CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nature as an elemental force of life and representing also the environmental world of man has been a basic concern of the thinkers since the beginning of human civilisation. Its infinite variety has moulded human life in various ways and led the scientists and philosophers to probe into its mystery to understand the reality of life on this planet. Every country and every system of thought tried to evolve its own concept of nature, for no proper study of mankind is possible without a knowledge of the workings of the forces of nature.

In the following pages a brief survey of the different concepts of nature is presented, with special reference to the British writers of about four centuries as a background study of the subject of this dissertation.

I. THE CONCEPT OF NATURE TILL THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

The concept of two orders of nature and grace had influenced Western thought since the early Christian years.

\[1\text{cf.}, \text{ "Nature has been a controlling idea in Western thought since antiquity." Basil Willey, The Eighteenth-Century Background (Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 9-10.}\]
Christianity, with its Judaic source which attributed omnipotence and infinite goodness to God, was committed to the idea that the presence of evil in the created world was due to the corruptibility of nature. Christian theology adapted the doctrine of grace to the idea that human nature had gone bankrupt and needed to be administered into "receivership". The central idea behind the two orders of grace and nature was that since the 'fall' man had lost 'the state of goodness' in which God had created him and that the state of goodness could be brought about only with the help of grace, of which church became the working medium.

The concept of the two orders, in its extreme form, found expression in an utter despair of human nature and also in church's reaction from the 'pagan riot' of the ancient civilisation which had given much importance to the worldly life of man and the pleasures of nature. It led to an excess of otherworldliness. Heavenly things became all important in the religious life of man, and nature was

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4 ibid.

relegated to the realm of Satan. Grace was recognised as overwhelmingly important for the spiritual goal of man. Knowledge of nature was 'forbidden', and 'to study nature meant to repeat the original sin of Adam; it meant a compact with the devil and the death of the soul."

But, besides this theological approach to nature, there is another aspect of the Christian concept of nature in which the contrast between grace and nature "is not absolute but relative. It is a contrast of matter and spirit informing it, of stages in a process, of preparation and fruition." This aspect of the Christian concept of nature is present in Augustinian type of theodicy. The Christian thinkers were faced with the problem of reconciling the idea of God with that of the imperfection of nature. The Augustinian theodicy reconciled the two in the notion of the finite goodness of nature. In this view there is no level of being which is, as such, evil. Everything, other than God, is made out of 'nothing' and is therefore mutable and capable of being corrupted; evil is this corruption of a mutable

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5 Ibid., p.14.


good. Thus evil is the malfunctioning, i.e., falling away from one's place in the hierarchy of being, of something that in itself is good. The created universe is an immensely abundant and variegated realm of forms of existence, each having its appropriate place in the hierarchy of being. Thus the goodness of the whole creation is a central theme of Augustine's thought. 9

The rehabilitation of nature from the Satanic to the Divine order, linking nature and God along Augustinian line, was mainly begun by Aquinas (1225-74). 10 In Augustine's view nature is not a closed system of strict determinism but "a hierarchy of individual 'natures' or essences, of which man is a part, and which has been...rationally ordered to ends ordained by [God]." 11 Aquinas adopted Augustine's conception of the moral order of nature as a basis for linking nature and God: "Since nature works for a determinate

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9 cf., "Augustine rejects the ancient...prejudice against matter and lays the foundation for a Christian naturalism that rejoices in this world, and instead of fleeing from it as a snare to the soul, seeks to use it in gratitude to God for His bountiful goodness." Hick, op.cit., p.51.

10 A.W. Scaglion, Nature and Love in the Late Middle-Ages (Berkeley, 1963), pp.9,133.

and under the direction of a higher agent, whatever is done by nature must needs be traced back to God, as to its first cause.\textsuperscript{12}

Christianity had incorporated many humanistic elements from Greek and Roman cultures. Its impact can be seen in the Christian tradition of the interpenetration of the two orders of nature and grace. As in Aquinas, and later in Hooker, Christian humanism attempted to integrate the concept of the two orders\textsuperscript{14} in the idea that grace fulfils rather than destroys nature.\textsuperscript{15} It prepared the ground for the emancipation of human nature from the theological restraint. This emancipation was a result also of the growing security of life in this world\textsuperscript{16} and of a turning from heaven to earth, from the other to this world which the classics had taught men to enjoy.\textsuperscript{17} It led to the revival of a genuine humanism.


\textsuperscript{13} Babbitt, \textit{op.cit.}, p.115.

\textsuperscript{14} The basis of Christian humanism was already there in Augustine's Platonian 'principle of plenitude' (\textit{Nick, op.cit.}, pp.81-2, 101-2).

\textsuperscript{15} This is what Milton, as a Christian humanist, attempts to show in \textit{Comus} (\textit{Madsen, op.cit.}, p.214).

\textsuperscript{16} Babbitt, \textit{op.cit.}, p.117.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{W. Wisk, The Renaissance and English Humanism} (London, 1941), p.54.
on the one hand, and of the pagan naturalistic side of the antiquity on the other. However, the classical humanism of the Renaissance was essentially a fusion of classical wisdom and religious faith, in which Christian elements were predominant.

