance. Surrender or self-absorption into the other which love commands was alien to her temper. In Clym’s face she read the promise of that rich and luxurious life of her ambition. On account of his association with Paris, her dreamland, she soon forgot inconstant Wildeve and fell in love with Clym at first hearing about his expected arrival. But she was deluded, and had misread his face. She had seen Paris where there was Egdon Heath writ large. Clym had decided never to return to Paris. He had even explained to her plainly during their period of courting that he was determined to live out his ethical system and teach it to others upon the heath. Yet she secretly cherished the fond hope that somehow he would be prevailed upon to return to Paris. So she married him,
but only to be disillusioned soon that he was not to be prevailed upon, that he loved his ideas far more than he loved her, and that she herself did not love him so much as she loved her dream of Paris. Clym sees the agony of her disillusionment later, and says:

"I suppose when you first saw me and heard about me I was wrapped in a sort of golden halo to your eyes—a man who knew glorious things, and had mixed in brilliant scenes—in short, an adorable, delightful, fascinating hero."

"Yes," she said sobbing."

Grown aware of the true nature of her own longings, she confesses this still more clearly to Wildeve later, while at the same time, justifying them and also appreciating Clym's worthiness. Consider the following dialogue with Wildeve:

"But do I desire unreasonably much in wanting what is called life—music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world? That was the shape of my youthful dream; but I did not get it. Yet I thought I saw the way to it in my Clym."

"And you only married him on that account?"

"There you mistake me. I married him because I loved him, but I won't say that I didn't love him partly because I thought I saw a promise of that life in him."58

Eustacia has all the qualities required of a tragic heroine to compel her author's as well as readers' sympathy.

Hardy has compassionate sympathy for all her spontaneous urges
and aspirations for "what is called life." In fact, he feels with her, and voices through her his own natural yearnings.

He writes of the afflicted Eustacia:

"There was a forlorn look about her beautiful eyes which, whether she deserved it or not, would have excited pity in the breast of any one who had known her during the full flush of her love for Clym."59

Of revoltive Eustacia, resolved to shake off gloom ("Yes, I will shake it off! No one shall know my suffering. I'll be bitterly merry, and ironically gay, and I will laugh in derision! And I'll begin by going to this dance on the green.")60, Hardy observes:

"To an onlooker her beauty would have made her feelings almost seem reasonable. The gloomy corner into which accident as much as indiscretion had brought this woman might have led even a moderate partisan to feel that she had cogent reasons for asking the Supreme Power by what right a being of such exquisite finish had been placed in circumstances calculated to make of her charms a curse rather than a blessing."61

But Hardy, inspite of his sympathy, does not approve of her thoughtless force of longing which proves destructive. There is no reason why the reasonable desires of such a beautiful shape languishing upon the heath should not be satisfied. Her feelings of revolt, therefore, are natural and justifiable.
But, then, the universe is irrational, the silent sky incapable of response to her prayer, and her condition irremediable. In view of this her violent clinging to life and hopes to find a place which could fulfill her urges, amount only to madness. The disharmony of existence grows in exact proportion to the intensity of our impossible demands from the world. Our frantic search for the home-land after heart's desire only increases our sense of alienation. Eustacia fails to understand, does not even try to understand that her own strong ambition has alienated her in the only place where she is condemned to live. That is her tragic weakness responsible for her doom. Her attitude to the world, though natural and justifiable in its demanding character, is yet wrong and unwise in that it achieves nothing and loses everything. Her fruitless revolt instead of providing an escape from her situation aggravates the pain of her predicament. Her anger blinds her to the right way of establishing harmony by turning the bitter divorce of existence into a peaceful co-existence with Nature, into emotionally agreed separation to correspond with its rational recognition. Quixotic act of striking the windmill in absurd confrontation is no act of heroism. Eustacia also is engaged in such strife with dead Nature. Sheathing the sword after realizing the absurdity is brave wisdom, not a cowardly retreat from the battle. But Eustacia does not realize it.
However, her "grandeur of temper" which "forswears compromise" is truly heroic in tragic sense. She keeps up her revolt, although at certain moments she sees some sense in her husband's spirit of resignation which brings him peace. The heaviness of her eyes which is her "general way of looking", she tells Clym, "arises from my feeling sometimes an agonizing pity for myself that I ever was born." It suggests the strained state of her mind to the strain and tension of which she ultimately succumbs. The revolt into exhaustion and her consequent death evoke deeply tragic response. She heretically blames the Providence, breaks down emotionally and seeks in suicide an escape from her situation, as such natures as hers, generally wishing never to have been born, are apt to do when tired and beaten in the battle of life. Quite near the end of her life when "The wings of her soul were broken by the cruel constructiveness of all about her", she moans:

".....How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!...... I do not deserve my lot!........0, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! 0, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!"83

And when the harmony hoped for during the life-time and in this world itself (as against the otherworldly aspirational
harmony of religion) is thus persistently sought and consistently denied, the thought of a return to the primal identity in death with the dead world is assuaging to the soul torn in the absurd.

"To Eustacia the situation seemed such a mockery of her hopes that death appeared the only door of relief if the satire of Heaven should go further."64

Fond Charley foiled once her contemplated attempt to commit suicide by hiding the pistols she was wistfully looking at.

"'Why should I not die if I wish?' she said tremulously. 'I have made a bad bargain with life, and I am weary of it - weary. And now you have hindered my escape. O, why did you, Charley!'"65

But ultimately she drowns herself before Clym's message requesting her to return, delayed by mischance, could be delivered into her hands. The 'this-worldly' Hellenic urges for the existence harmonious to them grow gradually into revolt and end in the tragic disintegration of the being who cherishes them. Hardy presents such characters again and again in his novels. Owing to his sympathy with them Hardy's critics are led into the error of interpreting their revolt against the world as Hardy's philosophy. Clear impression, however, emerges from his novels that in his view the otherworldly harmony in Heaven quite after our instinctive aspirations is superstitious, and that the hopes of this-worldly harmony between desire and
its object are absurd. Naturalism with its uninfriagable causal order is a scientific metaphysic sound in theory, but it explains away the freedom of man, though in chains of his physical conditions, and leaves the chaos of existence which man has created in nature practically intact. There is nowhere to be seen either the order of scientific conception or harmony of the optimistic notion. Only the "more thinking among mankind", admitting the deadness of the world and the expulsion of the human consciousness yearning for a home in keeping with its nature, from the world, held chaotically together in what is called existence, can work out an order or harmony by a willing return to the world in the spirit of emotional reconciliation with its alien nature. Consideration of the second group of characters to which Fustacia belongs, alone will not yield Hardy's whole thought, though they best represent his disturbed feelings. We have to consider the "more thinking" characters of the third group as well, and in greater detail, for Hardy thinks through them.

However, before we turn to the character of Clym, let us examine in brief the tragedy of Mrs. Yeobright, his mother. She also, to certain extent, belongs to the second group of characters who would have the events of life rhyme with the human wishes, and turns a heretic while crying against the scheme of things after a series of disappointments. She, of course, does not have
Eustacia's violent aspirations to found happiness corresponding to them upon the heart of this world. Her limited ambition is almost realized when Clym was given a nice start in the Diamond business abroad, and she was well reconciled to her widow's loneliness upon the ascetic heath. She was a woman of serene dignity contented with what life had already offered. She did not pine much for what is not. But she had never expected the blows from Fate that shattered what was already in her possession. She had ignored the fact that even what little is realized and is held indispensable for happiness may slip out of the hands and be lost in this chance-governed world of change. The events in a flux outside the self may drift apart from wishes where coincidently it had converged previously for a brief while. Hopes and expectations, however moderate, pave the way to despair when they are violently thwarted. And her expectations from her son and niece, though limited, were by no means moderate.

Her little world was shaken up first when Thomasin, her niece, decided to marry Wildeve against her disapproval of him as a proper match. Once she had forbidden the banns in the Church when the wedding was about to take place. Another time a little accident had prevented the marriage: Wildeve had the licence made out for Budmouth which was useless at Anglebury where they had decided to wed. This scandalized Mrs. Yeobright.
Now she was as anxious to get them married sooner than later as previously she was to prevent it altogether. Thomasin ultimately gets married to Wildeve owing to Diggory Venn's clever contrivance in her favour, and as Eustacia had shifted her attention from profligate Wildeve to Clym, a more promising man from Paris. Mrs. Yeobright somehow got reconciled to the marriage and resumed her placid way of living.

Clym's return for good from Paris after resigning his position in the Diamond firm, caused a chain of events that diverged from her wishes, offended her initially and disturbed her to death in the end. She could not approve of his idea of starting a school for the clowns, his renunciation, his missionary zeal. She says:

"After all the trouble that has been taken to give you a start, and when there is nothing to do but to keep straight on towards affluence, you say you will be a poor man's school-master. Your fancies will be your ruin, Clym." 66

Clym, however, had inherited his idealism partly from his mother, and she was, therefore, not quite without sympathy for his imprudent but well-intentioned scheme. She said that like his father he was "getting weary of doing well". 67 But his question, "Mother, what is doing well?" 68 silences her, for she was "far too thoughtful a woman to be content with ready definitions." 69 She was not altogether reconciled to his idea
of staying upon the heath. But it did not create a fatal disturbance in her.

Then in the chain of events already started comes a working of Fate still harder to bear when Clym falls in love with Eustacia and hastily decides to marry her. With womanly intuition Mrs. Yeobright could see his folly and foresaw his doom. But like helpless Cassandra crying warnings of the inevitable never heeded, she was profoundly disturbed at his "steady opposition" to her advice against this proposed marriage as she watched his "persistence in going wrong." She rightly felt that it was a bad day for him when he first set his eyes on Eustacia, and that he was blinded. But Clym's blindness sees no light and justifies only his folly. Mrs. Yeobright says in despair: "You have come only to distress me, a lonely woman, and shorten my days!"

She could not understand that sorrow is the disappointment of hope or expectation, and that the surest way of getting rid of despair is to abandon expectation itself. She could not resign herself to the inevitable in healthy mood of compromise, and would not adopt a positive attitude that could disarm Fate. To Thomasin's statement intended to console grief-stricken Mrs. Yeobright

"There are worse women in the world than Eustacia Vye."
The latter's quick answer is,

"There are too many better; that's the agony of it."73

In fact, it is wrong attitude which reads curses in the happenings otherwise of 'neutral tints'. Thomasin continues:

"'You are too unyielding. Think how many mothers there are whose sons have brought them to public shame by real crimes before you feel so deeply a case like this.'

'Thomasin, don't lecture me - I can't have it. It is the excess above what we expect that makes the force of the blow, and that may not be greater in their case than in mine: they may have foreseen the worst.'74

Yet she has not enlarged her expectation to cover up far within it any degree of excess to undo the blows of fate. She has no fortitude to expect worst adversity so that comparatively better times might please her. She expects, on the contrary, the events to rhyme with her wishes quite obstinately. That is why every event that did not rhyme added a bit to her disturbance, and darkened her mind a shade more, till ultimately she started seeing positively in the world a pervasive spirit of Malevolence.

When the church bell sounded suggesting that the wedding ceremony of Clym and Eustacia was over, grief-struck Mrs. Yeobright murmured:

"Then it is over.....Well, well! and life too will be over soon. And why should I go on scalding my face like this? Cry about one thing in life, cry about all; one thread runs through the whole piece. And yet we say, 'a time to laugh'."75
However, Mrs. Yeobright reconciles herself to what is over and done as the passage of time becalms her perturbed spirits. Persuaded by Venn she decides to pay a visit to her son and make peace with him and his wife. Then comes the final blow that sends her reeling to death. In the hot noon after long travel she reaches her house and knocks at the door. She sees Eustacia looking at her through a window, but finds no response to her knocks. She had seen before while nearing the house Clym and another man whom she could not recognize and who was Wildeve, enter the house. So she knew that Clym was in. Yet the door remained shut to her knocking twice. She was unaware of the fatal role which a little mischance had played—Clym's uttering in sleep 'Mother', Eustacia's thinking hearing this that he was awake and would open the door, and her consequent ignoring the knock the second time when otherwise she would have opened it. Mrs. Yeobright turns back utterly heartbroken finding no response to her advances.

"Her walk thither from the garden gate had been hasty and determined, as of a woman who was now no less anxious to escape from the scene than she had previously been to enter it......... Her lips trembled, becoming unnaturally thin as she murmured, 'Tis too much—Clym, how can he bear to do it.' He is at home; and yet he lets her shut the door against me.""76"

She continues deliriously in Johnny Nunsuch's presence:
"...... Shut out! She must have set him against me. Can there be beautiful bodies without hearts inside? I think so. I would not have done it against a neighbour's cat on such a fiery day as this!" 77

She expresses intense death-wish which is soon granted:

"No. I shall not sleep much till another day, and then I hope to have a long, long one — very long." 78

And she conveys her final message to Johnny's mother:

"Tell her you have seen a broken-hearted woman cast off by her son." 79

Emotionally broken, physically exhausted, stung by an adder she sinks upon the heath and becomes earth again. Unyielding-ness, though not ambition is her tragic flaw which accounts for her tragedy.

Eustacia, as we have seen, embodies Hellenic zest for life, urges for earthly happiness, which sound discordant in the world dead to them and make her a tragic figure whose powerful passions break her down. Her pagan beauty corresponds conspicuously to her inward desires. This makes her strikingly a representative of the instinctive human demands just in themselves, but unreasonable in relation to the indifferent nature of our world to which they are addressed. Clement Yeobright or Clym as he is generally called, on the contrary, has recognized
the neutrality of the world of Nature which is our only home, and has also emotionally adapted himself to it. He rejoices in the liberty permitted within the prison walls, is content in material sense with what positive good his situation yields, and does not allow his aspirations to wander beyond the limits which the human condition has imposed. He has developed that "more recently learnt emotion" which creates harmony and makes him feel at home upon the heath. He does not feel here like one banished or alienated. In tastes, temper and even appearance Clym bears complete contrast to Eustacia. He is a handsome but "thoughtful man". The strain of prolonged thought process which had originated initially in anguish at the perception of disharmony, has told upon his face. Its beauty is worn and has undergone metamorphosis to accord well with the sombre beauty of the heath.

"He already showed that thought is a disease of flesh, and indirectly bore evidence that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things. Mental luminousness must be fed with the oil of life, even though there is already a physical need for it; and the pitiful sight of two demands on one supply was just showing itself here."80

Yeobright is yet not a perfectly accomplished stoic inspite of his determined refusal to sink in pessimism. Though balance tilts in favour of stoical tranquillity of consciousness in him,
he still continues the struggle for its further consolidation against the tendencies drawing towards despair. All this is shown clearly in his look:

"As for his look, it was a natural cheerfulness striving against depression from without, and not quite succeeding. The look suggested isolation, but it revealed something more. As is usual with bright natures, the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase shone out of him like a ray."81

Hardy describes Clym as a future man, that is, man as he ought to be now, reconciled with the world as it is, or man as he surely will be when the shock of newly discovered estrangement with Nature subsides by long custom in due course. He is like all men a god imprisoned within flesh, but exceptional in having clear awareness of human nature as such.

"In Clym Yeobright's face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. Should there be a classic period of art hereafter, its Phidias may produce such faces. The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that seat for existence which was so intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitution of the advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure. People already feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting a mark of mental concern anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern perceptiveness to be made a modern type. Physically beautiful men - the glory of the race when it was young - are almost anachronism now; and we may wonder whether, at some time or other, physically beautiful women may not be an anachronism likewise."82
One must recall here Hardy's view previously discussed that enlightened sentiment finds sombre landscape beautiful, and that the orthodox concept of beauty is obsolescent. In the same consistent vein Hardy maintains how lucid awareness of life's predicament will effect corresponding change in the facial features to make them accord with the changed concept of bodily beauty. The interaction of mind and body is emphasised. "The view of life as a thing to be put up with" might be a shocking revelation to those like Eustacia who assert strong Hellenic urges. They would embrace pessimism in the end. But its shock vanishes to those who are determined to put up courageously with life's actual conditions. They steer apart from pessimism which is the reverse and result of disappointed optimism. Not our view of the external nature or life's actual being in its midst, but its contradiction of our demands from it make for pessimism as correspondence, actual or delusive, would favour optimism. Here clearly there is no statement of pessimism, since Hardy, or Clym, the representative of his thought, sees no possibility of correspondence and makes contradiction equally impossible by the renunciation of the instinctive demands from Nature. The critics who see here the expression of Hardy's so called pessimism are obviously mistaken. Desmond Hawkins who finds "the prime intellectual clue to Hardy" "not in Tess or Jude but in that
infuriatingly botched masterpiece, "The Return of the Native"

comments critically on the just quoted passage:

"This is a pretty naive view of history, founded apparently on a single cliche about 'the glory that was Greece'. But when a writer starts bandying phrases like 'the race when it was young' there is usually worst to follow - and Hardy duly goes in head first to the tune of 'the hellenic idea of life........that old fashioned revelling in the general situation'. And then, of course, 'a long line of disillusion centuries.'

"It is perhaps beside the point to argue that 'the view of life as a thing to be put up with' was more congenial to orthodox Jewery or medieval Christendom than to typical 'modern types' who believe in Progress and idealised love and social utopias. Hardy is arguing with whatever false instances, that the terms of life remain constant down the centuries; that they were once acceptable to and enjoyable by men; but that they are no longer so, because of our evolutionary development. "The 'new artistic' departure' of Hardy, 'the mark of mental concern' on his characters, springs from this doctrine that the evolutionary development of a higher and finer consciousness will only increase that disproportion between human aspirations and their possible modes of fruition in terms of our sublunar existence."

Mr. Hawkins, it seems, has failed to follow the drift of Hardy's mind here. Hardy has emphasised here not the view of history or the evolutionary development of human consciousness, but the growth of scientific knowledge of the external world and the story of life in it, which while it cannot be disputed, has replaced the rosy view of life and turned man into an exile in his homeland. He does not say that the pain of the human situation will keep worsening along with the progressive
evolution of human consciousness. On the contrary, as we have seen in the discussion on the setting, he has maintained that human souls, now alienated, will return to a closer harmony with Nature as new emotions according positively with the naturalistic world view will replace the traditional ones now conflicting with it. The countenance of that ideal future is revealed in the face of Clym.