The religious humanistic aspect of the Renaissance is reflected in its attitude to nature. It is neither the 'depraved nature' of the ascetic medieval theology nor the 'libertine nature' of pagan naturalism. The 'nature' of the Christian humanist is a divine law which is the origin of everything and under which everything acts. It fuses religious and humanistic ideas in the concept of a divinely ordered universe in which each created being, while following its own individual nature, conforms to the universal order. The universal order as the pattern to be followed by the individual is also a moral order. Thus the Christian humanist worked out the concept of normal, representative human nature.

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18 Babbitt loc. cit.
19 cf., "...The classical humanism of the Renaissance was fundamentally medieval and fundamentally Christian." Bush, op. cit., p.68.
20 The concept of 'depraved nature' continued in Luther and later in Calvin (vide Madsen, op. cit., p.214).
21 Babbit, op. cit., p.263.
The 'nature' of the Renaissance naturalist, as represented by sexual licence and base desires of man, is diametrically opposite of the 'nature' of the Christian humanist. It found expression in the thoughts and writings of the Renaissance thinkers and authors; but it was mostly rejected as anti-ethical, immoral and atheistic. The Christian humanistic view, linking man and nature with God, remained the chief concern of the Renaissance humanist. It was a continuation of the classical Christian tradition which held the view that "the dictates of nature are the dictates of reason and of God."  

By the time the Renaissance had its full impact on England, the humanistic concept of nature was fairly well developed. Its echoes are present in Chaucer's reference to the "noble goddesse Nature". In spite of his medieval background, Chaucer was also a humanist who felt that nature

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\[\text{22} \text{Nadsen, op.cit., p.189; cf., J.Bush on Renaissance naturalism in Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry (Minneapolis,1932), p.135, n.27 and p.257, n.46.}]

\[\text{23} \text{Nadsen, op.cit., p.198.}]

\[\text{24} \text{The Parlemant of Foules, l. 303.} \]
was not all Satanic. In the Prologue to Canterbury Tales, he suggests that the power inspiring the melodic songs of the birds is the same, i.e., nature, as the one which sets the longing in human heart to go on pilgrimage. The joy in nature coincides with the joy in man. There is a suggestion in the opening of the Prologue that there is a harmony between man and nature.

During the Elizabethan period two opposite concepts of nature, i.e., the 'libertine nature' of Renaissance naturalism and the 'divine nature' of Christian humanism, are simultaneously present. For example, the two orders of nature – the Satanic and the angelic – are available in Spenser's Faerie Queene. His 'great dame nature', 'a great goddess; 'with goodly port and gracious Majesty', is the 'divine nature' of the Christian humanist. His concept of

26 Prologue, ll. 9-12.
28 Prologue, ll. 1-5.
30 Faerie Queene, VII,viii,6,ll.1-9.
31 Ibid., VII,viii,5.
nature, like Montaigne's, marks a shift from the concept of 'depraved nature' of the scholastic tradition. But Spenser also shows his awareness of the opposition between the libertine and the divine natures.

Sidney, like Spenser, refers to two 'natures' in his Arcadia. The self-sufficing, Epicurean 'nature' of aunt Cecropia and Pamela's 'nature' as the aggregate of many individual 'natures', bridled by a heavenly 'Nature', represent two opposite concepts of nature. The former is the 'nature' of the Renaissance naturalist and the latter is that of the Christian humanist. Similarly, two conflicting pictures of nature are presented in Lyly's Euphues.

Two opposite orders of nature - depraved and divine, Satanic and angelic - are present in Shakespeare's plays,

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32 There is a similarity between Spenser's picture of 'nature' and Montaigne's "mother Nature" with a "universal and constant variety in her face" ("Of the Education of Children" in The Complete Works of Montaigne, translated by J.N. Frame, Stanford, 1957, p.116). But Spenser's 'nature' is placed in a religious and that of Montaigne in a 'human' context.

33 Hadsen, op.cit., p.192; vide Faerie Queene, II,vi, 15-17.


specially in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Hamlet refers to man as "the quintessence of dust", but he also recognises "this goodly frame, the earth" and the infinite faculties and the noble reason of man.  

Although the scholastic concept of 'depraved nature' is also available in the Elizabethan writings, nature was, in a sense, being gradually associated with the divine order. The direct result of the association of nature with God was that nature as the universal pattern was often recommended as a model for good conduct.  

When Lear reminds Regan of "the offices of nature, bond of childhood, Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude," he echoes the popular Elizabethan view of nature as an "ordered, beautiful arrangement to which we must adjust ourselves." Nature is now accepted as a guide for man because it exhibits the supreme art of God. To Hooker nature is an ideal 'pattern'. This pattern of 'reason' binds nature to God, and man to nature, and through her to God. Thus the ideas of God and

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36 *Hamlet*, II, iv, 285-301.  
38 *King Lear*, II, iv, 196-7.  
39 Danby, op. cit., p. 35.
nature are kept in the most intimate association. Hooker writes that "those things which nature is said to do, are by divine art performed." Custom is recognised as "the expression of the inner pattern of Nature, the basis of law and the practical guide for man." The light of reason is given to man by God, and the universal pattern is the evidence of the same reason in nature. It is man's duty to bring the individual pattern in conformity with the universal pattern by using reason, and thus realise the ideal form, i.e., God.