The orthodox Jewery and medieval Christendom, of course, found the life a 'thing to be put up with', but not without a reassuring hope in Heaven thereafter. They did not have lucid awareness of life's predicament in the world. Evolution as progress was a misreading of the incorrigible optimists of the nineteenth century who interpreted even science according to their convenience. They were not a modern type but traditional thinkers under a new garb. Finding no metaphysical reality congenial to heart's desire anywhere around or after death they read new hopes in the changes of evolution which they mistook for progress and visualised its culmination in a perfectly happy world in a future indefinitely distant. It was virtually a transfer of the biblical paradise from remote past to remote future equally wishful. In social utopias such as that of Marx also the goal of ethical endeavour was transferred to the end of time as the ills and evils of the social existence were found immediately irremediable. The experiences in our own age,
however, have disillusioned us and made us sober. We have learnt now a more matter-of-fact view of science which inspires little hope and great fears. We have seen social utopias so beautiful in theory turned into nightmares of horror and cruelty and countless crimes against humanity when these utopias were given practical shapes in political terms in various revolutions. In a space a century after Hardy wrote this novel we have seen the universe darkening, life deadening into boredom and distaste for existence exactly as foreseen by him. That, however, was the prophecy of near future which has come true. But the farther future as visualised by him is to resolve all the disturbances caused by the advanced learning into equilibrium, to closer harmony with the sombre nature of existence.

We find Hardy's naivette more profound and prophetic than the wishful philosophers of evolution of his own days when we read the works of existential writers and philosophers who have realized the futility of speculative metaphysics, who distrust the certitudes both of science and religion alike, and concentrate in philosophy on the clear description of the human situation. Kafka, Camus, Sartre, O'Neill and a host of other continental and American writers who directly owe no debts to Hardy, have nonetheless, it seems, in one way or the other, developed in the direction predicted by him. It seems,
not Hardy in the drift of his thought, but Hawkins in his criticism of it, is naive and merely repetitive of what his predecessors in Hardy-criticism have said. Hardy certainly does not speculate here about the evolutionary development of human consciousness at the present juncture or in future. Hardy is arguing, not with false instances, but very plausibly that the terms of life, constant down the centuries, and enjoyable to men in world's younger days, are no longer so only owing to our disillusioning knowledge.

Critics like Hawkins who discover in such passages - especially in the passages pertaining to Clym's characterization - "the 'pessimism' which became his "(Hardy's) trademark" have misread his moods and misjudged his views. It only means that they would not like to recognize the world boldly as Hardy did, or to be condemned to live in it after the recognition is compelled. Hardy meant to say that human situation, not human despair, is irremediable. The critics confuse the two and blunder. They miss the point that Clym was successfully reconciled to the situation, and was at peace. This peace, however, is achieved along with the establishment of harmony after a long struggle to quieten the initial emotional disturbance at the perception of the predicament, and is yet not complete. He stumbles upon the way out and tends consciously towards it. But he has yet not
passed the wicket. The history of his struggle and the measure of serenity he has realized appear clearly imprinted on his face. Hardy observes further regarding Clym's character:

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

The lineaments which will get embodied in ideals based upon this new recognition will probably be akin to those of Yeobright. The observer's eye was arrested, not by his face as a picture, but by his face as a page; not by what it was, but by what it recorded."

The "quandary that man is in" by the operation of natural laws, it is clearly stated here, is not a modern development. It has been so since the emergence of human consciousness. The future course of evolution may take superhuman or subhuman turns as chance directs; the variations caused accidentally in the biological structure of man, if suitable to survival, might by their corresponding effects on the consciousness take him back to the animal world of obedience to the instinctual or alienate him still further. Since evolution is not a progressive unfolding of any conceivable purpose but a series of unpredictable changes, it is futile to speculate about the future of man.
Hardy does not do so. He simply maintains that the consciousness of man as it is today, and known to be as such since time immemorial, has been at variance with Nature. But previously for want of scientific knowledge and easy religious beliefs which their ignorance inspired, people could sustain hopes and forget their absurd plight in Nature. What is really modern is the awareness of it. If Hardy or his Clym confined himself to the recognition of the general situation which permits no old-fashioned revelling, he would have certainly deserved the title of a pessimist. But for Clym this recognition is to become a spring-board of determined meliorism, brave but not blind. Father Time in Jude appears to Hardy to be a man of immediate future shocked at uncovering "the defects of natural laws". His despair is suicidal to life. Clym has passed that stage. Hardy observes:

"He had reached the stage in a young man's life when the grimness of the general human situation first becomes clear; and the realization of this causes ambition to halt a while. In France it is not uncustomary to commit suicide at this stage; in England we do much better, or much worse, as the case may be."

But Clym's actual position as that of Hardy's, after that stage of gloomy immediate future is passed, is farther still in ideal future where he has learnt "to put up with" the conditions of existence replacing by resignation both, pagan zest for, and impotent revolt against it. He pursues in practice the
ethical "ideals based upon this new recognition" of the general situation - the ideals which are positive and important and make for the restitution of harmony.

Clym had an activist nature. "The only absolute certainty about him was that he would not stand still in the circumstances amid which he was born."87 He is ever engaged in some meaningful activity of life which could satisfy his soul. He believes in translating ideas into actions, and is quick to change his activities when his ideas change. Spiritually and morally he thus keeps growing. That is why when neighbouring yeomen meet one another, they ask, "what is he doing now?" instead of asking a natural question, "what is he doing?" "There is an indefinite sense that he must be invading some region of singularity, good or bad. The devout hope is that he is doing well. The secret faith is that he is making a mess of it....if he were making a fortune and a name, so much the better for him; if he were making a tragical figure in the world, so much the better for a narrative."88 He does not love toil for livelihood alone. Material prosperity and splendour do not attract him. His chief characteristic is that he believes in the practice of his thought, in living out his philosophy of life.

Clym is a talented man. In the small world of Egdon he had built up a reputation as an artist and a scholar. He advanced rapidly in service in the diamond trade, went from Budmouth to London, and from there to Paris. He prospered well. But he was
not happy at heart. He was principally an idealist who found himself misplaced in the flourishing diamond business in the world of Paris. Hardy observes:

"That waggery of fate which started Clive as a writing clerk, Gay as a linen draper, Keats as a surgeon, and a thousand others in a thousand other odd ways, banished the wild and ascetic heath lad to a trade whose sole concern was with the special symbols of self-indulgence and vainglory."89

He resigns his position in the trade and returns to Egdon as soon as his ideas change decisively. He tells Sam, Fairway and others explaining his plans to them:

"I've come home because, all things considered, I can be a trifle less useless here than anywhere else. But I have only lately found this out. When I first got away from home I thought this place was not worth troubling about. I thought our life here was contemptible. To oil your boots instead of blacking them, to dust your coat with a switch instead of a brush: was there ever anything more ridiculous? I said."90

To the surprised villagers who fail to understand his philosophy, Clym explains further how qualitatively the life in Paris was no better than the life on the heath:

"Well, as my views changed my course became very depressing. I found that I was trying to be like people who had hardly anything in common with myself. I was endeavouring to put off one sort of life for another sort of life, which was not better than the life I had known before. It was simply different."91
It must be borne in mind that according to Clym neither the life on Egdon nor the life in Paris is valuable in itself. They are different in their material modes. But neither of these is better than the other. It is wrong to assume that Clym is a votary of rural simplicity. Life that is subject to the torment of desires which cannot be fulfilled is miserable alike in town and village. If Clym returns to Egdon, it is because, he thinks, he can start on his job of teaching "the ideals based upon this new recognition" of the human predicament among the people best known to him. He continues explaining his plan of constructive, meaningful life now among the heathen:

"All this was very depressing. But not so depressing as something I next perceived - that my business was the idlest, vainest, most effiminate business that ever a man could be put to. That decided me: I would give it up and try to follow some rational occupation among the people I knew best, and to whom I could be of most use. I have come home; and this is how I mean to carry out my plan. I shall keep a school as near to Egdon as possible, so as to be able to walk over here and have a night-school in my mother's house. But I must study a little at first, to get properly qualified."92

The aim of Clym's educational plans is not informative knowledge, but wisdom and self-discipline that could ease the anguish of the human situation.

"He had a conviction that the want of most men was knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence. He wished to raise the class at the
expense of individuals rather than individuals at
the expense of the class. What was more, he was
ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed."85

In simple religious spirit of morality Clym wanted the class
as a whole to prosper materially, while he wanted the individ­
uals to learn the glory of austere living, reduce their wants,
and raise themselves above others intellectually and spiritually.
Self-abnegation, not self-indulgence, austerity, not luxury,
contentment with the situation, not ambition to escape it for
the better, fortitude and endurance are the virtues as essential
and worth cultivating in his newer philosophy as they have been
in the traditional Christianity. The difference is that while
Christians practise them to secure a place in heaven, Clym finds
them valuable as peace-making with the neutral nature of our
world here itself.

But Clym could not see the importance of material prosp­
erness as the first stage towards intellectual development.
Vanity of affluence cannot be realized without its satiating
experience. He himself would not have realized the deceptive­
ness of Parisian splendour without its intimate experience.
There is, therefore, as much justification in Eustacia's yearn­
ings for rich and luxurious life abroad as in Clym's renunciation
of it. That is why when Clym says:

"I remember when I had the same longing for town
bustle. Five years of a great city would be a
perfect cure for that."
Eustacia wishes:

"Heaven send me such a cure!" 94

Hardy observes:

"In passing from the bucolic to the intellectual life the intermediate stages are usually two at least, frequently many more; and one of these stages is almost sure to be worldly advance. We can hardly imagine bucolic placidity quickening to intellectual aims without imagining social aims as the transitional phase. Yeobright's local peculiarity was that in striving at high thinking he still cleaved to plain living — nay, wild and meagre living in many respects, and brotherliness with clowns." 95

Clym's tragedy is that there was between him and his dearly loved brother eremites of the heath, a wide chasm which made the communication between the two impossible. The villagers respected him for his scholarship, renunciation and talents. But they could not understand his philosophy. They belong to the first group of characters discussed before. They are still in a state of happy inertia. They are already at peace since the painful awareness of the predicament has not yet dawned upon them. Clym, on the contrary, has faced lucidity, experienced its anguish and resolved it into a surpassing serenity. He has contemplated long on the side of life seeming dark to our desires, capricious run of events that rarely coincide with our wishes; and death, the journey's end, which reduces all human warmth and vitality to earth again. He had made himself
familiar with "the central town thinkers" in Paris, undergone rigorous intellectual training, and had now spurned fortune which seemed attractive to the villagers. His inward struggle and achievement, while it raised his stature in intellectual and spiritual sense, also carried him farther than the farthest reach of his brother eremites. The dialogue between the two was impossible. Hardy observes:

"In consequence of this relatively advanced position, Yeobright might have been called unfortunate. The rural world was not ripe for him. A man should be only partially before his time; to be completely to the vanward in aspirations is fatal to fame. Had Philip's warlike son been intellectually so far ahead as to have attempted civilization without bloodshed, he would have been twice the godlike hero that he seemed, but nobody would have heard of an Alexander.

"In the interest of renown the forwardness should lie chiefly in the capacity to handle things. Successful propagandists have succeeded because the doctrine they bring into form is that which their listeners have for some time felt without being able to shape. A man who advocates aesthetic effort and depreciates social effort is only likely to be understood by a class to which social effort has become a stale matter. To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has been long accustomed. Yeobright preaching to the Egdon eremites that they might rise to a serene comprehensiveness without growing through the process of enriching themselves, was not unlike arguing to ancient Chaldeans that in ascending from earth to the pure empyrean it was not necessary to pass first into the intervening heaven of ether."96

In living far ahead of his times he had certainly achieved intrinsic greatness. Hardy does not deny it. He only suggests
that Clym's greatness, valuable in itself, could not be recognised as such by the bucolic placidity which Clym addresses. They did not have insight enough to appreciate his wisdom. He is not like a successful leader voicing articulately their vague feelings, responding well to their vaguely felt needs, and receiving applause from them. He is like a prophet leaping far ahead of his age to a position out of his fellow's sight, beyond the hazy horizon of their limited vision. His philosophy, therefore, is not intelligible to them. He was misunderstood to the extent he was a prophet, not only by his stupid country fellows, but also by Hardy's critics who attach more importance to the ravings of the heretics than to the "serene comprehensiveness" of Clym. He shuns the path of golden mean, and pursues his chosen course to the extreme end. Hardy, therefore, describes his mind as ill-proportioned:

"Was Yeobright's mind well-proportioned? No. A well-proportioned mind is one which shows no particular bias; one of which we may safely say that it will never cause its owner to be confined as a mad man, tortured as a heretic, or crucified as a blasphemer. Also, on the other hand, that it will never cause him to be applauded as a prophet, revered as a priest, or exalted as a king. Its usual blessings are happiness and mediocrity. It produces the poetry of Rogers, the paintings of West, the statecraft of North, the spiritual guidance of Tomline; enabling its possessors to find their way to wealth, to wind up well, to step up with dignity off the stage, to die comfortably in their beds, and to get the decent monument which, in many cases, they deserve. It never would
have allowed Yeobright to do such a ridiculous thing as throw up his business to benefit his fellow-creatures." 

Inspite of his mother's strong opposition to his "entirely new course" of life, he leaves for good his "effeminate" business, the "trafficking in glittering splendours", and shows himself firmly committed to his self-chosen task of saving "half the world going to ruin" by teaching them "how to breast the misery they are born to". His philosophy does not end up in nice theories. It is not merely a speculative enterprise. It is a practical path of ideal ethical living. His soul, like St. Paul's, is outraged by the spectacle of "the whole creation groaning and travelling in pain", and he decided to do "some worthy thing" before his death while there is "health and strength enough for anything" in his body, not so much by a word of precept as by setting first before his fellows an example of ideal life that could harmonize well with the world. Eustacia also, later, is reminded of Apostle Paul when, herself in great distress, she sees him, though almost blinded, resigned to his condition, labouring even cheerfully like any furze cutter, indifferent to "outward things", and armoured against the arrows of misfortune. She tells Wildeve:

"......but the worst of it is that though Paul was excellent as a man in the Bible he would hardly have done in real life."
She fails to understand like most of us that saints and saviours are distinguished from the average humanity by the strict adherence in practice to their cherished ideas about ideal living. They renounce even subtle desire for recognition or reverence as a reward of their austerities, and hope to win a sort of inward satisfaction which is independent of external conditions. We dismiss them as misfits in life although we invest such persons in books about them with a halo of heroism. Clym's theories and practice, fatal to fame, are yet the only way to ease the human situation in the world. In estimating his greatness we have to consider his intrinsic strength of stoical virtues, not the want of its recognition by others. In fact, Clym's ambition, if it could be called ambition, was for obscurity, not for fame. Like a hermit he wanted to be alone, to "escape from the chafing of social necessities", and "longed to be in some world where personal ambition was not the only recognized form of progress." And "his scheme was far enough removed from one wherein the education of youth should be made a mere channel of social ascent."100

But Clym courted trouble when he fell in love with Fustacia. He blundered seriously when he decided to marry her. He and she had temperamentally nothing in common with each other. Hardy observes:
"Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym."101

His mother disapproves of the match and advises him against the marriage saying aptly that "if she makes you a good wife, there has never been a bad one."102 Although he disregarded his mother's advice, he himself perceives this when he tells Eustacia insistent on his return to Paris:

"You are ambitious, Eustacia - no, not exactly ambitious, luxurious. I ought to be of the same vein, to make you happy, I suppose. And yet, far from that, I could live and die in a hermitage here with proper work to do."103

But he trusts Eustacia's "candid confession" that she would rather live with him in a hermitage upon the heath than not be his at all. She says: "......though I should like Paris, I love you for yourself alone",104. She betrays the ignorance of her own true longing; and Clym wishfully thinks that she would come round to his ideals of life in due course, though "he could not but perceive at moments that she loved him rather as a visitant from a gay world to which she rightly belonged than as a man with a purpose opposed to that recent past of his which so interested her. Often at their meetings a word or a sigh escaped her. It meant that, though she made no conditions as to his return to the French capital, this was what she secretly longed for in the event of marriage; and it robbed him
of many an otherwise pleasant hour. His fatal decision to marry her was therefore to cause, as it did, her doom and his tribulations along with the tragedy of Mrs. Yeobright.

The artist's instinct in Hardy is masterfully exhibited in his 'providential scheme', the plot, his whole microscopic world from which spontaneously issues without his conscious intrusion his philosophy of life. He allows his characters to work out the courses of their lives, express their ideas and emotions, and act according to their responsible choice. He shows them engaged in the rough and tumble of life, and leaves it to the reader to judge of their folly or wisdom, and to account for their happy or miserable end. We have seen how, torn in the absurd, Eustacia ultimately broke down. It is interesting to see how Clym faces with fortitude the strain and pressure of his situation and disarms Fate.

Clym's reading "far into the small hours during many nights" caused inflammation in his eyes, impaired his vision, and almost blinded him. It was not certain whether or when he would regain his normal eye-sight and resume his work. This was an added disturbance to Eustacia's distress of confinement upon the heath. But Clym's reaction to the situation was sane and positive:
"Clym was very grave at the intelligence, but not despairing, a quiet firmness, and even cheerfulness, took possession of him. He was not to be blind; that was enough. To be doomed to behold the world through smoked glass for an indefinite period was bad enough, and fatal to any kind of advance; but Yeobright was an absolute stoic in the face of mishaps which only affected his social standing; and, apart from Eustacia, the humblest walk of life would satisfy him if it could be made to work in with some of his culture scheme. To keep a cottage night-school was one such form; and his affliction did not master his spirit as it might otherwise have done."107

Clym is ever content with what is. He does not grieve for what is not or what is lost. He feels happier still when he learns from Humphrey that he could earn half a crown per hundred faggots if he took to furze and turf cutting. Moreover, he thought, it would, without putting strain on his eyes, provide him with a healthy occupation. The question of its being a low class work did not occur to Clym who saw no shame associated with such manual labour, and he did not care for others' opinion holding it as such. But to Eustacia her husband's taking up such a job was a kind of dishonour difficult to endure. It depressed her spirits further. "There had been nonchalance in his tone," as Clym revealed his new plan of action now that study was impossible for him, "showing her that he felt no absolute grief at a consummation which to her was a positive horror."108 She pleaded tearfully but could not move Clym who was adamant on the point.
The furze cutting Clym discovers no ill-will in Nature, no discord. He finds himself in a kind of mystical harmony with the heathery Nature. His profound serenity comes from no outward source, but springs from within. It is a positive state mystical in the non-theistic introvertive sense. It defies definition in words. Here in seeing the world through Clym we feel that he and his creator are identified, for Hardy's state of mind with which the whole picture of Egdon Heath is instinct, itself is exhibited here in enhanced form. Hardy writes:

"This man from Paris was now so disguised by his leather accoutrements, and by the goggles he was obliged to wear over his eyes, that his closest friend might have passed by without recognizing him. He was a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more. Though frequently depressed in spirit when not actually at work, owing to thoughts of Eustacia's position and his mother's estrangement, when in the full swing of labour he was cheerfully disposed and calm.

"His daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person. His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and rugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down. Tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs."
heads or hips, like unskillful acrobats, as chance might rule; or engaged themselves in noisy flirtations under the fern-fronds with silent ones of homely hue. Huge flies, ignorant of larders and wire-netting, and quite in a savage state, buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man. In and out of the fern-dells snakes glided in their most brilliant blue and yellow guise, it being the season immediately following the shedding of their old skins, when their colours are brightest. Litters of young rabbits came out from their forms to sun themselves upon hillocks, the hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing it to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen. None of them feared him."109

It is a picture not different in tone from that of some hermit, a yogi, drawing towards the lure of his love and non-violence all animals taming the wild ones, and transforming the forest atmosphere into a paradise about him. Here there is a wild heath in harmony with bees, butterflies and dell-snakes who flock fearlessly around Clym lending consonant parts of the whole atmosphere a strange charm. It is not the description of the scene, but the tranquil colour of feeling that is significant. The poetry of the whole piece here betokens Clym's serene spirit which readily harmonizes with all things and beings, and endows the whole creation with a "kindly congruity". Nowhere in the novel do we see a spectacle of the struggle for existence, of life feeding upon life, of mutual hostility in the realm of Nature which the strong will to live and revolting consciousness would certainly detect anywhere. There is, indeed,
the soothing atmosphere of fearless sympathy. Clym's resignation has dispelled the predicament and deepened almost into a mystical peace, positive and profound.

Clym even sang while he worked. But Eustacia could not stomach the shame of his stooping so far below the dignity of her class. His singing annoyed, angered her. She told him:

"Why will you force me, Clym, to say bitter things? I deserve pity as much as you. As much? - I think I deserve it more. For you can sing! It would be a strange hour which should catch me singing under such a cloud as this! Believe me, sweet, I could weep to a degree that would astonish and confound such an elastic mind as yours. Even had you felt careless about your own affliction, you might have refrained from singing out of sheer pity for mine. God, if I were a man in such a position I would curse rather than sing."

Their attitudes are thus contrasted. She imagines and curses God for His heartlessness. She evokes our pity and assumes the grandeur of a tragic heroine who is heading towards her doom against her wishes for life at its richest and happiest. She is beautiful. She is not bad. She deserves happiness in fulfilment of her wishes. Yet she perishes for want of saving wisdom. Clym, on the contrary, only sings, but would neither pray nor curse. Divinity is more or less irrelevant to his plan of living, though he does not clearly affirm atheism. In his attitude to life we see no form of faith, heretic or devout. He has realized the futility of revolt, and is resigned to
all the workings of Fate. In his equanimity, unruffled under all circumstances, he towers far above an average man, assumes the grandeur of a stoic hero or a Christian hermit, and evokes in the reader, not pity, but admiration. His answer to Eustacia reflects fully the calm of his mind:

"Now, don't you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you. I have felt more steam and smoke of that sort than you have ever heard of. But the more I see of life the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting. If I feel that the greatest blessings vouchsafed to us are not very valuable, how can I feel it to be any great hardship when they are taken away? So I sing to pass the time."

His lack of ambition, his detachment from the world, his turning away from all the apparent blessings of fortune has not generated unrelieved gloom, as it should, if it were a purely life-negating attitude. But the state of his mind has been so positive and serene that even those in love with life's evanescent pleasures would envy it. Eustacia envies him for "the gift of content - which he has, and I have not." Wildeve, looking at Clym sound asleep, explains, "God, how I envy him that sweet sleep!.....I have not slept like that since I was a boy - years and years ago." He has known revolt and overcome it. He has suffered anguish of lucidity and resolved it into surpassing serenity. His contrast with the revoltive characters is clear, and his resemblance with
the rustic placidity is only superficial. The clowns who have small expectations from life are not free from small sorrows and disappointments. The state of their mind, though still saved from the awakening into the predicament which has plagued the characters of the second group, is that of dull inertia which is never identical with the mystic serenity of soul. The peace of wisdom and the peace of ignorance, though seemingly of the same sort, are substantially different. Clym has passed through the first two stages of placidity and revolt before arriving finally at the stage of the rediscovery of the homeland in the world itself. He has learnt the secret of happiness. He is eager to teach it to all. The world, according to him, is neither good nor bad if we do not make it either. When Eustacia, alienated upon the heath, says:

"I wish we didn't live here Clym. The world seems all wrong in this place."

Clym's answer, brief and simple, is:

"Well - if we make it so."

But Clym's equanimity was shattered when his mother died of exhaustion and adder's bite. He was mortified at the idea that he could have saved her but did not do so. "Day and night shout at me,"You have helped to kill her"," he tells Eustacia. And to Thomasin he says:
"I, who was going to teach people the higher secrets of happiness, did not know how to keep out of that gross misery which the most untaught are wise enough to avoid."  

He was prepared for any kind of calamity to his personal self. But he had never imagined that he would be responsible for his mother's most tragic death. His equanimity which previously used to rise to the level of serene gaiety now sank at its lowest to touch the fringe of despair. But he was not completely overwhelmed by its darkness.

"Endurance and despair, equanimity and gloom, the tints of health and the pallor of death, mingled weirdly in his face."  

The later revelation that Eustacia had kept his door closed when his mother had come in a spirit of compromise, added rage to his sorrow.

"Eustacia; you have held my happiness in the hollow of your hand, and like a devil you have dashed it down."  

This led the couple finally to separation. When Clym in course of a few days was mentally reconciled with her, his belated invitation to come back never reached her. In the climax that followed both Eustacia and Wildeve were drowned while Clym, rescued by the reddie, survived. The tragic phase of his life was thus over. Chastened by tribulations his elastic
spirit comes out triumphant to start life again in accordance with his long cherished scheme, rectifying past errors in his future action. He turns a preacher and goes about imparting his wisdom, instructing the eremites how to endure well the coil of things we are born to.

"He did sometimes think he had been ill-used by fortune, so far as to say that to be born is a palpable dilemma and that instead of men aiming to advance in life with glory they should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame."120

On the Rainbarrow he starts "the first of a series of moral lectures or Sermons on the Mount, which were to be delivered from the same place every Sunday afternoon as long as the fine weather lasted."121

"He wore a shade over his eyes, and his face was pensive and lined; but, though these bodily features were marked with decay there was no defect in the tones of his voice, which were rich, musical and stirring. He stated that his discourses to people were to be sometimes secular, and sometimes religious, but never dogmatic; and that his texts would be taken from all kinds of books."122

"Yeobright had, in fact, found his vocation in the career of an itinerant open-air preacher and lecturer on morally unimpeachable subjects; and from this day he laboured incessantly in that office, speaking not only in simple language on Rainbarrow and in the hamlets round, but in a more cultivated strain elsewhere - from the steps and porticoes of town-halls, from market-crosses, from conduits, on esplanades and on wharves, from
the parapets of bridges, in barns and outhouses, and all other such places in the neighbouring Wessex towns and villages. He left alone creeds and systems of philosophy, finding enough and more than enough to occupy his tongue in the opinions and actions common to all good men. Some believed him, and some believed not; some said that his words were commonplace, others complained of his want of theological doctrine; while others again remarked that it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else. But everywhere he was kindly received, for the story of his life had become generally known."125

J. I. M. Stewart comments critically on Clym's character:

"Clym Yeobright is not up to his job - if by his job we may mean that of protagonist in a novel of advanced ideas. This appears nowhere more clearly than in his reaction to his cousin Thomasin's predicament. Here he follows his mother, whose attitude is one which a Victorian curate's daughter would no doubt share with a respectable peasantry. 'Marry him you must after this,' Mrs. Yeobright says to the unfortunate girl when she has returned a maid a few hours after leaving home to become Wildeve's wife. When Clym begins to hear of the story his attitude is that 'it is too ridiculous that such a girl as Thomasin could so mortify us as to get jilted on the wedding-day', and he is disturbed on suspecting that 'there is a scandal of some sort.' Clym does, indeed, have misgivings about the marriage when it actually takes place. But his attitude to the whole affair is decidedly not that of a philosopher. It is a folk-attitude in all essentials."124

It is true, in such matters Clym's attitude is no better than "the folk attitude" of the respectable Wessex peasantry. But Mr. Stewart fails to understand the basic fact that in this
novel Hardy has not intended or attempted to challenge the conventional concepts of propriety, right and wrong regarding such petty issues, or to express his personal views on sex and marriage. We cannot criticise an author or his character for not doing what he did not try to do. Clym is brought up from his birth in the social world of Egdon Heath. Its social culture and customs are entrenched as much in his consciousness as in others. That makes him one of the folk and gives him reality. He never seriously questioned the morals of this heathery world. The social absurd stifling the primal urges of man has not yet unmasked itself to his view. Therefore, he has never given thought to its possible resolution. Hardy's attention like that of Clym is concentrated here on the cosmic absurd and its resolution, man in the actual and then ideal relationship with the world of Nature. In thinking over this he is one of the advanced philosophers. There he is unimpeachable. He not only sees clearly, but acts for amelioration in the light of his thought. He not only perceives the absurd, but establishes harmony as well without betaking himself to any superstitious thinking, without imagining anthropomorphically with all passion a Friend or Enemy behind phenomena to relieve absolute human loneliness in the midst of Nature. There he is bold and courageous, a strong stoic hero.
D. H. Lawrence observes in criticism of Clym:

"Clym has found out the vanity of Paris and the beau monde. What, then does he want? He does not know; his imagination tells him he wants to serve the moral system of the community, since the material system is despicable. He wants to teach little Egdon boys in school. There is as much vanity in this, easily, as in Eustacia's Paris. For what is the moral system but the ratified form of material system?"

In fact, not Clym, but Lawrence does not know what the former wants to do after his renunciation of the Parisian pomp. Lawrence and Hardy in their attitudes to life are poles apart. Lawrence ever wished to devour the pleasures of life with greedy zest, and found in the world much to satisfy his 'whole man' - his mind, body and senses. Hardy discovered life as a 'thing to be put up with', and all its pleasures hollow. His brooding detachment dismissed the zest for existence as childish. Lawrence's lack of proper understanding or appreciation of Clym's philosophy, therefore, seems natural. What Clym wants to teach is not new norms and ideals of moral conduct in relation to other men in society. His principal concern is to make peace with the world which in the scheme of things appears to be opposed to man. He wants to steal away the sting from the bitings of misfortune that looms large all around the fragile being of man. What he seeks to embody in his moral system is his melioristic
response to the human situation in Nature. The moral system dealing with man's relationship with Nature is a novel concept which few of Hardy's critics could understand and least of all Lawrence. But it can still be described as moral, for, it requires sustained effort of will and the discipline of mind to work out an ideal relationship of harmony with the world, to re-establish a home in the heart of Nature where man is alienated actually. The stoical ethics is ethical only in this sense. The perception of the social absurd and the moral system to ease its anguish is the next stage still postponed in Clym's case.

Lawrence observes further:

"He came back to Egdon - what for? To reunite himself with the strong, free flow of life that rose out of Egdon as from a source? No - "to preach to the Egdon eremites that they might rise to a serene comprehensiveness without going through the process of enriching themselves". As if the Egdon eremites had not already far more serene comprehensiveness than ever he had himself, rooted as they were in the soil of all things, and living from the root! What did it matter how they enriched themselves, so long as they kept this strong, deep root in the primal soil, so long as their instincts moved out to action and to expression? The system was big enough for them, and had no power over their instincts. They should have taught him rather than he them."

Lawrence displays again the same lack of understanding of Clym's character. It is wrong to equate rustic placidity
with Clym's serene comprehensiveness. The trouble is that the rustics are still rooted in the 'soil of all things' exulting in little pleasures that life yields without being shaken seriously by the little sorrow that beset them on their road to death. The absurdity of existence has not yet dawned upon them. All this does not amount to a positive qualification in them which is wanting in Clym as Lawrence sees it, but rather their limitation which Clym has outgrown. Clym being prophetically far ahead of his times in his perception and resolution of the cosmic absurd, as we have already seen, is beyond their reach. Clym is right in his philosophy as Alexander the Great would have been if he had dreamt of a civilization without bloodshed, as Hardy says. Clym's only tragedy is that there is no point of contact between him and his audience. They are not alienated and therefore they cannot understand what Clym's return signifies. They are yet not uprooted from the soil, and naturally they fail to follow Clym's philosophical approach of striking firmer roots once more on the earth. Clym does not object to their enriching themselves materially. He only thinks - mistakenly, of course, as we have considered earlier - that affluence is not always a necessary intermediate stage on the way to the philosophical uplifting of one's soul. But it is far from truth to say that he has to learn from them and not they from him. At least Hardy does not say so.
'The Return of the Native' as a tragedy

Schopenhauer sees as in the universe so also in tragedy the spectacle of causeless suffering, "the unspeakable pain, the wail of humanity, the triumph of evil, the scornful mastery of chance, the irretrievable fall of the just and innocent." He sees no Hegelian moral order anywhere and reads no atonement in the hero's disintegration in course of tragic action for a particular act of offence against it. The only order he discerns is that of pervasive Evil. "The true sense of tragedy," he writes, "is the deeper insight, that it is not his own individual sins that the hero atones for, but original sin, i.e., the crime of existence itself."

But the function of tragedy is not to wound, but to heal after wounds are inflicted, not only to awaken us into a cruelly contrived scheme of torture, but also to deliver us from it, if not wholly, at least in certain positive measure. Schopenhauer cannot substantiate his views on the basis of any known tragedy, nor could a work of tragic beauty be produced in keeping with his absolutely pessimistic philosophy. Since suffering, according to him, is not exceptional or accountable
but normal order of things, it can, if presented on the stage or in a narrative, have no assuaging after-effects. Nietzsche, who shared with Schopenhauer a dark, disturbing view of existence, therefore perhaps, moderated the latter's pessimism regarding the function of tragedy, and said that it not only reveals the evil nature of existence but gets us reconciled to evil by creating in us a mood of resignation. It gives also the mythical consolation that the hero has passed on through death to a higher and happier existence, and thus protects us from absolute despair. Nietzsche writes:

"We are to recognize that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end; we are forced to look into the terrors of the individual existence - yet we are not to become rigid with fear: a metaphysical comfort tears us momentarily from the bustle of changing figures. We are really for a brief moment primordial being itself, feeling its raging desire for existence and joy in existence; the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena, now appear necessary to us, in view of the excess of countless forms of existence which force and push one another into life, in view of the exuberant fertility of the universal will."

".....the hero, the highest manifestation of the will, is negated for our pleasure, because he is only phenomenon, and because the eternal life of the will is not affected by his annihilation."

Both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are at one in maintaining that life itself is a tragedy, and that what the literary genre of the name embodies is only its painful awareness. The lesson of resignation resulting from the conclusion of a tragedy emphasised by Schopenhauer, more particularly by Nietzsche,
is not positive expression of the heroic will of a stoic, but rather the crumbling of the strong will to live. It does not mean serene reconciliation with the world, the establishment of a "peculiar and kindly congruity", but rather a state of fatigue of a mind long strung in tension and tired in the end in a hopeless struggle against destiny.

D. H. Lawrence reads in *The Return of the Native* a tragedy in keeping with Nietzsche's views without, of course, mentioning his name. He almost echoes Nietzsche when he writes:

"What is the real stuff of tragedy in the book? It is the heath. It is the primitive, primal earth; where the instinctive life heaves up. There, in the deep, rude stirring of the instincts, there was the reality that worked the tragedy. Close to the body of things, there can be heard the stir that makes up and destroys us. The Heath heaved with raw instinct. Egdon, whose dark soil was strong and rude and organic as the body of a beast, out of the body of this crude earth are born Fustacia, Wildeve, Mistress Yeobright, Clym and all the others. They are one year's accidental crop. What matters if some are drowned or dead, and others preaching or married; what matters any more than the withering heath, the reddening berries, the seedy furze, and the dead fern of one autumn of Egdon? The Heath persists. Its body is strong and fecund, it will bear many more. Here is the sombre, latent power that will go on producing, no matter what happens to the product. Here is the deep, black source from whence all these little contents of lives are drawn and the contents of the small lives are spilled and wasted. There is savage satisfaction in it; for so much more remains to come, such a black, powerful fecundity is working there that what does it matter?"
Hardy's critics have generally agreed that the Egdon Heath in its passive dullness and changeless antiquity plays in this novel a decidedly active and significant role. But Lawrence has gone to the extent of reducing the entire stuff of tragedy to it. Destiny, according to the Nietzschean concept of tragedy – which Lawrence, it seems, finds illustrated in *The Return* – claims ineluctably its victims, the hero or heroine, unmoral in character, just as it would dissolve lesser individuals, the insects, the seedy furze, the reddening berries or dead ferns in the annual recurrence of autumn. Nothing matters; neither virtue nor vice, neither folly nor wisdom, has caused an individual's doom, or can save him from disintegrating. All beings, great and small, are levelled down to the same insignificance. The continuity of the World Will ever manifesting itself in a myriad new forms as the old forms, the 'one year's accidental crop', fade and fall, is but a poor consolation. What follows is a sense of futility, complete nihilism.

But the conclusion of a tragedy should be healthy, not sickening, meaningful, not nihilistic. Egdon Heath which in Lawrence's view dwarfs the dignity of man to the degree of irrelevance, alone cannot make for a tragedy which has to represent principally the human affair. As William G. McCollom
rightly observes, in tragedy "Often the world of action is so vivid that the background can hardly be said to exist. The tragic actor strongly qualifies the tragic terrain. Consequently, we shall find it difficult to paint the landscape without the figures."132 And again: "The tragic dramatist is ever seeking to denominate his world. But he always returns to man."133 Hardy also has chiefly concentrated in this novel, not upon the swarthy landscape of the Egdon Heath, immense and overwhelming symbol of the Nature, but upon the human figures that grow up and move about in its face, not upon the background, but upon the dramatic action.