For a balanced view of the Elizabethan attitude to nature, it should be remembered that "the Elizabethan conception of world-order was in its outlines medieval, although it had discarded much medieval detail." Nature was not thought of as an autonomous realm and it still needed a religious justification. But the tendency towards the redemption of nature from the Satanic order and its rehabilitation to the divine order is unmistakably present.

41 Danby, op. cit., p. 25.
in the Elizabethan world-view.

By the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, the scientific discoveries began to affect man's attitude towards the universe. It was proved that the world-view of traditional Christianity, which was based on the Aristotelian concept of the 'incorruptible' heavenly bodies and the 'corruptible' earth, and also on Ptolemy's geocentric idea of the universe, was not in conformity with the 'facts' of science. "The Copernican theory obliterated the traditional distinction between corruptible and incorruptible, [and placed] the earth, as it were, amongst the heavenly bodies." The 'Tuscan Artist', Galileo, saw through his telescope that generation and corruption had been going on in the heavens.

Thus the new astronomy was displacing the scholastic philosophy, and the mechanico-materialistic explanations began to be felt as 'facts'. A tendency was now gradually growing towards a scientific type of explanation of the physical phenomena, and there was a shift from theology to

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45 *Paradise Lost*, Bk.I, l.288.

46 Basil Willey, loc.cit.
science, from metaphysics to physics. The scholastic idea of the 'forbidden knowledge' was being rejected. Scientists were exploring the mysteries of nature. Though there was as yet no thorough-going belief in the uniformity of nature and the constant invasion of nature by the supernatural was taken as a matter of course, yet the 'facts' about the physical nature explained by the scientists, as distinguished from those of theology, were being accepted as 'real'. But it was still a period when "wonder was a habit of mind", and "the feeling that there was a divine meaning, an otherness, in the universe, as well as a mechanical order, was still inevitable...". It meant that the early seventeenth century was simultaneously confronted with two contrasted realities - physical and metaphysical, scientific and theological.

The presence of this 'dual view of world-order' is reflected in Bacon's and Browne's attitudes towards nature. Bacon pleaded for the separation of the two orders of truth, the natural and the numinous. But at other times he felt

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47 ibid., pp.11-2.
49 Basil Willey, The Seventeenth-Century Background, p.50.
the necessity of reconciling the scientific with the 'revealed' truth. This desire to hold the two in balance made him present nature as a rational arrangement and visualise a direct connection between man's logical order and the order of the physical universe. In his view nature is a benevolent order arranged by God. He maintains that there are two scriptures through which God is revealed to man, i.e., through the written word and the created universe. He also claims that 'it was not the pure knowledge of nature and universality, a knowledge by the light whereof man did give names unto other creatures in Paradise, as they were brought before him, according to their proprieties, which gave the occasion to fall...'.

It may be said that Bacon's task was to prove that the study of nature was not Hephistophelian but Promethean.

Browne's attitude to nature is much more complex than Bacon's. He joins with Bacon in rejecting the idea that there is a risk of damnation in exploring the secrets of nature. The new scientific discoveries were to him a

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51 Danby, op. cit., pp. 21-3.
54 Basil Willey, The Seventeenth-Century Background, p. 37.
means of magnifying the image of God to man. To the extent that a new knowledge of nature excites wonder, it makes man capable of paying a higher homage to God than the gross admiration of an ignorant man:

There is no danger to profound these mysteries, no sanctum sanctorum in Philosophy. The world was made to be inhabited by beasts, but studied and contemplated by man; 'Tis the Debt of our Reason we owe unto God, and the homage we pay for not being Beasts... The wisdom of God receives small honour from those vulgar heads that rude ly stare about, and with a gross rusticity admire His works: those highly magnify Him, whose judicious inquiry into His Acts, and deliberate research into His Creatures, return the duty of a devout and learned admiration.  

Browne, like Bacon, believes in the settled and determined order of the world. In his view it is the laws of God that we discover in nature. The two books of divinity for Browne are the "written one of God, and another of his servant Nature, that universal and public Manuscript, that lies expans'd unto the eyes of all; those that never saw Him in the one have discovered Him in the other..." But Browne is not finally committed either to the spiritual or the scientific view. He is his own Janus, "living in

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56 ibid., pp.25-3.
an age half scientific and half magical, half sceptical and half credulous, looking back in one direction to Placideville, and forward to Newton. It gives a unique complexity to Browne's view of nature and distinguishes it from both the scholastic and the Renaissance views, bringing it closer to that of a mystic, in which the events and the outward interests become insignificant. He approaches the stage of a quiet communion and, lost in its deepening mystery, he is conscious only of a 'mystical mathematics' of the universe through which all things begin and end in order.