Tragedy has to show man at grips with destiny. This destiny might assume in his view the shape of cruel gods, or neutral Nature, or wickedness of other men, or callous impersonality of a false society or its crushing code of conventional conduct. It has to show in this painful struggle not only the ephemerality of man but also the meaningfulness of his brief existence, not only his weakness, but also the possibility of his growing into strength, not only his actual situation in the world, but also the remedies to retrieve him from it, not only his death or downfall but also the causes, essentially avoidable, that led him to it, not only the heart-breaking sorrow but also the cause of it. We must have the feeling from the spectacle that man need not have lost though he does
lose, he need not have died though he does die. Fate is crushing when it strikes. But its blows could have been averted. Tragedy never represents irremediable evil. Its philosophy is not pessimism or predeterminism. It does not impress upon the audience absolute human helplessness.

Hegel might not be right in presuming a moral order in the universe which the hero or heroine in tragedy disturbs and comes to grief in consequence. But the presumption of order of some kind or the other is a basic requirement in tragedy. The order is violated in course of tragic action, but is restituted at the conclusion. Even if no such order seems to exist, it has to be created, or atleast the possibility of its creation must be hinted at. Those who see tragedy, modern or ancient, as a spectacle of sheer disorder from start to finish are mistaken. Raymond Williams rightly observes:

"Specifically, in tragedy, the creation of order is directly related to the fact of disorder, through which the action moves. Whatever the character of the order that is finally affirmed, it has been literally created in this particular action. The relation between the order and the disorder is direct." 154

And again:

"The tragic action, in its deepest sense, is not the confirmation of disorder, but its experience, its confirmation and its resolution." 155
Does Hardy postulate any order? F. R. Southerington maintains that it had ever been Hardy's yearning to discover in the world a kind of order that should satisfy "his spiritual and emotional needs on a rational basis." Southerington observes:

"......Hardy's deepest wish was to impose order upon experience and nature; any order, but preferably some system that would match the facts of experience by justifying reason and sensibility, and by giving some purpose to human existence. I believe that in the end he failed, because the order which he discerned could not satisfy his emotional needs. But he did discern an order."

Needless to say that the order which Hardy discovered was that of causal mechanism in the world of Nature. Its laws are uniform and infallible. Every event can be explained scientifically in terms of causality as the necessary outcome of the antecedents. It could never be otherwise than what it has been. This new doctrine of determinism in consonance with the researches of science thus leaves no room for chance or accident. In our too well-ordered world of Nature nothing can fall out from the causal chain of happenings wherein every effect is determined by the causes that precede it. Yet what does fall out from its all-conditioning clutch is the irrational wishing of man, his vain ambitions, ideals, expectations and day-dreams that demand what ought to be but has never been. Hence, what
Hardy discovered, in the final analysis, was the supreme disorder of existence between the rigid scheme of things that could never be altered, and the vain human wishing that would rarely coincide with it. But the question pertinent to our subject is, does this disorder emerge as the concluding note in Hardy's novels, especially in *The Return of the Native*?

The answer is, no. The perception of the disorder is followed by the establishment of harmony as a right resolution. The order is not to be discovered metaphysically in the abstract, but to be created ethically by the effort of the will and understanding. What irks Hardy's critics is the lack of any metaphysical consolation in his works which in their eye amounts to complete pessimism. They continue to despond of the disturbing presentation of truth about life's precarious being in a world to which Hardy himself and his representative characters are reconciled in feeling. A close study of *The Return of the Native* as a tragedy makes us feel that Hardy's angry critics owe their resentment to their own lack of boldness in seeing what Hardy saw and brought shatteringly to their unwilling attention, and to their lack of fortitude in following for the resolution of disorder his path which saved him from sinking in despair.

Hardy's views on the disorder which is discovered, and
the order to be established form the core of his philosophy. The contrary movements come to unity here in the artistic pattern of the piece which gives in the total impression full significance of the emergent thought. In the marriage of Eustacia and Clym Hardy presents two attitudes to the same situation of the persons confined in the same place - one making for disorder, leading towards strife and extinction, the other leading towards harmony and peace. Their close juxtaposition in wedlock throws into sharper relief the characteristics of each. One is a Hellenic beauty of Olympian grandeur who deserves and craves for "what is called life", at its richest and happiest, but never gets it. The other is an ascetic heathman who spurns all pomp and glitter of Parisian life already earned. One grumbles against the privations of life and wants the world to be a paradise congenial to human needs. The other refuses either to rejoice or sorrow under any circumstances and puts up peacefully with all the vicissitudes of fortune. One painfully discovers the absurd as she vainly revolts against her inexorable conditions, and seeks ultimately in death the dead harmony with the dead world. The other rises in the spirit of resignation above the absurd into a serene harmony with the world without committing 'philosophical suicide' or resorting to 'bad faith'. One is defeated by Fate despite resistance. The other has conquered it without resistance. The movement of the zest for life embodied in one,
natural for the human creature expelled from the primal paradise of Nature, is undesirable as the outward circumstances rarely converge by accident to meet it in fulfilment. That fatal flaw which makes in the end for heart rending pain, sorrow, heresy and suicide, is rectified in the other by "the view of life as a thing to be put up with" wherein "men laugh at misery through long acquaintance with it."

Eustacia Vye is truly and very recognizably a tragic heroine in this novel. She is an exquisite formation of the "happy convergence of natural laws" in her physical charms, and although she does not have lofty moral qualities to win our esteem, her just and amoral ambition does win our sympathy. This flower of beauty with bo base or wicked qualities ought not to have withered prematurely, and would not have withered had she been wise enough to deprecate her ruin, but did wither away pitiably before her full span of life was over. She is ranged in her struggle, not against gods, not against the callous society or villainous men, but against her own homeland, the heath. Her doom was not inevitable. Violent clinging to the sort of dream which could never become reality, her unbending pride that forswears all compromise enhances the pain of her predicament which ultimately breaks her down. If she had learnt to temper her longings with some stoical
thinking, she would have been reconciled with her homeland where she felt like one banished. A little contentment with the joys and comforts which Egdon could afford would have made her happy enough to avoid suicide. The issuing moral note in her tragedy, thus, is that one must put an end to the absurd strife with the world by unilateral declaration of truce, since the world like the windmill of Don Quixote constitutes only the passive term of the absurd. Raymond Williams writes: "The rhythm of tragedy, it is said, is a rhythm of sacrifice. A man is disintegrated by suffering, and is led to his death, but the action is more than personal, and others are made whole as he is broken." Accordingly, the tragic rhythm of Eustacia's sacrifice is not sickening as her death and suffering are not caused by necessity. It has wholesome effect as we recognize her assertive hubris accounting for her disintegration. We pity her and learn to save ourselves from such a fate as hers. The total impression of her struggle unto death is tragic, but certainly not gruesome.

What is just a constructive note implied in her struggle and death, is Clym's well-chosen path of practical living. He is a hero, but not tragic. As George Santayana maintains: "the heroic is an attitude of the will, by which the voices of the outer world are silenced, and a moral energy, flowing
That is Clym's attitude, and his life has the rhythm of triumph, not or error, atonement and sacrifice. The first characteristic of a tragic hero is strong will to live, preserve what is possessed, and achieve what is far beyond his reach. Clym has almost abandoned the will to live, renounced what is won, has no acquisitive ambition left in him, and is ready to embrace with open arms of friendship any calamity which Fate has power enough to fling on him. Not the external circumstance in itself, but together with a peculiar reaction of the hero to it, makes for tragedy. In order to be tragic, suffering must make him shriek in pain; death must seem terrible enough to make the dying hero tremble except in the event of suicide when lasting sleep appears to the torn in life the only possible deliverance. Therefore, the death of Lear or Macbeth is tragic, while the death of Socrates is only heroic. Clym would not have appeared tragic even if he had died. And the course of his life after its turbulent phase is over, shows him reconciled with life. He stays firmly committed to his philosophy which is to be lived, not simply thought of. His ability to accept without complaint whatever Fate brings is precisely the lack of a tragic figure. Nothing could break his heroic strength. It lies in his anxiety displayed all throughout the action to lay down arms and retreat bravely.
from the battle against the impersonal workings of Nature all about him.

Long acquaintance with misery teaches man to laugh at it. Constant familiarity with death reduces its terror. The expectation of worst adversity makes even the events of indifferent nature seem happy. Not despite his sombre vision of life, but rather on account of it, Clym does not talk of death or suicide now and again. It is significant that ancient Greeks, the optimistic race with tremendous zest for life, could see horror in death and so produce tragedies. But ancient India ever brooding over the darker sides of existence saw little sorrow in suffering, no horror in silent ceasing to be, and therefore could produce no tragedies. Hellenic Rustacia naturally appears to be a tragic figure, while Clym with almost an oriental outlook, with no comforting theology, is an ascetic with intrinsic greatness which his times and people are not advanced enough to appreciate.

Hardy stated in the description of Egdon that "human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a somberness distasteful to our race when it was young." Clym is prophetic in adopting a view of life as a thing to be put up with even when it has yet not replaced for others the traditional zest. He has recognized
the nature of his homeland, is reconciled with it, and has converted its prison like conditions into a hermitage. His elastic emotions are fully in tune with his rational knowledge. In the case of Hardy's generation and ours who do not live in the ideal future which Hardy has envisaged, wishes and expectations on the emotional side linger behind in the traditional colour even when rapidly developing lucid comprehension of the coil of things on the rational side of consciousness painfully conflicts with them. Therefore, Clym is saved from the aching sense of alienation which plagues those akin to the second group of Hardy's characters. In Clym's case it is quite correctly the return of a native to the homeland which appears to the souls emotionally estranged from it like Bustacia a place of condemnation in exile. Hardy is quite justified in reading the countenance of future in Clym's face revealing in its sage like character serenity which most men will realize when the anguish of the absurd is past in due course. Absurd feeling is the feeling of shock at the sudden discovery of the naturalistic universe which since long ages had been devoutly held as Divine creation. And the feeling of shock, however strong, cannot last for ever. It cannot resist the healing passage of time. Only Clym is quicker in recuperating and arriving where humanity in its sluggish pace will take perhaps a century more to reach. But it will not, it seems, fail to reach there.
The disorder of existence which has started with man's expulsion from the paradise of Nature, confirmed conspicuously in Eustacia's self-alienating yearnings, is resolved in Clym's figurative return to Nature's heathery symbol. His stoical 'apathy' matches in harmony with the neutrality of Nature. The order is restored. It is not at all a negative conclusion. In fact, the restitution of order, whatever its character, can never be negative, though it may appear so to some who demand a different sort of restitution. In his notion of harmony to be established Hardy is unconsciously tending towards a religious view which was, with him, always an instinct he could not overcome or subdue. Patient endurance, contentment, equanimity, resignation are virtues advocated as much by the religion as by the Hardyan ethic, although in the latter they are dissociated from the dogmatic metaphysic, and become valuable even in relation to the naturalistic world-view in as much as they help ease the pain of the human situation. Clym's practice and preaching of them is the message of this novel. A Christian hermit or a Buddhist monk would whole-heartedly agree with Clym's way of life. His equanimity assumes almost a mystical character. It is stoical. Albert Schweitzer has rightly observed: "In its essence stoicism is a nature philosophy which ends in mysticism." And again: "True resignation consists in this: that man, feeling his subordination to the
course of world-happenings, wins his way to inward freedom from the fortunes which shape the outward side of his existence. Inward freedom means that he finds strength to deal with everything that is hard in his lot, in such a way that it all helps to make him calm and peaceful. Resignation, therefore, is the spiritual and ethical affirmation of one's own existence. Only he who has gone through the stages of resignation is capable of world-affirmation. 

Clym's resignation as that of Hardy himself is of this kind. It should be clearly distinguished from the resignation of the broken will to live as conceived by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Clym is exhibiting a tendency towards non-theistic mysticism without his own or his author's intellectual awareness of it. It is his affirmative resignation that enables Clym to sing cheerfully even when almost blinded, and commune with the brown heath, its insects and dell-snakes in the fearless spirit of affectionate fellowship while sweating under the hot sun and cutting furze.

Pity is a feeling which arises from our unconscious sense of being saved from the fate that disintegrates the tragic hero. It arises from our sympathetic detachment as a spectator. It is a tragic emotion which we feel for Eustacia. But it is not possible to feel pity for Clym, for his cheerful
attitude to depressing misfortunes is heroic, and it evokes rather admiration. We admire his fortitude, his elasticity, his power of will in following a purposeful course of action, his great gift of contentment which even Wildeve envies and Eustacia does not fail to appreciate, his renunciation of things held valuable by most men. In viewing his life through the capricious changes of fortune we do not feel, as we would in a tragedy, that we should rectify in ourselves his fatal follies and errors. The feeling, on the contrary, is that he has rectified in himself the instinctive folly in most men who yearn unreasonably for things which indifferent universe cannot provide, and thus aggravate the pain of our exacting conditions. It is our feeling of admiration for the heroic, not of pity for the victim of fate.

However, in the private sphere of Clym's life his tribulations have a little tragic colour. It was on his part an error of judgment to marry Eustacia disregarding his mother's warning that his fancies would be his ruin. The man, successful in establishing harmony with the world, is disappointed in his one strong wish of making his mother and wife happy. He evokes tragic pity when he laments that he who was going to teach mankind the secret of happiness could not avoid the gross misery which the most untaught are wise enough to avoid.
If his grief had broken him, in this private sphere at least he would have been a complete tragic figure. But he lives, his resilient spirit soon regains lost composure, and reconciles himself with the changed nature of his lonely existence. It is the loneliness of a hermit, not the loneliness of an exile. He emerges stronger from his purificatory tribulations, and follows with unshakable fixity of purpose his long thought out mission of life.

With Eustacia, ignorant of her own true longing, character has been destiny, for Clym on his part had made no secrets about his plans even before engagement. He was not quite responsible even for Mrs. Yeobright's death. His only regret that he could have saved both women by making peace with his mother earlier, and inviting Eustacia back in time later after their separation, is baseless, for in both cases queer coincidences had played a fatal role in spelling the conclusive catastrophe, not his own acts or omissions. These two deaths were accidental to the extent they were not the outcome of the responsible course of action chosen by the characters themselves.

This troubled phase of life apart, Clym comes to no lasting grief. He is, at the end, as happy as he wished to be in that he realizes his long cherished dream of becoming a new kind of teacher preaching by precept and practice his ethical
Ideas which can harmonize the human being with the sombre nature of his homeland.

After studying *The Return of the Native* thus in the light of Hardy's discovery of the absurd disorder and his unique resolution of it, it should be clear now how the traditional Hardy-criticism as stated in the following passages of Edwin Muir has failed to perceive the essential affirmative note emerging at the conclusion of Hardy's tragic novels embodying his vision of man's situation in the world. Critics have attributed to him heresy and pessimism which he does not share with his revoltive characters of the second group. No comment or confutation is felt necessary:

"Hardy takes a short cut to tragedy by reducing life to a formula. He gets rid beforehand of the main obstacle to tragedy, which is man's natural inclination to avoid it. His characters are passive, or at the best endlessly patient. He does not believe that character is fate; so that for him tragedy does not proceed from action, but resides with the power which determines all action. Misfortune is not brought about by men and women, but is arranged by his power which is indifferent to all arrangements and therefore no misfortune itself. Misfortune is a principle of the universe and falls upon the weak and the strong indiscriminately, neither averted by wisdom nor brought on by folly, striking inevitably and yet as if by chance. For it is the result of a mistake which man cannot correct, since he did not make it. It was made by the Maker of the universe.

"In *Wuthering Heights* the action produces the catastrophe. The outcome is inevitable because Cathy and Heathcliff are what they are. We do not
have to postulate a malevolent President of the Immortals. But Clym Yeobright and Eustacia Vye and Damon Wildeve in The Return of the Native are not the real agents of their tragedy. Behind them, there is a power which insidiously deranges the action and defeats their intentions. Their intentions are generally good. But into the execution a disastrous change enters from outside as by a mathematical law, turning good into ill. This chance is generally a coincidence, and coincidence is therefore an organic part of Hardy's world, which could not exist without it. Coincidence is indispensable to him, for it is the one device by which he can evoke a sense of this power outside human life which perpetually arranges and deranges it.  

IV

THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

This is a tragedy of an exceptional individual in classical sense. The general human situation is not so conspicuously presented here as in The Return of the Native. It is more interesting as a narrative than as a clear, comprehensive exhibition of Hardy's philosophy of life. Whereas Egdon Heath in its symbolism stands for the sombre, unmasked face of primordial Nature and transcends particular time and place, Casterbridge as painted here is the actual Dorchester of Hardy's times buzzing in its grain markets with farmers' and cornfactors' activities.
Whereas in *The Return of the Native* metaphysical, moral, lyrical, even introvertive mystical notes combine to form a superb symphony, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, we have principally rural realism though the usual trends of Hardy's thought and emotions are to be discerned here also. Henchard, the rise and fall of whose energetic career forms the bulk of the novel, is more himself than merely the representative of Hardy's heretics. The note of resignation in Elizabeth-Jane's attitude to life reduces despair in proportion to her detachment, tends towards harmony, but does not quite positively establish it. It does not develop so unmistakably the mystical depth of introvertive nature. Her consciousness seems rather sad than serene. The backcloth to dramatic action here it not endowed with the serene beauty of Hardy's soul which emanated from the heath in *The Return of the Native*.

However, the form of tragic disorder here it not different. Michael Henchard's volcanic personality fumes and fulminates against the world of 'neutral tints'. He ascribes his failure to be loved by some one to the workings of Fate, turns a heretic, and aggravates the pain of disorder till his violent vitality dissolves into dust. The movements in mutually opposed directions - one towards strife and extinction, the other towards equanimity and serene survival, one embodied in Henchard's career, the other in that of Elizabeth-Jane, - are evident in
the emergent thought pattern from the total impression. But if they are not so very well defined as in The Return of the Native, it is because Hardy, as stated in the preface to the present novel, is absorbed here in "a study of one man's deeds and character" almost exclusively.

"Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite."143 That is the setting of the novel. The action is largely confined to the town although the story starts and concludes a little beyond its bounds. It is Dorchester itself rechristened in the Wessex world and realistically delineated. The language accordingly has a prose-like rhythm. But when Hardy's history-consciousness carries us back to the town's Roman foundations, Casterbridge symbolically assumes the character of world arena.

"Casterbridge announced old Rome in every street, alley, and precinct. It looked Roman, bespoke the art of Rome, concealed dead men of Rome. It was impossible to dig more than a foot or two deep about the town fields and gardens without coming upon some tall soldier or other of the Empire, who had lain there in his silent unobtrusive rest for a space of fifteen hundred years."144

The most conspicuous of all the Roman features of the town is its Amphitheatre, "Melancholy, impressive, lonely, yet accessible from every part of the town......."145. Hardy himself describes the place as suggestive. Centuries roll by; new gladiators enter
the lists as the older ones die defeated in shame or after a moment or two of victory; characters and chorus change; but the spectacle of man ranged in struggle against nature, against fellow creatures, ever persists.

Now, the hero in this arena is Michael Henchard, not a Roman, but martial still in physical build and temper. He is six foot one inch and a half tall "stern piece of virility". His heavy frame, large features, commanding voice, rich complexion verging on swarthiness, "a flashing black eye, and dark, bushy brows and hair" fitly embody the "unruly volcanic stuff" of his personality. His loud laugh showing thirty two sound white teeth signified "a temperament which would have no pity for weakness, but would be ready to yield ungrudging admiration to greatness and strength. Its producer's personal goodness, if he had any, would be of a very fitful cast - an occasional almost oppressive generosity rather than a mild and constant kindness." He was "a rule o' thumb sort of man" who "had in a modern sense received the education of Achilles, and found penmanship a tantalizing art." He was a poor hay trussser at the start of his career. Tipsy under the excess of rum mixed furmity at Weydon Fair, he sold his wife along with the baby Elizabeth-Jane in her arm to one Newson, a sailor, on shore leave who soon sailed to the American continent. Coming
to senses and aghast at the impact of tragedy, Henchard solemnly vowed under the oath to the Bible to "avoid strong liquors for the space of twenty one years to come, being a year for every year that I have lived," as a token of his genuine repentance. By sheer dint of will and energy he prospered rapidly in Casterbridge and rose to become the Mayor of the town. In Lucetta's fair estimate "he is a hot-tempered man - a little proud - perhaps ambitious; but not a bad man." Nature's blind energies rage within him without direction.

He does not live like Eustacia in a 'suppressed state'. He has achieved both wealth and status in keeping with his ambition. Yet at heart he is unsatisfied. Amid all his bursts of vitality he feels lonely and miserable. He is feared, even honoured but not loved. His pride alienates him from his fellows; His "tigerish affection" needs an object. That is why he is drawn irresistibly towards Farfrae, Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane by turns. For a brief spell when Susan returns to him after the reported death of Newson, the drift of events seems to converge in fulfilment towards his violent longing for love, and he is truly a happy man living with his wife, daughter and dearly loved friend Farfrae. But this happiness does not last. Death snatches away Susan. Elizabeth is discovered to be Newson's daughter. Farfrae's lovable qualities which win people's affection rouse his jealousy, and a spirit of rivalry estranges
him from Farfrae. Lucetta, his betrothed before Susan's return, is also lost to Farfrae when he turns to her after Susan's death. Such domineering natures as Henchard's cannot maintain the even tenor of affectionate relationship with anybody. His pride itself builds walls round him and holds him a prisoner. It thwarts his inmost urge for communication.

"Susan, Farfrae, Lucetta, Elizabeth—all had gone from him, one after one, either by his fault or by his misfortune."\(^{154}\) His own nature rather than the want of right company accounts for his loneliness. Hardy quotes Novalis' dictum that character is Fate and describes Henchard like Faust "as a vehement gloomy being who had quitted the ways of the vulgar men without light to guide him on a better way."\(^{155}\) He is again described as "the self-alienated man."\(^{156}\) His whole life as presented here reveals his strong urge for love at strife with his own stubborn pride. His tragedy is that he can relinquish neither. He is self-doomed to the Fate he meets.

As is usual in Hardy the characters in a state of frustration turn heretic and invent a malicious cosmic Being to lay on Him the blame for their misfortune. That is what Henchard does when rudely shocked at learning that Elizabeth is not his but Newson's daughter:
"He looked out at the night as at a fiend. Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious, and he could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him. Yet they had developed naturally."157

It was in desperate desire to beat Farfrae that he consulted the weather prophet, staked his all on his forecast in purchasing grains and ruined himself. In the event of fatal loss which made him a bankrupt "the movements of his mind seemed to tend to the thought that some power was working against him."158

"These isolated hours of superstition came to Henchard in time of moody depression, when all his practical largeness of view had oozed out of him."159 After his desperate attempt at suicide was thwarted strangely by the sight of his effigy whirling in the pool below, Henchard read in the incident Divine intervention to prevent his escape into peace. He says: "Who is such a reprobate as I! And yet it seems that even I be in Somebody's hand."160

In tragic grandeur Henchard remains unparalleled among all Hardy's characters, and he is said to have his peers only in the Shakespearean and Sophoclean tragedy. David Daiches observes: "He has something of the willfulness of Oedipus and Lear, something of their dignity even in his weakness and the manner of his self-destruction."161 And Evelyn Hardy writes:
"As others have pointed out, Henchard is Lear-like in his tragic grandeur; but Hardy has consummately proved that such a tragic figure need not be regal one; He evokes in us both terror and pity through his portrayal of a homespun trusser of hay."162 The events of his tumultuous life have chastened him at the end. He is no longer the Henchard of former days. He has "schooled himself" to accept his Cordelia's wish in all matters as "absolute and unquestionable"163. The role resembling partially that of Cordelia is played here by his step-daughter Elizabeth-Jane. His weary soul found last refuge in her affection. For her sake he "had fettered his pride sufficiently to accept the small seed and root business which some of the Town Council, headed by Farfrae, had purchased to afford him a new opening. Had he been only personally concerned Henchard, without doubt, would have declined assistance even remotely brought about by the man whom he had so fiercely assailed. But the sympathy of the girl seemed necessary to his very existence; and on her account pride itself wore the garments of humility."164

But with Newson's arrival his last refuge lies demolished, and he banishes himself from Casterbridge. The will to live in him is dead. He is exhausted in his struggle against Destiny which issues from his character.
"He had been sorry for all his long ago; but his attempts to replace ambition by love had been as fully foiled as his ambition itself."

"Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his soul in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum - which arranges that wisdom to do shall come pari passu with the departure of zest for doing - stood in the way of all that. He had no wish to make an arena a second time of the world that had become a mere painted scene to him.

"Very often, as his hay-knife crunched down among the sweet-smelling grassy stems, he would survey mankind and say to himself: "Here and everywhere be folk dying before their time like frosted leaves, though wanted by their families, the country, and the world; while I, an outcast, an encumberer of the ground, wanted by nobody, and despised by all, live on against my will."

Yet he was clinging to a last straw of hope which kept him breathing. Elizabeth-Jane had promised to remember him at the time of his departure from Casterbridge, never to quite forget that though he loved her late, he loved her well. He hoped against hope that she would keep the promise till at last the last fond hope was bitterly disappointed when she addressed him as Mr. Henchard. He disappeared from the scene altogether and died upon the Egdon wastes. The agony of his dying soul is relieved a little by the dog-like fidelity which he discovered unexpectedly in Abel Whittle whom he had subjected to worst humiliation, and who yet followed and comforted him during the last few days of his life.
John Paterson in an article captioned "The Mayor of Casterbridge as a Tragedy," regards this novel as a traditional tragedy justifying "the ways of God to man." According to him, Henchard had offended the moral order and incurred upon himself the wrath of Heaven in selling away his wife at the fair at Weydon-Priors at the start of the novel.

"Arousing such forces of retribution as will not be satisfied with less than the total humiliation of the offender and the ultimate restoration of the order offended, it will come to represent, like its counterpart in Lear and Oedipus, the violation of a moral scheme more than human in its implication."167

In the whole novel he reads: "Hegel's sublime and indestructible "ethical substance"."168 He observes:

"Recording the remorseless private and public deterioration of the protagonist, the novel enacts the indignation of the moral order whose serenity his act of impiety has violently affronted. Forsaken by Farfrae, blasted by the disclosure that Elizabeth-Jane is not his daughter, and deprived of the love and loyalty of Lucetta; humiliated by the revelations of the furtivy-woman and ruined in a trade war with his Scottish antagonist; crushed by his public rebuke on the occasion of the Royal Visit, rejected by the "daughter" whose affection had consoled him in defeat, and reduced in the end to the starkest of deaths, Henchard will be forced, like Oedipus and Faust and Lear, to rediscover in suffering and sorrow the actuality of the moral poser he had so recklessly flouted."169
But Mr. Paterson's interpretation appears forced. The fact is that here as elsewhere in Hardy's novels the Fate that presides over the destiny of a hero or a heroine is the same indifferent amorality of the world interpreted by Hardy's heretics as the sinister Intelligence. Hardy himself has interpreted such tendings of Henchard's mind as superstitious, and described the events that led to such tendings as those that had developed naturally. Yet the amoral order is order still, and the most rigid one, not chaos. The offender by being a misfit into it punishes himself unwittingly and suffers a breakdown. There is none to punish Henchard. No supernatural Nemesis dogs his footsteps. His persistent hubris makes him consistently misfit in the world, in the society, and constitutes his hamartia even in the amoral universe. His own pride thwarts his longing for love. As George Wing suggests "he was starved of affection: and, like those self-made bosses of the steel-works and cotton-mills of the nineteenth century, he had no adroitness in setting about obtaining friendship and love. He thought it could be bought by the bushel. He thought he could bully it out of people. He was unceremonious in behaviour, scorned subtlety, and emotionally was a bull in a china shop." Even if he had not sold his wife at the start of the novel, the story of his life would have been different only in
details, but not in substance. There seems therefore to be no justification in the novel for Mr. Paterson's presumption that here at least Hardy in contravention of his well-established atheism evolved a belief in just gods or God, for the convenience of archetypal tragedy.

Lascelles Abercrombie seems more fair when he observes of Henchard's tragedy:

"Art like Thomas Hardy's fiction is not to be abstracted in analyses of plot and character. The story, with all its detail, and the inevitable process of Henchard's history, from the sin that braces him with remorse to make some good of life, through the heights of his prosperity, down to the anguished resignation confessed in his scribbled will - the story is a great particular instance, put into objective formality, of the tragic metaphysic behind a noble artist's conception of the world. It is not one man's old sin finding him out; but a type of the general sin of personal existence, and personal desire, in a universe of indifferent fate. And the tragedy is not so much punishment exacted for this, as the stubborn endurance of the punishment. But just how this formal typification is done, is only to be seen in the whole story itself."171

H. C. Webster more or less follows the same line of thinking when he reads cathartic character in Henchard's stubborn endurance and resignation. He observes:

"Although a seemingly sinister Fate opposes him, Henchard always struggles on...... He rarely considers whether destiny is hard; he only knows
that he must endure. . . . We may be struck by terror at his fate, but we are also aroused to admiration by his dogged courage. We feel that it is an honour to belong to the same race with a man who so courageously resists an implacable and sinister Fate. This is the purgation of our emotions that tragedy produces, not the helpless feeling that comes after reading a pessimistic tale of the futile and petty lives of futile and petty people. "172

But Webster is wrong if he thinks that Henchard's heroic endurance in itself constitutes the affirmative note of his tragedy. His resignation is bitter and negative. It is born of the extremity of despair and soul's weariness. Henchard illustrates the Schopenhauerian concept according to which a tragic hero is purified by suffering in that he recognizes the normality of suffering, the crime of existence, and resigns to death after developing this insight not only life, but also the will to live. It is not the stoical resignation of Clym's kind characterized by serenity that deepens almost into introvertive mysticism. It is not born of the renunciation of all hopes and wishes in the spirit of philosophical equanimity. It does not betoken the triumph of will against the workings of fate. There is in it, on the contrary, overwhelming sense of defeat that kills the zest for life while much longed for peace of death eludes. This kind of negative resignation must never be confused with the affirmative resignation of Hardy's sage characters of the
third group. It shows Henchard like a broken giant who knows how to die in unbending dignity. But it does not explain why he dies and how he could have saved himself in honour and dignity.

If there were nothing in the novel to account for Henchard's suffering, it would have lost the tragic rhythm of sacrifice which has to suggest reconciliation with the world and make the audience whole in the spectacle of the hero's decline and fall. It would then have degenerated into a horrifying tale of causeless suffering. But it has not. The corrective note here comes from Elizabeth-Jane's character and career. It is that of affirmative resignation as distinct from Henchard's negative resignation. It would have saved him as it did save Elizabeth-Jane in ordeals and tribulations worse than his. In the thought-pattern of the novel Henchard and Elizabeth are complementary even as Eustacia and Clym were complementary although Hardy's absorbing interest in telling the tale here does not allow the two movements to be defined so conspicuously as in The Return of the Native. Elizabeth has rectified in herself the errors and wrong attitudes of her step-father. Whereas Henchard is self-doomed to suffering and tragic death, Elizabeth-Jane proves a self-saviour in the face of obviously more depressing outward situations and events. Her seemingly negative approach to life is, in fact, profoundly
positive. While it makes the excess of optimistic joy dependent on the transitory favours of fortune in the external world impossible, it also rules out the possibility of a steep fall into the abyss of despair in pessimistic sense when the external events diverge away in their indifferent course from the human wishes. Her equanimity moves cautiously within the limited range having at one end subdued gaiety, and at the other subdued sadness. Her gift of calm thinking keeps her secure beyond happiness and sorrow in ordinary sense.

This pretty daughter of Newson and Susan, brought up in poverty, has passed early in life through the vicissitudes of fortune which does not encourage optimism. After her arrival in Casterbridge along with her mother the latter shortly died leaving her to the care of Henchard. Lonely Henchard, deceived into believing by the well-meaning dishonesty of Susan that Elizabeth was his daughter, lavished without reserve all his impulsive affection on Elizabeth. But it was entirely withdrawn as impulsively when disillusionment occurred. Poor Elizabeth who was made to believe by Henchard that he was her real father, kept on wondering at the inexplicable changes in his attitude towards her till at last near the end of the novel revelation came from Newson who was not dead as reported. When Farfrae first loved her, Henchard in his anxiety to keep his daughter
near himself to relieve the sorrow of his loneliness forbade
the courtship. Later after the discovery that she was Newson's
daughter, Henchard, anxious to get rid of her presence, allowed
Farfrae to meet and court her. But then Farfrae who accidentally
met Lucetta and loved her at first sight, was lost to Elizabeth-
Jane. Driven by Henchard's strange dislike for her she seeks
to earn independent living in a sort of paid companionship with
Lucetta. But in the marriage of Farfrae and Lucetta she loses
not only her lover and friend, but also her only home which she
had found under Lucetta's roof. With a view to removing her
intrusive presence from their happy household, she finds inde-
pendent lodging and takes to the job of netting for earning
livelihood. All these events and absolute loneliness of this
almost an orphan girl with no consolations of wealth and status,
are more heart-rending in objective sense than those which Hen-
chard suffered. Yet while Henchard is broken, she lives, and
not only lives, but "the solidity of her character" positively helps and consoles her better-placed friends - Henchard,
Lucetta, Farfrae - in their troubles.

Very early in the novel Hardy reveals Elizabeth-Jane's
thinking which she reads in Farfrae's appearance as well at
Three Mariners where both she and he had put up at their first
arrival in the town.
"She admired the serious light in which he looked at serious things. He had seen no jest in ambiguities and roguery, as the Casterbridge tosspots had done; and rightly not — there was none. She disliked those wretched humours of Christopher Coney and his tribe; and he did not appreciate them. He seemed to feel exactly as she felt about life and its surroundings — that they were a tragical rather than a comical thing; that though one could be gay on occasion, moments of gaiety were interludes, and no part of the actual drama." 174

The subsequent unfoldment of Farfrae's character proves that she had wishfully read in him her own views about which, in fact, he was never serious. But it is fully substantiated that such were Elizabeth's convictions which the later course of her life only consolidates. Her views develop more, but do not change into different kind. This revelation of her mind at her first appearance in the novel agrees well with her conclusive feeling, much quoted episode in the general drama of pain. It reflects not pessimism but affirmative resignation.

After Henchard's remarriage with Susan when "The freedom she experienced, the indulgence with which she was treated, went beyond her expectations," 175 she refused to be shaken from her equanimity. Her prettiness developed into beauty, and there was plenty to satisfy her every wish. "Perhaps, too, her grey, thoughtful eyes revealed an arch gaiety sometimes; but this was infrequent; the sort of wisdom which looked from their pupils did not readily keep company with these lighter moods. Like
all people who have known rough times, light-heartedness seemed to her too irrational and inconsequent to be indulged in except as a reckless dram now and then; for she had been too early habituated to anxious reasoning to drop the habit suddenly. She felt none of those ups and downs of spirit which beset so many people without cause; never— to paraphrase a recent poet—never a gloom in Elizabeth-Jane's soul but she well knew how it came there; and her present cheerfulness was fairly proportionate to her solid guarantees for the same."

"Her triumph was tempered by circumspection; she had still that field-mouse fear of the coulter of destiny despite fair promise, which is common among the thoughtful who have suffered early from poverty and oppression.

"I won't be too gay on any account', she would say to herself. "It would be tempting Providence to hurl mother and me down, and afflict us again as He used to do."

"Knowledge—the result of great natural insight—she did not lack; learning, accomplishments—those, alas, she had not;......" By knowledge Hardy means the awareness of the human situation and the wisdom to ease its rigours. To augment her knowledge further she studies the books of philosophy and becomes "a young perusing woman". Such habit of serious
reading is a characteristic of most of Hardy's idealists. In her "great natural insight" into the coil of things, in her desire to seek enlightenment from the books, Elizabeth resembles Clym of The Return of the Native and Hardy himself. She does not simply cram information or amuse herself in the intellectual gymnasium of philosophy in the Western academic sense. Hers is 'adversity's sweet milk philosophy'. She translates her thought into action and follows philosophy as a way of life. There can be no doubt that Hardy thinks through her. "To learn to take the universe seriously there is no quicker way than to watch — to be a "waker", as the country-people call it," writes Hardy commenting on thought-obsessed Elizabeth tending night after night on her sick mother. It is the author's own observation in his third person narrator's capacity. Watching means witnessing without emotional involvement. It amounts to becoming a disinterested spectator of all time and universe. That is what Elizabeth has been doing.