With the advancement of the new philosophy, the authority of religion was gradually undermined. Descartes' 'philosophical quest', though it left unchallenged the main fabric of faith, represented a complete break with the scholastic tradition. It reinforced the growing disposition to accept the scientific world-picture as the only 'true' one. On the one hand, "the habit of free contemplation released the mind to find even further astonishing significances in things ordinary or more remote," and on the other, it led to the growth of the materialistic rational philosophy,

57 Basil Willey, The Seventeenth-Century Background, p.44.
58 ibid., p.83. 59 coular, op. cit., p.12.
which was hostile to both religion and poetry. Earlier, natural philosophy had given matter powers of self-movement which it shared with living beings:

Yea plants, yea stones detest,
Anc love...

But the new philosophy made a distinction between mind and matter. Hobbes went a step further and denied the existence of soul separate from matter. He claimed that mind was incidental to body, i.e., there is no soul outside life. He refers to Scripture to support his view: "That the soul of man is in its own nature eternal, and a living creature, independent of the body... is a doctrine not apparent in Scripture." In reducing the universe to 'all matter,' Hobbes broke the link between nature and God. His

50 Basil Willey, The Seventeenth-Century Background, pp.82-3.


52 cf., "The scheme of scientific ideas of the seventeenth century which has dominated human thought ever since... involves a fundamental duality, with material on the one hand, and on the other hand mind." A.N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York, 1952), p.58.

rejection of the idea of spirit as an independent reality reduces everything to the status of mere 'material', which naturally includes nature. Nature is shorn of its mystery and reduced to 'motion'. Both Hobbes and Locke had the same view of nature. In their view the world was made up of "bodies in motion, which were arranged in an orderly pattern and followed well defined causal laws."\(^{64}\) Newton revealed that "the law by which an apple falls to the ground is the same as that which keeps the planets in their courses."\(^ {65}\) He completed the materialistic world-view of the seventeenth-century 'new philosophy'.\(^ {66}\)

The theory of mechanical causation left little room for supernatural agencies. The whole cosmic movement was reduced to a gravitational pull which could be mathematically proved. The universe of the Deists turned out to be a


\(^{66}\) Although the Cambridge Platonists found in the metaphysics of Plato a defence against Hobbes' materialism, the prestige of Scripture had diminished appreciably (Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth-Century Background*, pp.125, 73).
'Great machine' made of material parts which all move through space and time according to the strictest rules of mechanical causation.

As the century came to the close, the materialistic philosophy had made a deep dent in the minds of English thinkers. The spirit of materialism pervaded almost every aspect of English thought. Nature was thought of as matter with primary qualities, i.e., which could be mathematically proved. Reason was no more an abstract intellectual activity but a measuring rod of the 'real' world. It was recognised as a faculty to guide one to the mathematical certainty of 'truth'. It is in this sense that Dryden refers to reason in Religio Laici. To Browne reason was a divine faculty. But to Dryden reason is confined to the knowledge of the material world and it 'dies and dissolves' in supernatural light. It is limited to the probing of the reality on the natural (material) level, but it can throw no light on matters concerning the soul.

With the change in the meaning of reason followed a change in the meaning of nature. Nature and reason

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68 Religio Laici, 11.1–40.
69 ibid., 11.35–6.
70 Danby, op. cit., p. 36.
became synonymous in the sense that both of them referred to 'truth' which related to the physical and material world. They were recognised as the guide of man because they were universal. It led to a tendency to distrust those thoughts and ideas which were derived from the personal experiences of the individuals. Conformity to the existing norm was thought to be rational and natural. It is in this sense that Swift, in his satires, implies a reference to a standard of nature and reason to which a civilised society must conform. The Houyhnhnm "thought nature and reason were sufficient guides for a reasonable animal, as we pretended to be, in showing us what we ought to do and what to avoid." The notion of the mechanical explanation of all the processes of nature hardened into a dogma of science in the eighteenth century. With Hobbes and Locke behind it, the century was only too ready to dismiss any thought or feeling as unnatural which lay outside the range of its experience.

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73 Whitehead, op.cit., p.61.

The universal, the common and the matter-of-fact came to be recognised as natural. This attitude is reflected in the literature of the age. For example, Pope's 'nature' is a set of rules that have been discovered of old and tested by experience. To the poets of his school nature is a mechanically ordered universe into which the individual would ideally fit as a small part. "In the Essay on Man Pope presented Nature as a magnificent mechanism, held together by the principle of 'attraction'." He describes nature as a rational pattern of the material world including man. Nature and art are one and the same:

All Nature is but art, unknown to thee
All chance direction, which thou canst not see.

Images of nature, which were common and universal and reflected the general experience of the society and concurred with its sentiments, were described in the nature poetry of the period and praised by the critics. Johnson praises Gray's Elegy because it "abounds with images which

75 Essay on Criticism, 11.88-91.
78 ibid., x,289-90.
find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which
every bosom returns an echo. Dyer's Groninger Hill is
approved because "the scenes which it displays are so
pleasing, the images which they raise so welcome to the mind,
and the reflections of the writer so consonant to the general
sense or the experience of mankind..." In Johnson's
own descriptions the general dominates over the particular.
With the popularisation of Locke's rational explanation of
the working of the human mind, the supernatural became an
object of distrust. Spectres and apparitions were associated
with 'weak minds'. The ideas of goblins and 'spright'
were explained away as having been caused by one idea
introducing "into the mind a whole set that bear no
resemblance to one another in the nature of things."