Despair is hopes disappointed, not hopes dismissed as unreasonable. Elizabeth's equanimity and fortitude betoken wisdom that dispels pessimism together with the unreasonable hopes and wishes that constitute it when thwarted. Obstinate desires do not accord well with the world of chance changes. The renunciation of these desires means rejection of both
optimism and pessimism as unwise. Hardy reflects on behalf of Elizabeth when Donald was lost to her:

"She had learnt the lesson of renunciation, and was as familiar with the wreck of each day’s wishes as with the diurnal setting of the sun. If her earthly career had taught her few book philosophies it had at least well practised her in this. Yet her experience had consisted less in a series of pure disappointments than in a series of substitutions. Continuously it had happened that what she had desired had not been granted her, and that what had been granted her she had not desired. So she viewed with an approach to equanimity the now cancelled days when Donald had been her undeclared lover, and wondered what unwished-for thing Heaven might send her in place of him."181

After Newson’s return, Henchard’s death and her marriage with Farfrae there ensues in her life a period of happiness. But she is not unaware of its episodic character. A brief interlude, whether painful or happy, cannot be held as the conclusion of life which continues to drift through rough weather with only intermittent fine days. But the story has to end somewhere, and it is better for the novelist to stop in a moment of happy episode which, after a series of tragic occurrences might have sound restitutive effect in keeping with the aesthetic demand of tragedy. The novel ends with the wedding. The state of Elizabeth’s mind at the conclusion of the novel is near Hardy’s ideal. He writes:

"All was over at last, even her regrets for having misunderstood him (Henchard) on his last visit, for not having searched him out sooner, though these were
deep and sharp for a good while. From this time forward Elizabeth-Jane found herself in a latitude of calm weather, kindly and grateful in itself, and doubly so after the Capharaum in which some of her preceding years had been spent. As the lively and sparkling emotions of her early married life cohered into an equable serenity, the finer movements of her nature found scope in discovering to the narrow-lived ones around her the secret (as she had once learnt it) of making limited opportunities endurable; which she deemed to consist in the cunning enlargement, by a species of microscopic treatment, of those minute forms of satisfaction that offer themselves to everybody not in positive pain; which, thus handled, have much of the same inspiriting effect upon life as wider interests curiously embraced." 182

"Her position was, indeed, to a marked degree one that, in the common phrase, afforded much to be thankful for. That she was not demonstratively thankful was no fault of hers. Her experience had been of a kind to teach her, rightly or wrongly, that the doubtful honour of a brief transit through a sorry world hardly called for effusiveness, even when the path was suddenly irradiated at some half-way point by day-beams rich as hers. But her strong sense that neither she nor any human being deserved less than was given, did not blind her to the fact that there were others receiving less who had deserved much more. And in being forced to class herself among the fortunate she did not cease to wonder at the persistence of the unforeseen, when the one to whom such unbroken tranquillity had been accorded in the adult stage was she whose youth had seemed to teach that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain." 183

A mood of serene equanimity lifts her above the ups and downs of fortune. It has become almost a permanent state of her mind more positive than what is usually termed hope and happiness. Her affirmative resignation has turned the world torn in the absurd
into a harmony for herself. Her compassion for those who demand from life the sort of happiness they deserve but do not get, as well as her perception of the lack of wisdom in such demand, are essentially Hardy's. Henchard's tragic flaw, apart from his being emotionally a bull in China shop, is his lack of such wisdom. Elizabeth in having such wisdom has rectified in herself that flaw. That is how a corrective note to Henchard's tragedy comes from the character and career of Elizabeth-Jane. She belongs to the third group of sage characters. Hardy himself admires the solidity of her character which she has built up by the exercise of understanding and will. But H. C. Webster reads more of Darwinian naturalism in Hardy's novels than is justifiable when he refuses to give her any credit for her stoical triumph against indifferent circumstances and inward unruly impulses. Instead of appreciating her victory against woman's usual weaknesses - vanity, show and coquettry - he describes her as "too impersonally human to be vain, showy, or coquettish." If she does not break as a consequence of frustration in love, it is because, Webster feels, "sexual impulses are not sufficiently strong" in her "to require much resisting." He exhibits the modern tendency of naturalistic psychology never to concede the strength or greatness of an individual, ever to regard it as essentially a limitation or weakness, or treat every divergence from the normal pattern of human behaviour under different circumstances as sub-normal, ruling out
the possibility of supernormal, self-guided, will-based divergence. Else he should have seen the triumphant spirit of a strong human being in her character where he sees merely a natural irremediable fact.

(V)

*Far from the Madding Crowd*

E. A. Baker observes: "It is the tragi-comedy of rural life, pathos mingling with its opposite and settling at last into a measure of chastened happiness for the principal characters, with the main stress, however, on the furious passions, thwarted purposes, and shattering griefs which are the reality behind the idyllic calm of the pastoral scene." What Mr. Baker has failed to notice here is the emphatic note of affirmative resignation that steers triumphant through all "furious passions" and "shattering griefs" towards the realization of a concord beyond the metaphysical discord. For the first time in Hardy's fiction here the opposed movements, one towards strife and break-down, the other towards serene survival, are clearly spelt out. Moreover, from the action of this novel emerges
Hardy's philosophy of love as a sure deliverance from alienation. It also is a positive tendency that takes a slightly different mystical turn. As we will be discussing it in detail in the next chapter, we must keep ourselves confined in the present one to the discussion of Hardy's ethical resolution of the metaphysical absurd.

Far from the Madding Crowd is a serious work though not exactly a tragedy. Jean Brooks rightly observes: "The story has the simplicity of a ballad plot that pushes the characters into tragic relationships which converge on a climax of love, passion and death." The principal characters are Gabriel Oak, Bathsheba, Farmer Boldwood and Sergeant Troy. Character is destiny in each case. Circumstances continue to change indifferent to the needs of an individual dying under or surviving despite them. We feel that they alone would not have spelt calamity if the forces within the individual had not actively conspired with them. These inner forces could have been restrained from activity by the character concerned, but unfortunately were not so restrained. He could have deprecated the doom or tribulations to which he nonetheless succumbs.

The movement of life-affirmation through philosophical resignation is represented in the character and career of Gabriel Oak. He is obviously the hero in this novel. "At the farthest
points of radiation from the centre the novel begins and ends with the fortunes of Gabriel Oak who, as his name suggests, watches and endures throughout."188 He is a picture of rusticity and rugged candour. He appears at first comic like all the chorus characters of Hardy. But his greatness blossoms under the impact of adversity as he strides from the state of inertia prior to the awakening into human predicament in Nature, to the serenity surpassing the strain of the absurd revolt. He stands distinguished from the start from his brother-clowns in his impressive physical build and winning expression of innocence on his face where the marks of youth and even the relics of boyhood are still seen lingering. He is described as "an athletic young fellow of somewhat superior appearance to the rest."189 But pride, even awareness of his superiority is foreign to his nature. He is absolutely unassuming, and has no specific expectations from life. He feels quite light and free as he never regards himself as the centre and concern of his existence. "And from a quiet modesty that would have become a vestal, which seemed continually to impress upon him that he had no great claim on the world's room, Oak walked unassumingly, and with a faintly perceptible bend, yet distinct from a bowing of the shoulders."190 People, religious in traditional sense, would consider him a Laodicean, for "he went to church, but yawned privately by the time the congregation
reached the Nicene creed, and thought of what there would be
for dinner when he meant to be listening to the sermon. Yet
spiritually he towers above the so called clergy and
Christian. The composure of his mind is rarely ruffled, and
never for long. His compassion embraces men and animals alike.
He is ever ready to sacrifice his personal interests for the
sake of others' happiness. His renunciation and self-effacement
are almost complete. In all this he practises Christianity
which consists more in noble behaviour than in formal belief.

Gabriel Oak, at the commencement of the story, is an
industrious farmer. His living, now as later, is simple, even
austere. "It was only latterly that people had begun to call
Gabriel 'Farmer' Oak. During the twelvemonth preceding this
time he had been enabled by sustained efforts of industry and
chronic good spirits to lease the small sheep-farm of which
Norocombe Hill was a portion, and stock it with two hundred
sheep. Previously he had been a bailiff for a short time, and
earlier still a shepherd only, having from his childhood assisted
his father in tending the flocks of large proprietors, till old
Gabriel sank to rest."192 He was a twenty eight years old
bachelor.

After Bathsheba had saved his life from being suffocated
to death in his cottage, he took fancy for her. The fancy soon
grew into serious love. She was just a visitor to Mrs. Burst, her aunt, at Norcombe. She was wild, mischievous, innocent and romantic. She needed a man who could satisfy her vanity and tame her naughty temper at the same time. It was but natural that rugged fidelity and devotion which Oak had all to offer could not win her consent for marriage. His tactless proposal was lightly refused. She soon went away to Featherbury where she inherited from her uncle a large farm and flock which she cleverly managed all alone.

This disappointment in love, however, left him unshaken. Neither his love nor his life was adversely affected. His devotion to his beloved grew gradually into a self-fulfilled feeling which needed no return in material sense, and ran deeper in even flow. But when George's son, the younger dog, drove his flock to death, he met with a reversal of fortune which made him practically a pauper. Yet what he felt instinctively at the disaster was not worry regarding his own penury hence on, but profound pity for the dumb creatures now dead or dying. "A shadow in his life had always been that his flock ended in mutton – that a day came and found every shepherd an arrant traitor to his defenceless sheep. His first feeling now was one of pity for the untimely fate of these gentle ewes and their unborn lambs." It was as remarkable as it was characteristic that the one sentence he uttered was in thankfulness:
"Thank God I am not married: what would she have done in the poverty now coming upon me."194

This suggests Gabriel's compassion and concern for others, as well as a positive attitude to life which finds no disaster despiriting or heart-breaking. Commenting on his sane reaction to the loss of flock Hardy observes:

"Gabriel was paler now. His eyes were more meditative, and his expression was more sad. He had passed through an ordeal of wretchedness which had given him more than it had taken away. He had sunk from his modest elevation as pastoral king into the very slime-pits of Siddim, but there was left to him a dignified calm he had never before known, and that indifference to fate which, though it often makes a villain of a man, is the basis of his sublimity when it does not. And thus the abasement had been exaltation, and the loss gain."195

It would be absurd to call such affirmative attitude pessimistic.

Oak had to dispose of his farm to pay for the debts. And then in search of a job as a bailiff or even as a shepherd, he went to the hiring fair held at Casterbridge, and came chance-guided to Weatherbury while on way to another hiring fair to be held at Shottsford. He saved the harvest from fire fighting bravely its swift spreading blaze in a farm near there. To his great joy and surprise he discovered that Bathsheba was the owner of that farm. As an act of appreciation he was at once hired as a shepherd. He accepted the appointment more with a
view to staying near the object of his heart's devotion than for the sake of job itself.

But Oak here was in for emotional ordeals. Bathsheba had rejected him long back. He had himself given up the hope that she would ever marry him. His love as distinct from selfish passion had assumed disinterested character which seeks and rejoices in the happiness of the beloved even at the cost of his own personal well-being. He is perfectly resigned to the neutral drift of events in the external sense. Affirmative resignation and almost a sort of mystical love, ever in possession of the image of the beloved, mingle in his consciousness which is delivered from the rages of revolt and the agony of alienation. But he was often disturbed on account of Bathsheba. To see her provoking Boldwood now and marrying such a profligate as Troy then was painful to him. He foresaw the ruin of Boldwood and misery of Bathsheba. He tried his best to prevent it, but he had no luck. However, his mere presence was comforting to both. He never maintained "the repose of a man whom misfortune had inured rather than subdued." 196 His profound, positive serenity is compared with the agitated consciousness of rebellious Bathsheba when she goes to his cottage in order to get some courage and consolation from him in the hour of her worst tribulation. She finds the interior of the cottage like a tranquil hermitage imbued with the element of his soul. The emotional turmoil that
agitates the afflicted characters in the world outside does not disturb its peaceful atmosphere. Hardy observes:

"Like a homeless wanderer she lingered by the bank, as if lulled and fascinated by the atmosphere of content which seemed to spread from that little dwelling, and was so sadly lacking in her own. Gabriel appeared in an upper room, placed his light in the window-bench, and then - knelt down to pray. The contrast of the picture with her rebellious and agitated existence at this same time was too much for her to bear to look upon longer. It was not for her to make a truce with trouble by any such means. She must tread her giddy distracting measure to its last note, as she had begun it."

He had made truce with the trouble. He moved everywhere armoured against the shafts of Fate. Feeling himself quite safe, his concern was the happiness of others. Bathsheba wonders at his total indifference to self-interest and devotion to others' cause.

"What a way Oak had, she (Bathsheba) thought, of enduring things. Boldwood, who seemed so much deeper and higher and stronger in feeling than Gabriel, had not yet learnt, any more than she herself, the simple lesson which Oak showed a mastery of by every turn and look he gave - that among the multitude of interests by which he was surrounded, those which affected his personal well-being were not the most absorbing and important in his eyes. Oak meditatively looked upon the horizon of circumstances without any special regard to his own standpoint in the midst. That was how she would wish to be."

Gabriel Oak, thus, appears a nearly accomplished stoic.

He is truly representative of Hardy's thought and belongs to the third group of characters. Like Clym and Elizabeth-Jane he also is
fond of reading. Among the rustics he is considered to be "a very understanding shepherd and learned in books." He endures, watches and witnesses the course of events that leaves Troy dead, Boldwood almost insane and Bathsheba fairly chastened. His disinterested devotion is nonetheless rewarded as Bathsheba marries him at the end. Henry W. Nevinson observes: "It is some comfort in that fine story - the first that brought Hardy to high fame - that at the last Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak are joined in trustful love. It is some comfort, but one half suspects that this comforting consummation was perhaps devised to hold the favour of the sensitive English public, who like Charles Darwin, "demand a happy ending." Be that as it may. Knowing Oak as he has been throughout the novel, we feel that what he wanted was ever in his possession. Nobody could rob him of his self-fulfilled feeling of love for the image of the loved one, abstract to others, but more lively to him than living flesh and blood. A different shape of external events leading him away from Weatherbury and Bathsheba would not have mattered much to him.

Hardy, it seems, has split the character of Gabriel Oak into Diggory Venn and Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native*. We have discussed here his achievement of "truce with trouble", in the manner of Clym Yeobright. We will discuss his deliverance from alienation, as that of Diggory Venn, his partial reincarnation, as also other lovers of Hardy's novels in the next chapter.
dealing with Hardy's philosophy of love.

Farmer Boldwood represents rattling impulses run uncontrolled to frenzy and imprisonment. He embodies the movement towards strife and death in response to the tantalizing character of life's promises.

Boldwood, when we see him first, is a rich, handsome and stern-looking farmer. "He was a gentlemanly man, with full and distinctly outlines Roman features, the prominences of which glowed in the sun with a bronze-like richness of tone. He was erect in attitude, and quiet in demeanour. One characteristic pre-eminently marked him - dignity." He is about forty years old. Liddy says of him: "Never was such a hopeless man for a woman! He's been courted by sixes and sevens - all the girls, gentle and simple, for miles round, have tried him. Jane Perkins worked at him for two months like a slave, and the two Miss Taylors spent a year upon him, and he cost Farmer Ives daughter nights of tears and twenty pounds' worth of new clothes; but Lord - the money might as well have been thrown out of the window." He is kind and generous. He had educated Fanny Robin who had "no friends in her childhood.", and got her a place under Bathsheba's uncle. He later promotes Gabriel Oak from the position of his bailiff to that of his partner in farming.
Boldwood appeared serious, reposeful and beyond the reach of aspiring maidens. It seemed, he would maintain his repose and strength up to the end of his life. But nobody knew, he himself perhaps was not aware, that his impressive iron constitution embodied a soul vulnerable to easy sway of passion, once it was awakened. His quiet appearance hid fatal impulses in dormant state. "The phases of Boldwood's life were ordinary enough, but his was not an ordinary nature. That stillness, which struck casual observer more than anything else in his character and habit, and seemed so precisely like the rest of inanition, may have been the perfect balance of enormous antagonistic forces positives and negatives in fine adjustment. His equilibrium disturbed, he was in extremity at once. If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him; a feeling not mastering him was entirely latent. Stagnant or rapid, it was never slow. He was always hit mortally, or he was missed.

"He had no light and careless touches in his constitution, either for good or for evil. Stern in the outlines of action, mild in the details, he was serious throughout all. He saw no absurd sides to the follies of life, and thus, though not quite companionable in the eyes of merry men and scoffers, and those to whom all things show life as a jest, he was not intolerable to the earnest and those acquainted with grief. Being a man who read all the dreams of life seriously, if he failed to please when they
were comedies, there was no frivolous treatment to reproach him for when they chanced to end tragically."203

Bathsheba, annoyed with his indifference to her, sent a valentine, affixing on it a large seal with the words "Marry me." "Bathsheba was far from dreaming that the dark and silent shape upon which she had so carelessly thrown a seed was a hotbed of tropic intensity."204 The valentine was enough to rouse his passions and work up a storm in the placid waters of his mind. He soon developed infatuation for her. "No mother existed to absorb his devotion, no sister for his tenderness, no idle ties for sense. He became surcharged with the compound, which was genuine lover's love."205 Strong Boldwood was transformed into weakness personified. His dignity was gone. He followed Bathsheba's footsteps begging for her acceptance of his proposal for marriage. "I wish I could say courteous flatteries to you," he tells her, "and put my rugged feeling into a graceful shape: but I have neither power nor patience to learn such things. I want you for my wife - so wildly that no other feeling can abide in me; but I should not have spoken out had I not been led to hope."206 When Bathsheba agrees to think over his proposal, he takes it for positive consent and feels happy. She tells him in warning, "Don't be happier if happiness only comes from my agreeing. Be neutral, Mr. Boldwood.' I must think."207 But it was impossible for his violent passion to neutralize itself.
Bat was his tragic weakness.

Bathsheba had promised him to try to love him. She was truly disconcerted to see his tragic metamorphosis caused by her own one thoughtless prank. "'I have every reason to hope that at the end of the five or six weeks, between this time and harvest, that you say you are going to be away from home, I shall be able to promise to be your wife': she said firmly. 'But remember this distinctly, I don't promise yet'." But unfortunately for Boldwood, Sergeant Troy appears upon the scene in the former's absence, and by his bullying, cursing flatteries of Bathsheba's beauty captivates her heart. Then inspite of her sincere wish to repair the wrong she had unintentionally done to Boldwood, she realized that she loved Troy so much that she could not oblige Boldwood. Boldwood reels under the stunning blow of Fate. "O, Bathsheba - have pity upon me!" he appeals to her in vain. "God's sake, yes - I am come to that low, lowest stage - to ask a woman for pity! Still, she is you - she is you." And again: "I am no stoic at all to be supplicating here; but I do supplicate you.......In bare human mercy to a lonely man, don't throw me off now." But her love compelled her to marry Troy despite her genuine concern for Boldwood's miserable plight.

As is usual in Hardy, thwarted passions, defeated hopes, result in a heretic mood of imagining a God responsible for human
misery, and an intense death-wish. Boldwood tells Oak:

"O Gabriel, I am weak and foolish, and I don't know what, and I can't fend off my miserable grief! ....... I had some faint belief in the mercy of God till I lost that woman. Yes, He prepared a gourd to shade me, and like the prophet I thanked Him and was glad. But the next day He prepared a worm to smite the gourd and wither it; and I feel it is better to die than to live." 211

But that was not the end. The story of hope come to grief is enacted twice in the life of Boldwood. He steadied the disturbance of his first failure somehow although there was "in the steadiness of this agonized man an expression deeper than a cry." 212 But the second failure was to drive him to a murderous frenzy and an indefinite term of imprisonment.

The reported drowning of Troy in the sea revived Boldwood's hope. He thought, he could renew his proposal to Bathsheba as she was free once more to accept it if she chose. Again she finds herself on the horns of dilemma. Troy's death was not confirmed yet. The sight of Boldwood's miserable plight was unbearable to her. She did not love him. "Love is an utterly bygone, sorry, worn-out, miserable thing with-- me", 213 she tells Gabriel. But she could not ignore him either. "I believe I hold that man's future in my hands. His career depends entirely upon my treatment of him. O Gabriel, I tremble at my responsibility, for it is terrible." 214 Gabriel advises her to give him a conditional
promise that she should marry him at the expiry of seven years' period if Troy did not return meanwhile and his death was confirmed. She decides to do accordingly and appoints the day of Christmas for it. Boldwood is cheerful on that day as he thinks it to be the day of his engagement. He had long looked forward to it. There was also in his heart the foreboding of a trouble "looming in the distance". He admits that his cheerfulness rests on a slender hope. "And yet I trust my hope. It is faith, not hope." One who lives on hopes is an optimist. But Hardy seems to aver that only an optimist sinks into the abyss of pessimism when the slender hope he lives by suddenly collapses. The affirmatively resigned like Oak, on the contrary, keep away alike from hope and despair, the obverse and reverse of the same coin, and prove positive rocks of abiding strength amid passing mishaps and troubles. Oak warns Boldwood against having too much of hope as previously Bathsheba herself had advised him to be neutral. "Don't build too much upon such promises, sir. Remember, you have once be'n deceived. Her meaning may be good; but there - she's young yet." And again: "We don't know what may happen. So many upsets may befall 'ee. There's many a slip, as they say - and I would advise you - I know you'll pardon me this once - not to be too sure." But it was not possible for Boldwood to live without strong hope, faith as he calls it. His life was blank without it, and he could not live
this another time if his existence was undermined by a blow of Fate. However, that which was feared did happen, and Troy who was not dead as reported appeared in Boldwood's house to claim Bathsheba in the midst of a gay party on the Christmas day. "Troy next advanced into the middle of the room, took off his cap, turned down his coat-collar, and looked Boldwood in the face. Even then Boldwood did not recognize that the impersonator of Heaven's persistent irony towards him, who had once before broken in upon his bliss, scourged him, and snatched his delight away, had come to do these things a second time. Troy began to laugh a mechanical laugh: Boldwood recognized him now."218 Bathsheba nearly swooned. All the assembled there were dazed and perplexed. Boldwood reeled under the shock. Then in a sudden fit of frenzy he took a gun and discharged it at Troy. The latter fell and died instantly. Boldwood was sentenced to death first. Then a petition was addressed to the Home Secretary, pleading to reconsider the sentence on the ground of mental derangement, the signs of which were patent to those close by Boldwood. "The prompters were a few merciful men who had perhaps too feelingly considered the facts latterly unearthed, and the result was that evidence was taken which it was hoped might remove the crime, in a moral point of view, out of the category of wilful murder, and lead it to be regarded as a sheer outcome of madness."219 Consequently his death-sentence was commuted to confinement during her Majesty's pleasure.
That is the end of obstinate hope that runs through long strife and founders ultimately in the mire of despair.

Sergeant Troy is the successful rival of both Oak and Boldwood. He is handsome, romantic and intelligent. With women he has been a brilliant success. "He had been known to observe casually that in dealing with womankind the only alternative to flattery was cursing and swearing. There was no third method, 'Treat them fairly, and you are a lost man', he would say." He seems profligate and must have had many a passing affair. But he is not a heartless villain. "He never passed the line which divides the spruce vices from the ugly; and hence, though his morals had hardly been applauded, disapproval of them had frequently been tempered with a smile." He had done Fanny Robin a fatal wrong. But he was struck with great remorse when he saw her suffering and learnt later that she had died in confinement along with his child. That was why he banished himself from Weatherbury for a long period. Hardy suggests that although he was not a good man, his were the sins of impulses, not of intentions. His attitude to life was on the whole bohemian. He succumbs finally to Boldwood's frenzy which he had himself aroused unintentionally.

E. A. Baker describes him as "an emissary of the general malevolence". In fact, he suggests over and above his
individuality only ill-chance that snatches away the cup of happiness twice from quite near Boldwood’s lips. While Boldwood dies, Oak who is affirmatively resigned to all ill-chances and accidents survives.

Bathsheba is the central character round whom revolve the stories of Oak, Boldwood and Troy. She is fair and charming, and her one characteristic which constitutes a tragic flaw is vanity. The drawback of both Oak and Boldwood, according to her unconscious feeling, was their tactless, prosaic way of proposing, their inability to say even once that she was beautiful. Her marriage with Troy was natural. Only such a handsome bully who could both flatter and curse could have won her heart. But her marriage was the end of her romance as Troy was temperamentally unfit for settled domestic happiness, and she could not tolerate his slighting treatment and ways of wasting her money. Her soul revolted against the misery of her post-marital condition. "Her pride was indeed brought low by despairing discoveries of her spoilation by marriage with a less pure nature than her own. She chafed to and fro in rebelliousness, like a caged leopard; her whole soul was in arms, and the blood fired her face."224 She tells Liddy: "Liddy, if ever you marry - God forbid that you ever should! - you’ll find yourself in a fearful situation; but mind this, don’t you flinch. Stand your ground, and be cut to pieces. That’s what I’m going to do."225
But her rebellion achieves nothing. It is, like all revolt against the human condition, impotent and fruitless. She is not enlightened enough to see that her situation was tragic in social, not natural sense. It is the tragedy of ill-advised marriage. She fails to perceive what Troy sees in a flash when he tells her: "A ceremony before a priest doesn't make a marriage. I am not morally yours."226 She does not challenge the validity of such a wedlock. She appears to be a typical Victorian English woman with all the conservative virtues. She rises up in arms but does not know where to strike and how. The force of her rebellion without a definite target would have broken her if Oak's comforting presence were not there.

After the reported death of Troy she feels fairly chastened. After his murder by Boldwood even the residual of her zest for life passes away and her rebellious passion dies. Liddy says of her: "Her eyes are so miserable that she's not the same woman. Only two years ago she was a romping girl, and now she is this!"227 But though broken emotionally, her power of endurance does not break. She bears with fortitude what is ordinarily difficult to bear. In this she resembles Henchard. Her fortitude, Hardy says, "had been more of will than of spontaneity",228 as distinct from Oak's steady stoical equanimity. However, it is a praise-worthy quality. Commenting
on her behaviour soon after Troy fell dead, Hardy writes:
"Deeds of endurance, which seem ordinary in philosophy, are rare in conduct, and Bathsheba was astonishing all around her now, for her philosophy was her conduct, and she seldom thought practicable what she did not practise. She was of the stuff of which great men's mothers are made." But it suggests the strength of a tragic-heroic character, the revoltive consciousness, whose fire is nearly spent up, whose clutch upon life has loosened, and who, unwilling to resist, is in consequence resigned unbent to whatever Fate has yet to fling on him. It is the resignation of one who is sinking and has no hope of being saved. It does not have affirmative character. Henchard breaks when his capacity to bear is exhausted, and Bathsheba also would have broken if she were as lonely at the end as Henchard, and if Oak's affectionate support were not readily available. However, her external circumstance being finally different and favourable, she survived all her ordeals. Chastened and purified she becomes a fit match for Oak's fidelity and devotion.

Over and above her round individuality Bathsheba stands symbolically for life itself, capricious and alluring, who breaks Boldwood, satiates Troy and satisfies despite her coquetry and caprice Gabriel Oak who, disinterested in the material sense, loved her in the abstract. Her marriage with
Oak at the end is significant. It means resignation alone is right affirmation, as hope represented in Boldwood paves the way to despair, and possession as in the case of Troy to ennui.

VI

Other Novels

In other novels the principal theme is not man in relation to the world of Nature. *Desperate Remedies*, Hardy's first published novel, has all the faults and crudities of a novice, lacking in self-confidence, wanting popular recognition, fumbling for expression. The shape of his genius appears undecided. *Under the Greenwood Tree*, as the title itself suggests, is a pastoral romance in which the story is simple and setting beautiful. Hardy's vision of the cosmic absurd is not even barely hinted here. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, a bit melodramatic, reveals Hardy's perception of the cosmic absurd for the first time, and also his genius for tragedy. The Cliff-hanging scene of Knight here is most memorable. It is grand and symbolic of
the human situation in Nature. It is already quoted at length and discussed in the First Chapter. However, no resolution of the cosmic absurd is suggested here. Hardy is engrossed chiefly in the narrative and the character portrayal of Elfride. In Two on a Tower, The Woodlanders, and The Well-Beloved is expressed Hardy's philosophy of love which runs as a gentle side-current in the novels discussed in this chapter too. The Trumpet Major is a good romance that can be classed along with the novels of love, while A Laodicean is a trivial work from the philosophical point of view. The Hand of Ethelberta, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure embody Hardy's perception of the social absurd and are discussed at length to elucidate Hardy's humanism in a separate chapter under the caption 'Anguish of the Social Absurd'.

But nowhere in all these works is Hardy's basic position in regard to the cosmic absurd and its resolution is contradicted. It is constant though not equally conspicuous in each novel.

E. A. Baker is not quite fair when he observes:

"It was unfortunate that he kept shifting his ground, and the metaphysics underlying A Pair of Blue Eyes do not tally with those of The Return of the Native, or those with Tess and Jude: Hardy was always seeking a better theory to substantiate his tragic view of things, and at any rate each novel maintains consistency from beginning to end."
Baker is mistaken. Hardy never sought a theoretical metaphysics beyond the first impressions, and attempted only to describe the human situation in the existential fashion. It is but natural that in considering social absurd, or sex and love, he does not arrive at those very conclusions reached in sane reaction to the cosmic absurd. If Hardy's vision and views vary slightly in different novels, it is because they are thematically different. However, Hardy's basic convictions as discussed in the first chapter are common in all of them, and Baker himself admits that each novel, from the point of view of thought, is consistent from beginning to end. Hardy's position in regard to the cosmic absurd and its transcendence is the same whenever he considers man in relation to Nature. But we cannot blame him for brooding over different spheres of human experience in his own independent way.
In the previous chapter, as also in course of the previous sections of this chapter, often the references are made to Naturalism and Existentialism. But in order to distinguish Hardy's position from these, and to elucidate its uniqueness, a study of Hardy's establishment of harmony vis-a-vis the metaphysical concepts of cosmic harmony as advanced or rejected by the Idealists, Naturalists and Existentialists will be enlightening.

The state of alienation ever since the emergence of human consciousness in course of evolution has been the condition of man's existence. To the mind, consequently, awakened to the human predicament the existence appears a state of divorce between the cries of consciousness and the silence of the universe. But man cannot face the absurd in undimmed lucidity, endure its anguish or rejoice in the amor fati. Therefore, to allay his spirit homesick for harmony man has developed various notions of ontological harmony. The actual harmony of the primal paradise of Nature where man belonged once, now lost to him, real still for animals and still lower forms of life, is defined here as the primal harmony. What Fromm describes as "another kind of harmony which can lift the curse by which
he was separated from nature,"251 in keeping with the demands of human consciousness, is defined in this thesis as the aspirational one, for it has never been nor is ever likely to become real like the primal one. It has always existed in abstract in wishful idealistic philosophy and religion. The rigid scheme of Nature which Naturalism has offered, reducing multiple phenomena to one single stuff of matter governed in its mutations and movement by the uniform, infallible causal laws, is defined here as the speculative primal as distinct from the actual primal harmony existing before the birth of man. It is also like the aspirational harmony an intellectually conceived notion in abstract, metaphysically consistent, but inconsistent with the irrefutable experience which shows man not as a mere part of the mechanical deterministic scheme of spatio-temporal flux of existence, but opposed to it by virtue of his freedom born urges and aspirations. The rejection of all these forms of harmony is the recognition of the absurd which Hardy shares in common with the existential thinkers. Hardy's transcendence of the absurd, bold not wishful, practically achieved, not theoretically envisaged, is described here as the ethical harmony.
The Aspirational Harmony

The urge for the aspirational harmony which man's alienation from nature entails needs for its fulfilment a spiritual world. For this need he invents God and believes in Him in spite of his inquisitive nature. Religion is the creation of the wishful irrational in man which runs counter to the light of reason. Majority of men have always preferred the assurances of faith to the anguish of lucidity. But the theological certitudes of belief which the doctors of divinity hammer ceaselessly upon man's ears only blind him hypnotically to the obvious in experience which easily gives the lie to what they preach. God and His abode harmonius with the human hopes, to be reached at least hereafter, collapses when honest doubt raises its head.

Among the aspirational thinkers of religion Orphics, Pythagoras and stoics must be particularly mentioned, for Hardy has shown kinship with them though not without qualification. Orphism substituted a sort of religio-ethical mysticism for the superstitious polytheism of Homer and Hesiod, and laid down a path leading beyond suffering. To quote A. H. Armstrong: "The soul, it seems, to the Orphics......was an immortal god
imprisoned in the body and unless released by following the Orphic way of life, to travel the wheel of reincarnation in an endless succession of soul, animal and human." 

Pythagoras extends the same speculation further, describes man as a stranger mysteriously strayed into this world, body as the tomb of soul, and prescribes his liberation above Orphic ethics the truly philosophical attitude of witnessing without involvement the games of life in the world-show. Later stoics laid greater emphasis on the rigours of ethics, on endurance and resignation in order that man may achieve harmony now and here with this world as hereafter in the world of God. Epictetus, the Roman stoic, regarded man as "a little soul bearing about a corpse," and said: "I must die. But must I die groaning? I must be imprisoned. But must I whine as well? I must suffer exile. Can any one then hinder me from going with a smile, and a good courage, and at peace?......What say you, fellow? Chain me? My leg you will chain - yes, but my will - no, not even Zeus can conquer that." To Marcus Aurelius, the stoic Roman Emperor, the good is life in harmony with the universe. He writes: "Everything harmonizes with me which is harmonious to thee, O Universe. Nothing for me is too early or too late, which is in due time for thee. Everything is fruit to me which thy seasons bring, O Nature: from thee are all things, in thee are all things, to thee all things return,"
What prompts us to place stoics among the aspirational philosophers is their crude belief in God. Otherwise stoicism is a disciplined way of life tending towards introvertive mysticism, than either faith or philosophy.

This nostalgia for harmony is discernible even in the history of philosophy which is an adventure of thought as against the theological certitudes founded on faith. Here we discover two movements: one forward towards the aspirational beyond the world of actual discord, to be understood inferentially as the basic structure of reality; the other, backward towards a speculative return to the primal harmony which, again, has to be comprehended in thought, not to be actually restored by an impossible reversal of the evolutionary process up to a stage before the emergence of human consciousness. The forward movement develops into various forms of idealism which posit a spiritual principle governing our world and responsive to the urges of alienated man. Thus they conceive the universe as a metaphysical harmony. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observes:

"An idealist view finds that the universe has meaning, has value. Ideal values are the dynamic forces, the driving power of the universe. The world is intelligible only as a system of ends. Such a view has little to do with the problem whether a thing is only a particular image or a general relation. The question of the independence of the knower and the known is hardly relevant to it. Nor is it committed to the doctrine that the world is made of mind, an infinite
mind or a society of minds. Idealism in the sense indicated concerns the ultimate nature of reality, whatever may be its relation to the knowing mind. It is an answer to the problem of the idea, the meaning or the purpose of it all. It has nothing in common with the view that makes reality an irrational blind striving or an irremediably miserable blunder. It finds life significant and purposeful. It endows man with a destiny that is not limited to the sensible world. 

In this sense most of the ancient and modern philosophers before Darwin were more or less idealistic, for they believed that the values of man have some grounding in the nature of the world, and that his spiritual longings must have corresponding objects though not clearly seen. Beyond the horizons of the immediate discords of our existence may be faintly envisaged the ultimate concord in abstract by the thought predisposed to see it. On the whole the aspirations that gave rise to religion appear in the idealistic philosophy couched in the language of logic. All idealistic systems have been futile attempts of the wishful thought at seeing a metaphysical harmony of the spiritual kind where, in fact, there is the irrefutable absurd of experience.

(ii)

The Speculative Primal Harmony

Another movement seeking to establish the harmony of Nature
in material sense is seen in various schools of Naturalism in the history of philosophy. It is described as the speculative primal because like the aspirational harmony it is also supposed to exist in the abstract at variance with our concrete experience. It easily confutes the aspirational logic that our longing for an idealistic harmony ontologically proves its existence, for the desire of man is not the reality of the world.