Nature in eighteenth-century poetry is mostly external
and matter-of-fact. It "is not a living presence with which

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80 ibid., p. 386.
81 Hasselas, edited by G. Tillotson and B. Jenkins
82 Joseph Adcison, The Coverley Papers, edited by
83 ibid.
the spirit of man communes: it is a collection of objects."  

The Elizabethan sense of kinship between the life of nature and that of man was inevitably lost in the Newtonian universe, and man with his thinking mind remained just an observer. In James Thomson nature is not an active teacher; we have to draw our lessons from what she provides. We have to court 'the inspiring Breeze'

... and meditate the Book of nature, even open, aiming thence, Warm from the Heart, to learn the moral Song.

Nature is thus reduced to a moral metaphor. What Hallins observes about the treatment of nature in Shenstone can be, more or less, applicable to the major part of the nature poetry of the period: "There is nothing more than moralisation and no real philosophy of Nature."  

It does not imply that the eighteenth century did not recognise the beauty and charm of the particular in nature.

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Even Johnson praises the novelty of Thomson's *seasons*. Shaftesbury "recognised the astonishing variety of nature and peculiar and original character of everything in nature." But the predominant tendency of the period was towards the common, the universal, the objective and the picturesque in nature.

Towards the end of the century, the mechanical and materialistic views of life and nature were being discarded. The Enlightenment with its rationalism had vindicated the value of reason, but in the process it also showed the invalidity of the artificial views of the civilised society and its laws. In a way, it slowly prepared the ground for the preference of nature to civilisation, of instinct to morality, and of sense to reason itself.

The reaction against the mechanical-rationalistic world-view of the eighteenth century, which culminated in the Romantic Movement, started in the later part of the century itself. Hume "overturned the philosophic card-castle erected by Descartes and his successors." He defended nature against reason and proved the inadequacy of

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88 Lives of the Poets, II, 358.
89 Sutherland, op. cit., p. 24.
90 Scaglion, op. cit., p. 144.
of reason in human life. He showed that morality was a
sentiment of the heart. Burke pleaded for the adaptation
of politics "not to human reason but to human nature."
Burke, in opposition to the position of the materialists,
showed that "mind is the only absolute reality." Hartley
used the principle of "ideas connected in our minds by
customary association " to explain the evolution of moral
character and the development of the moral sense out of
simple sensation. He held that the laws of association,
if given free play, tend to attain their own end, i.e.,
transformation of sensuality into spirituality, and that
these laws would produce better behaviour and exert maximum
influence for good. Holbach in France, and his follower
Godwin in England, declared that all our misfortunes are
due to our neglecting and departing from nature. They

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94 Whitehead, op.cit., p.70.
95 Basil Willey, The Eighteenth-Century Background, p.134.
96 ibid., p.148; cf., "Hartley contributed to the
stream of tendency which flowed into the nineteenth century
as philosophical radicalism, and also as Wordsworthian
naturalism" (ibid., p.149) and Prelude (1850), Bk.I,11.401-14.
97 Basil Willey, The Eighteenth-Century Background, p.151.
both held the existing institutions as unnatural and hence responsible for evil and misery in the society.

Hobbes had taken the very worst view of man in a natural state. Rousseau refuted his view and asserted that the 'natural' man possesses the sentiment of compassion rather than viciousness. He also suggested that the way to the 'state of nature' is through "looking into our own hearts and by looking at nature herself; not the nature of the scientist but the nature of the romantic solitary." With him and his followers to return to nature was to get rid of kings, nobles and priests, who could no longer rule or preach. It was a return to a simpler social order, to wild mountains, forests, deserts, and deserted islands, to find a new expression for repressed emotions; it was a return to freedom from arbitrary rules, to good from evil, to liberty from slavery, to sincerity from artificiality, to feeling from reason.

These ideas of man and nature were related to a system

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98 ibid., p.197.
99 Bronowski and Hazlitt, op.cit., p.238.
of thought basing nature upon the concept of organism and not upon that of mechanism. \(^{104}\) The ideas of matter as a living substance, with a life of its own, and "with a voluntary power instinct," \(^{105}\) were widely spread in pre-Revolutionary France. \(^{106}\) In England such ideas were held, in different forms, by Erasmus Darwin and James Hutton, but their chief exponent was Joseph Priestley. In opposition to the Newtonian concept of 'inert matter,' Erasmus Darwin believed in the active force of matter and personified natural forces as spirits of the elements. \(^{107}\) Priestley avoided the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter by introducing the idea that matter was neither inert nor 'impenetrable' and that it was not incompatible with 'thought' or 'sensation'. \(^{108}\) He showed his consciousness of natural forces as separate intelligences and believed that nature was an extension of the Divine Being. \(^{109}\)

The emotional atmosphere at the end of the century was favourable for the reception of these ideas of nature.

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104 Whitehead, op.cit., p.76.

105 *Prelude* (1850), bk.I, l.379.

106 Piper, op.cit., p.25. 107 *ibid.*, p.27.


The eighteenth-century scientific scheme had ignored the immediate psychological experiences of mankind. The deistic approach to God and religion had ignored the significance of emotional response in religious experiences. It had laid emphasis on reason as the basis of religious thought and life. The Deity had been reduced to a clockwork Prime Mover of the universe and the emotional aura of religion was banished. And man turned to nature for the emotional satisfaction of his religious nature.

The hideousness of the towns and the triviality of the urban life also contributed to the tendency of 'return to nature'. As the defences against the starker truths of life and the less manageable truths of man's own nature were crumbling with the advancing years of the century, the individual was craving to break the restrictions of society. He felt oppressed by the artificial and materialistic aims of his society and turned to nature as a source of spiritual help. The 'return to nature' was, in one

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110 Whitehead, op.cit., p.75.
112 Sutherland, op.cit., pp.113-4.
sense, an expression for emotions repressed by existing
customs and also an escape from the corrupt air of
streets or drawing rooms. Nature came to be associated
with the Arcadian world and with the idea of the 'infinite',
and 'nature-religion', in one form or the other, became a
substitute for the Christian religion.

The Romantic concept of nature was a reaction against
the materialistic and mechanical views which divided man
and nature. Although man and nature had been recognised
as one in the mechanical sense of reason, the mechanical
world-view did not postulate the unity of life between man
and nature. Newton had interpreted matter as absolutely
inert, which had nothing in common with life or mind.
The concept of nature, which equated it with reason, was
unsatisfactory to the emotional and spiritual aspirations
of the Romantics. But the concept of nature in the
Romantic period can be properly understood if we realise
that it was a synthesis of elements derived from science

115 Stephen, op.cit., II, 447, 448.
118 Piper, op.cit., p. 9.
and religion. The idea of 'living' matter was used in the Romantic concept of spiritual unity of man and nature.

To Wordsworth the mechanical world of the scientist was "a universe of death/The falsest of all worlds." His universe is a world of harmony, in which "Man and Nature, Mind and the external world, are geared together and in unison complete the motive principle of the universe." It is active and "moves with light and life informed". Wordsworth recognised mind or intellect as a principle co-ordinate with the life of nature. The mind of man and the objects of nature are inhabited by the same spirit. All forms of matter are informed by "the immortal spirit". Nature is a living presence in Wordsworth, and not a mere

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119 cf., The Romantic 'nature poetry had its roots deep in the religious and scientific movements of the modern world' (Beach, op.cit., p.3).

120 The Prelude (1805), Bk.XIII,11.141-2; vide Beach, op.cit., p.105; Piper, op.cit., p.3; Basil Jilley, The eighteenth-Century background, p.243.


122 The Prelude (1850), Bk.XIV,1.161.

123 Tintern Abbey, 11.93-9; vide Piper, op.cit.,pp.71-2.

124 The Prelude (1850), Bk.I,1.340.

125 Beach, op.cit., p.203.
Blake's concept of nature is unlike Wordsworth's. Blake was a mystic and found that the senses were treacherous and distorted the vision of reality. To him the natural objects are 'dead matter' without spirit. His belief that man is "altogether an evil" is based on his distrust of the senses. But, as Beach observes, "Blake is an isolated figure, having little influence on the literature of his time."

Coleridge, like Wordsworth, believed in the active life of matter. They were both seeking contact with 'Divine Nature'. But in Coleridge nature is symbolical and designed to impress the mind of man and to bring him to know God. To Wordsworth the spiritual power is immanent in nature. Coleridge's 'nature' leads to

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129 Beach, op.cit., p.114. 130 Piper, op.cit, p. 40.
132 Beach, op.cit., pp.4-5.
the Divine Being; Wordsworth's 'nature' is Divinity. "In the
Ancient Mariner Coleridge's conception of nature is embodied
in spirits who are at once intelligent natural forces and
divine agents."\(^{133}\) His 'natural world' is a product of
Imagination, and the substance of reality in nature is and
must be in ourselves.\(^{134}\)

Shelley, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, believed that
"the universe is a living unity which could be known through
the imagination."\(^{135}\) He is at one with Wordsworth as to
the interfusing of the 'Presence' in nature.\(^{136}\) Like
Wordsworth, Shelley believes in the unity of man and nature.\(^{137}\)
but Shelley was more interested in the cosmic operations
of nature than in its visible aspects. In Prometheus
Unbound the operational aspects of nature are represented
by Earth and Moon who converse in the language of science.
Shelley's 'nature' is of organism, and "prehensile unifi-
cation" constitutes its very being.\(^{138}\)

\(^{133}\) Piper, op.cit., p.98.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., p.144. Wordsworth also recognised the role
of Imagination in spiritual experience (vide The Prelude:
1850, Bk.XIV,11.188-92).