William Ernest Hocking defines the Nature of naturalism as "the sum of things and events in a single space and time, subject to a single system of causal laws," and observes:

"Naturalism is the type of philosophy which takes nature, in this sense, as the whole of reality. Naturalism denies the existence of anything beyond nature, behind nature, other-than-nature. If there is anything in the world which inclines to set itself apart from nature, as independent of the causal laws, be it free decision of the human will, product of creative imagination, a poem, a song, human reason itself, naturalism declares that also to be a part of the scheme of nature." Materialism, dynamism and positivism are well-known forms of naturalism. In ancient times, and even after the establishment of Christendom under well-organised Church there were in Europe scattered thinkers in all ages like the Emperor Frederick-II, Gibbon, Voltaire, etc., who displayed a tendency to prefer courageously the speculative road to the primal to the popularly
followed aspirational line. But these were few voices in the wilderness. Most of them were naive realists who in lieu of the forsaken language of faith and idealism had no sound ways of explaining phenomena with their ultimates into a material system. Such atheist exceptions apart, philosophers generally sought to provide in theory the intellectual confirmation to the aspirations of faith.

"But the great era of naturalism is, as one would expect, the century of Darwin and Spencer, when natural law was first successfully applied to the world of living organisms, and the principles of evolution in biology were extended to the history of the universe. The nineteenth century saw the notable works of Ludwig Buchner (Kraft and Stoff, Force and Matter), Herbert Spencer (Synthetic Philosophy), Ernst Haeckel (Riddle of the Universe), T. H. Huxley (Essays), and Friedrich Nietzsche." 237

Darwin proved positively for the first time that even life upon the earth was absolutely contingent, that its present forms evolved one from the other after a slow process of ages, that teleology was man's anthropomorphic superimposition on the material universe, and that the biblical story of world's creation is a myth. His biological research impressed a wide mass of the educated everywhere. It envisaged a world-view from where God had disappeared leaving man at the mercy of Death, and rendered his values rootless. To the lukewarm in faith it did not matter whether belief was well-founded or not. But to the honest, passionate seekers after God like Hardy who had
hitherto relied so devoutly on the promise of faith, it was a shattering blow. Even bold philosophers, inclined idealistically though not exactly idealists, prepared to recognize the bitter truth were initially baffled. They, however, soon set themselves to the task of rebuilding philosophy on a new basis supplied by science. Some of them still refused to disavow loyalty to God, the dethroned King. J. S. Mill, for example, managed to grant asylum to the crippled God, no longer infinite and omnipotent, limited by matter and force, benevolent in His intentions perhaps, but powerless to execute them, and asked us to become His co-creators in making the world better and free from evil. Spencer, refuting theism, pantheism and atheism alike as venturing into the realm of the unknowable, relieved the Fugitive from pursuing enemies and kept Him there, beyond the phenomenal world, safe in exile. Idealism appeared in a new garb. Herbert Spencer, Henri Bergson, Lloyd Morgan, and Samuel Alexander interpreted the changes of evolution as a steady progress in their own way towards a destination that will, when it arrives in course of time, satisfy our urge for spiritual harmony. Meredith among English writers is said to be Bergsonian before Bergson, and some of Hardy's sympathetic critics, as we have seen in the first chapter, have ascribed a sort of evolutionary idealism to Hardy too in order to defend him from the charges of pessimism.
But the general post-Darwinian trend in philosophy has been to recognize Nature as absolute. Human consciousness is explained away as an accidental resultant of bio-chemical processes, as a by-product, as a brief illusion of life reducible ultimately to dead matter, for change and mutations of matter cannot introduce a category of existence essentially alien to its substance. Seemingly free will of man, in fact, is a necessary outcome of the antecedents. The laws of Nature apply uniformly to all creation including man, and produce events in predetermined course of causal succession in time. Naturalism does not bring in a chaos in the universe. It brings in, on the contrary, a most rigid order. It is the illusion of consciousness that creates illusorily a sense of disorder. We experience ourselves as separate and opposed to Nature. But we are asked to believe with faith almost as fervent as religious in the infallibility of causal laws that we are wrong, and the absolutist metaphysics of Naturalism is right.

(iii)

The Recognition of the Absurd

Existentialism has attempted no metaphysics in the abstract, rejected all forms of conceptual harmony, and kept itself confined to the recognition and description of the human situation in Nature which is absurd. It is true, Sartre argues, that the
consciousness of man is a "useless passion". It has no substantial "being-in-itself" like the objects of Nature. In that sense it is just nothing. But this nothingness is yet a being of its own kind, a "being for itself", and although it terminates with the death of body, it is no illusion so long as it lives. The freedom of will is not only real, but inescapable. During the brief duration of his being man instinctively demands a 'kingdom of ends.' However, existential thinkers do not err like idealists in thinking that such a kingdom has objective being. Since our values have no roots in reality, everything is permitted and all actions are amoral. Nevertheless in order to save life from sinking into nihilism to the possible extent we must create and maintain relevant values, and we are free to do so.

God is an imaginatively achieved much wished for combination of beings for-itself and in-itself, denied to man in fact. To believe in Him or any kind of cosmic harmony, idealistic or naturalistic, is an instance of "bad faith". One must maintain lucid awareness of the actual existence which is in a state of strife between the consciousness of man and the reality of the world. In The Flies which embodies Sartre's thought, Creastes, the free man aware of his power, tells Zeus who stands for Nature:

"You are the king of gods, king of stones and stars, king of the waves of the sea. But you are not the king of man."
Nature is made to argue in the person of Zeus:

"Remember, Orestes, you once were of my folk, 
you fed in my pastures amongst my sheep. 
Your vaunted freedom isolates you from the 
fold; it means exile."259

He tells Orestes further that his whole consciousness which has 
outgrown the animal nature, is a disease "foreign to my nature, 
foreign to yourself", and asks him to return to the fold under 
his Law. Orestes's reply to Zeus is the articulate formulation 
in words of a feeling of most men who find themselves at variance 
with Nature. He says:

"Foreign to myself - I know it. Outside nature, 
against nature, without excuse, beyond remedy, 
except what remedy I find within myself. But. 
I shall not return under your Law: I am doomed 
to have no other Law but mine."240

Albert Camus' position is also similar. He expresses 
the same futile quest for harmony:

"I can negate everything of that part of me that 
lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for 
unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity 
and cohesion. I can refute everything in this 
world surrounding me that offends or enraptures 
me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and 
this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy. 
.....And these two certainties - my appetite for 
the absolute and for unity and the impossibility 
of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable 
principle - I also know that I cannot reconcile 
them."241
Casus and Sartre are at one in their recognition of the absurd, in their determination to maintain painful lucidity, although their ethical responses to the human situation differ.

But with the existentialists, the absurd is not only a misfortune; it seems to be also a precious possession. Camus, for example, observes:

"If I judge that a thing is true, I must preserve it. If I attempt to solve a problem, at least I must not by that very solution conjure away one of the terms of the problem. For me the sole datum is the absurd. The first and, after all, the only condition of my inquiry is to preserve the very thing that crushes me, consequently to respect what I consider essential in it."242

Camus is right, of course, in rejecting as he does both suicide as well as "philosophical suicide", i.e., the acceptance of a comforting aspirational belief to resolve the anguish of the absurd, for evading the problem is not solving it. But he asks us to live, not in order to resolve the absurd by an ethical response, bold lucid and yet positive, but to perpetuate its pricking and derive satisfaction from the consequent bleeding. He seems to have developed a bad taste for the absurd which in the beginning was a torture to him.

All atheistic existential thinkers are not only groping in the dark, but have obstinately decided to remain in the darkness
and spiritual isolation to maintain both quest and lucidity. They lack any sense of purpose in life. The characters in the works of Camus, Kafka, and Sartre are not normal human beings. Their abnormal behaviour, their authors aver, is the free flow outward of the inward intending being that is indeterminate and unpredictable. Delirious raving in dialogues is their prerogative. The dissatisfaction with the real combined with the impossibility of the realization of a happy ideal, persistent quest for God despite the knowledge that he does not exist, heresy in the guise of atheism, affirmations of emotions along with the equally strong rational negation of their objects proclaimed aloud without arbitration of either in confusion - all this makes existential thought a pack of unresolved contradictions, eloquent delirium but not a sane philosophy. Sanity, in fact, is described as a barrier to freedom. They meet in their metaphysical march an insurmountably steep wall, turn to social thought, meet again the same fate, keep running within the walls refusing any ladder leading above and beyond, and find a little satisfaction in fruitless action of jumping, romping and dashing heads against the walls to bespatter their faces and those of others with their blood. What they call meaningful action is only gratuitous, ill-directed frenzy paralyzing thought.
(iv)

Hardy's Establishment of Harmony

Hardy shared the aspirations of the idealists. But he could not subscribe to any form of conceptual harmony in favour of them. His loss of faith was final and painfully authentic. Those who have sought to defend Hardy on the ground of what they call a positive hope at the end of *The Dynasts*, as we considered in the First Chapter, have ascribed to him a feeble revolutionary idealism. It is a baseless defence. However, even after Hardy categorically maintained that he would not care to write that dubious line after the World War I, the tendency to read a note of optimism in *The Dynasts* still persists.

Hardy has often been regarded as a perverted idealist, a disciple of Schopenhauer. Mr. A. O. J. Cockshut has seen Hardy's universe through his revolting characters of the second group when he states that in Hardy's works one reads "a piece of Wordsworth turned upside down", and that he was consequently "a pessimistic pantheist." In other words, according to Mr. Cockshut, Hardy believed that God was palpably present everywhere, and nothing except God existed; only it is not good God, but evil God. Mr. Cockshut writes:

"Pantheism, of course, is a very ancient view of life, and also a very natural and obvious one. But it raises
difficult questions about the status of man. Here Hardy was in a dilemma, and like all
dilemmas it was emotional rather than
intellectual. On the other hand, he
instinctively regarded man as a part of the
universal system differing in no fundamental
respect from stars, animals and earth."244

And on the other:

"If we respond to his stories and feel with
his characters, we find, despite all the
theorizing, that man has his old dignity
and passion. However much he may be at a
loss to explain it, Hardy endows man with
a soul."245

In fact it is not Hardy's, but Mr. Cockshut's dilemma which is
apparent in this attempt at justifying his presumption that
Hardy was a pessimistic pantheist. To the writer of tragic
fiction who consciously presented the experience of human soul
opposed to the otherwise coherent scheme of the world, Mr.
Cockshut applies without the former's consent a ready-manufactured
theory, and then instead of admitting that it does not fit well,
he complains that Hardy is inconsistent.

It is equally wrong to think that Hardy was a perverse
theist. When Mr. Harold Child, one of the earlier critics of
Hardy, states that Hardy's novels are "About the struggles of
individual human wills against the power that rules the world,"246
he is attributing to Hardy a kind of hostile dualism between
powerless human beings and an overseeing malignant Deity that foils their wishes to be happy. A faint belief in such a Power also would have been better than no belief at all, for it would have, as considered in the First Chapter, satisfied Hardy's anguished quest for God, fortified himself against absolute loneliness in the world of Nature, and made the revolt of his revolutive characters meaningful. His misfortune, as expressed in *Net*, a poem quoted earlier, was that he could see or believe no kind of God, and rejected consequently both prayer and revolt equally as senseless aspirational reactions addressed to Nothing. The truth is that he saw neither an idealistic harmony nor a perversion of it into confrontation between the two terms of existence – man and the world, or world's Controller, equally or in different degrees live and intelligent.

Hardy recognized the universe as a vast impersonal mechanism in the naturalistic sense which without prevision had by accident evolved consciousness and now stands neutrally at variance with the urges of its product. However, it is repeatedly averred in the preceding pages, Hardy was not an absolute naturalist. He did not believe that consciousness was an illusion, that human freedom was a myth, and that man was inseparably a part of the blind being of Nature that rolls on inexorably in the space-time-casual flux. His world-view
was naturalistic, but not his view of man. He did not endow man with a soul but found him endowed with one though mortal. He felt no difficulty in holding opposed views of man and Nature, for he attempted no consistent metaphysical theory. Refusing to wander into the abstract beyond the realm of verification, he stood firmly grounded in the phenomenal experience, and offended thus the system-readers of philosophy who demanded a monistic explanation, preferably aspirational, of the whole existence.

All this amounts clearly to the recognition of the cosmic absurd in the existential manner. Hardy did not commit 'philosophical suicide' to allay his spirit homesick for harmony. But he did not like Albert Camus or Jean Paul Sartre develop bad taste for the absurd, did not regard man's misfortune as his precious possession. He exhibited that human situation has ever been absurd although we had never been so lucidly aware of it before. But he suggested that it need not and will not be eternally so. Lucidity has brought anguish in its wake as a result of shock it administered to our traditional emotions and Pagan zest for life. But the feeling of shock by its very nature is transitory. The disillusioned view of the naturalistic world as custom will reduce its shock will gradually win our emotional acceptance as much as it has forced our rational admission today. Then the "more recently
learnt" elastic emotions will coincide well with the neutral
drift of things, and "human souls may find themselves in closer
and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness
distasteful to our race when it was young." Hardy prophesies
the general predominance of mature wisdom in the days to come
which will heal the wounds inflicted upon mankind by the
scientific enlightenment. He himself like his Clym was far
ahead of his times in converting the prison-like conditions of
our existence into a tranquil hermitage, a desert into a beauty-
spot, and in realizing the saving wisdom. Beauty and harmony
is correspondence, not contradiction, between emotions and
their objects. Therefore, the harmony born of Nature's
coincidence with man's wishes and wants is rare and brief. Only
the harmony born of man's congenial emotional approach to all
chance changes in the outer world and that part of his being
which is conditioned by them, will prove lasting. Existentialists
have clung obstinately to the traditional emotions despite the
collapse of metaphysics corresponding to them and the discovery
of the material universe opposed to man's brief being. Conse-
quence is insane revolt addressed to Nothing and unrelieved
anguish. Hardy has reformed his feelings to accord well with
the world, and established harmony on the heart of the Egdon
Heath itself. Consequence is the resolution of the anguish into
a repose ineffable.
This was the achievement of Hardy's philosophy. He resembles with Pythagoras among Orphics, and stoics like Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius in holding philosophy not as a wonder-born adventure of speculative thought in the accepted academic sense, but as an ethical response to the world inspired by the longing to get beyond the suffering and sorrow of the human condition. Like Pythagoras Hardy regarded man as a deity lying ignominiously in chains in the ephemeral human carcase, and insisted on witnessing the world-show without active involvement. The passage of Marcus Aurelius quoted earlier expresses equally the stoical harmony which Hardy himself has worked out. The resemblance, however, was partial, for Hardy could not subscribe to the belief in the soul's immortality and the cycle of reincarnation. His stoicism was shorn of even slightly sustaining belief in the existence of God.

Evelyn Hardy does not understand the true character of Hardy's resignation which is similar to the stoical 'apathy' when she says that it is "a negative attitude to life which totally contradicts Hardy's naturally responsive heart." She fails to distinguish the negative resignation from the affirmative, of the soul battered and exhausted in the strife whose clutch on life loosens, from the resilient power of equanimity that achieves "truce with trouble". The affirmative
resignation has armoured Oak and Clyn and Elizabeth-Jane against "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". But does it hinder them in enjoying what life has offered?,

Evelyn Hardy also fails to see that the state of consciousness born of affirmative resignation, above the dual of hope and despair, is yet not a state of 'no-joy, no-sorrow' emptiness. It is a state of serene fullness in the hitherto unrecognized mystical sense more positive in experience than what we usually call positive. W. T. Stace writes of introvertive mysticism as distinct from the extrovertive kind known to Christianity:

"Our normal everyday consciousness always has objects. They may be physical objects, or images, or even our feelings or thoughts perceived introspectively. Suppose then that we obliterate from consciousness all objects, physical or mental. When the self is not engaged in apprehending objects it becomes aware of itself. The self itself emerges. The self, however, when stripped of all psychological contents or objects, is not another thing, or substance, distinct from its contents." 248

Consciousness remains pure and serene itself when dissociated from all desires and passions that held it in turmoil. It is introvertive mystical experience. Belief or imagination has no place in it. It cannot be described as negative. In fact, no mystical experience is negative since it produces a highly satisfying state of mind. Krishnamurti's 'choiceless awareness' is
mystical in this sense. Zen-consciousness born of 'prajna' intuition as preached by Professor Suzuki of Japan is also an instance of introvertive mysticism. Hardy exhibits a tendency deepening discernibly into such mystical consciousness in his detached, disinterested attitude to life. He wrote to a friend in reply to abundance to praise which the latter had sent him: "As I have told you before, I read those things said about me by generous friends as if they were concerning some person whom I but vaguely know and whom they have mistaken for me." This suggests that Hardy could stand aloof from his physical being and the stream of mind as a witnessing consciousness, serene and self-satisfied. It has grown mystical in that its serenity is independent of material conditions and can be maintained, as in the case of Clym, even when one goes almost blind and cuts furze under the scorching sun. The expression of "radiant triumph such as imagination could never have conceived....dignity and peace," on the "death face" of Hardy as reported by F. E. Hardy, signifies some well-won inward tranquillity which does not come from negative thought alone. All this does not, of course, mean that Hardy is a perfectly accomplished introvertive mystic. This is only to suggest that he has advanced a long way towards that direction, and his accomplishment is positive and significant as it is.
If one strong point of Hardy's philosophy of life is affirmative resignation, another is his compassion for all beings. Henry W. Nevinson describes him as the "spirit of noble genius, chastened sublimity and sadness deeply implanted in him by the pity of the world." Revolt is not Hardy's personal attitude to life. But he feels with sympathetic concern for those engaged in revolt with the world or reeling helplessly under the blows of Fate. Failing to distinguish his strong sympathy from his sane judgment critics have, instead of reading pessimism in some of the characters, attributed it to their creator who held that although revolt is not an ideal attitude, it is natural. His heart bled for the poor and the miserable. H. M. Tomlinson writes: "I should doubt that Hardy was ever made angry, except by cruelty to the lowly and unimportant." His compassion embraced even animals and still lower forms of life.

With both Hardy's affirmative resignation and compassion in view, William Lyon Phelps writes beautifully:

"Mr. Hardy writes as though he lived on another planet, and by means of some tremendous astronomical contrivance, were able to see earth's inhabitants life-size, and regard them with the exclusive attention of a student, himself entirely remote from their concerns. He feels as the astronomer of the Lick observatory felt, when he turned the mighty telescope on flaming San Francisco; he breathed the keen, cool air of the
mountain top; but brought close within his vision were some hundreds of thousands of people living in hell. The astronomer's heart was wrung with pity at the spectacle; pity and horror; but there was nothing he could do except continue to look."

To conclude, Hardy's philosophy of life seeks to reconcile man with the world, and realize by ethical effort and discipline a practical harmony in place of the absurd strife perceived in the phenomena.