\(^{135}\) Piper, op.cit., p.3.

\(^{136}\) Whitehead, op.cit., p.66; cf., Adonais, XLI.

\(^{137}\) "On Love" in Selected English Essays, edited by

\(^{138}\) Whitman, op.cit., pp.6-7.
wild and solitary nature is associated with the romantic idea of the infinite. In the Ode to the Westwind, Shelley presents a reciprocity between man and nature in which nature is not only a state of the soul but the soul is a state of nature.

Byron was mostly interested in nature to reflect his anger against society. Though he realised a sensitive existence in nature, he had no belief in the purposiveness of nature. He made "much of the wild aspects of nature and very often just because they are wild..." His heroes project their own feelings in nature and discover their own passions in the elemental forces as a sort of release from the constraints of society.

The Wordsworthian concept of nature is again reflected in Keats' poetry. The "fair paradise of Nature's light"
inspires the imagination of the poet and makes him "feel uplifted from the world." As to Collins, calm and gentle sights of nature are a source of delight to Keats. In moments of solitude, he prefers "Nature's observatory" to "the jumbled heap of murky buildings." The poet communicates with the 'secret essence', which is the 'active Principle' of Wordsworth's *Excursion*. Keats was also influenced by the evolutionary ideas of W.C. Wells whose theory "promised to show that the importance of beauty was the result of a law of nature." The old gods in *Hyperion* fall by 'course of Nature's law', "for 'tis the eternal law/That first in beauty should be first in might."

It is seen that the Romantic concept of nature is, more or less, based on the belief that, nature is a living power, there is unity between the life of man and nature.

145 "I stood tip-toe on a hill," 11.126,139.
146 *ibid.*. Cf., Edmund Blunden on the 'quiet rule of Nature' in Collins' *Ode to Evening* and 'equipoise and still splendour of Nature' in Keats' *Ode to Autumn* (*Nature in English Literature*, London, 1949, pp. 44,50).
147 "O solitude! if I must with thee dwell," 11.2-4.
148 *The Poet*, 1.5. 149 *Excursion*, Bk.IV,1.3.
150 *Piper*, op. cit., p.193.
and it can meet the spiritual and emotional demands of man. It has a spiritual order; it is responsive to the poet's mood. The romantic welcomes nature, beautiful or terrible, to reflect the beauty or storm in his soul. Nature offers him an escape from the triviality of the materialistic society; it is purposive and harmonious, and essentially noble and good.

II. THE VICTORIAN SCENE

The Romantic concept of nature was a synthesis of the elements derived from science and religion. The scientific notion of the regular and universal laws of nature corresponded with the religious notion of a divine providence. The religious and scientific notions were fused into one by the metaphysical notion of nature. But, due to the socio-economic changes and new developments in the scientific ideas during the nineteenth century, this poetic concept of nature was gradually becoming less tenable. The gulf between science and religion was widening. And "as the nineteenth century continued,

154 Beach, op. cit., p. 4. 155 Scaglion, op. cit., p. 143.
nature became less and less available as an object of veneration."^157

Eighteenth-century England was a close-knit, organic society. Into this community came the disturbing and disruptive forces of industrialism and radicalism.\(^158\) Its population grew at a rapid rate.\(^159\) As improved methods of farming came into use, the open fields, commons and wasteland were 'enclosed'. Many of the old smallholders became agricultural labourers or shifted to the towns.\(^160\) Agriculture was dominated by business spirit,\(^151\) and paupers were increasing. The disinherited poor became subject to sufferings and injustices.\(^162\) Landed interests came in conflict with the manufacturing ones; the wage earners were exposed to every kind of abuse.\(^163\) The spread of social distress and economic upheaval along with various conflicts


\(^{161}\) Klingopulos, op. cit., p. 17.

\(^{162}\) D. Thomson, loc. cit.  \(^{163}\) ibid., p. 37.
of economic interests created what came to be known as the 'condition of England question'. "Life in the new industrial towns, the discipline of the factories and the strenuous, incessant activity of the mines and mills in which men were harnessed to machines, all meant great problems of human adjustment." \(^{164}\)

The process of destruction of the organic social unity of the rural community in England, which had its beginnings in the eighteenth century, \(^{165}\) hastened its pace in the nineteenth. The primitive trinity of earth, woman and man of the old order \(^{166}\) was being undermined. \(^{167}\) The 'metaphysical equilibrium' of science and religion was breaking down. \(^{168}\) Scientists were challenging the scriptural account of 'creation' as an historical event. Bishop Ussher's chronology of Old Testament was challenged

\(^{164}\) ibid., p.43.

\(^{165}\) vide Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* and Wordsworth's *Michael*.


\(^{167}\) L.S. Luedtke, "Sherwood Anderson, Thomas Hardy and 'Tandy'," *Modern Fiction Studies*, XX (Winter, 1974-75), 535.

\(^{168}\) Beach, op. cit., pp.7-8.
by Lyell in his *Principles of Geology* (1830—33). Earlier, Erasmus Darwin had maintained in his *Zoonomia* (1794—95) that the world had evolved and had not been created.

Chambers' *Vestiges of Creation* (1844) was another link in the evolutionary theory. It cast serious doubt on the minds of the thinkers as to the veracity of the divine power behind the creation. The long process of the gradual withdrawal of God from the world led to the breakdown of the lines of connection between God and man. The scientific notion of the universe contradicted the religious beliefs. And, as the idea of divinity was dissociated from the creation, it was felt that nature was unable to satisfy the religious and moral needs of man. The poets and thinkers turned their mind to a notion of man as different from nature for the satisfaction of their sense of a moral order in the world and for justifying the idea that the higher destiny of man was not bound by 'imperfect nature'. It resulted in a dual world-view of man and nature as belonging to two different orders. It led to the rejection of Romantic

169 Parrot and Martin, op.cit., p.143; Buckley, op.cit., p.27.

170 Parrot and Martin, op.cit., pp.1-3-7.

naturalism and also to the re-examination of the Rousseauistic concept of man as "good and noble because he lives by his pure, innocent instincts..." 172

During the late Victorian years, the scientific-materialistic outlook gained ascendency over the religious and the spiritual. The order and piety provided by a redemptive Christian ideology fell victim to the mechanisation and secularism of the age. 173 And "religion, conceived as a concerted system of ideas, aspirations and practices to be imposed on society, was losing its place in the English world." 174 The application of the method of scientific study to Bible was slowly emerging as the Higher Criticism which was finally accepted in England by 1890. 175 The attitude to religion was growing more and more utilitarian and mechanical. 176 Science dominated the philosophical ideas towards religion. It laid emphasis on the study of nature without reference to a spiritual and religious order. It also pointed out the irrelevance of the spiritual and

172 Scaglion, op.cit., p.143.
175 Parrot and Martin, op.cit., pp.147-8.
Philosophical radicalism or Benthamism dominated English radical thought throughout the century. Earlier, the Malthusian doctrine of laissez-faire had made a natural law of the manufacturer's untrammelled pursuit of profit and, on scientific grounds, recommended abstention from all attempts to improve the lot of the workers. Bentham based his principle of utility on the belief that nature has placed man under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure, and that men are prompted in their behaviour by the desire to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. He assumed that pain and pleasure were quantitatively measurable and that the problems of right and wrong might resolve themselves into a weighing of the quantities of pleasure against those of pain resulting from an act or omission. Utilitarianism, like James Mill and his son, J.S. Mill, claimed to be scientific and to have superseded old-fashioned moral casuistry. Bentham identified pleasure and pain with

177 D. Thomson, p. 30.
178 Klingopulos, op. cit., p. 34.
180 Klingopulos, op. cit., p. 37.
good and evil respectively. The good or evil tendency of an act was to be known by summing up all the values of all the pleasures on one side, and those of all the pains on the other. If it is found that the balance is on the side of pleasure, it will give the good tendency of the act upon the whole, and if it is on the side of pain, it will give the bad tendency of the act on the whole. "Equipped with these explanations the utilitarians could afford to dismiss as superfluous fiction such terms as conscience, moral sense, love, right..." [181]

With the awareness that nature in itself does not offer any moral basis for human action, it was realised that the scientific knowledge of the laws of nature, as different from the spiritual and religious laws, was necessary for the basis of human behaviour. Nature's laws were substituted for absolute causes and the aim now was to ascertain invariable relations between facts by the method of observation. To see in order to foresee became the motto of the positivists. [182]

Comte's positivistic philosophy reflects the agnostic

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[181] ibid., p.34.
temper of the period. Nature, he claimed, is impartial and it is vain to discover her intentions as the metaphysicians do. In his view "science is a knowledge of the laws of nature. This knowledge is the only rational basis of man's action in nature." The study of science was being advocated for its utilitarian ends. J.S. Mill wrote that the idea of a perfect God was not deducible from nature. He denied that nature afforded some external criterion for what man should do. To him it was evident from her cruelty and supercilious disregard both of mercy and justice that there was no providential order in nature. Thus he claimed that nature could not be a proper model for man to imitate. The only course left for man was of "perpetually striving to amend the course of nature — and bringing that part of it over which we can exercise control, more nearly into conformity with a high standard of justice and goodness." 

Like Mill, Spencer pleaded for the "conquest of the forces of Nature" for complete living.

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183 cf., "Agnosticism had the temper of the age on its side." Young, op.cit., p.109.
The scientific picture of the universe as a vast mechanism of cause and effect was complete with Darwin's *Origin of Species*. His theory of evolution implies that the development of the various forms of life is the result of a natural process. He gave a scientific explanation of nature without any reference to a supernatural agency. His theory of the survival of the fittest proved that a struggle for existence has been going on in the entire world of nature, and that the evolution of the species is determined by the organisms' adaptability to the internal and external conditions in the struggle for survival. This he called 'natural selection'.

Huxley defended Darwin's *Origin of Species* and the theory of evolution against religious orthodoxy. He maintained that nature was indifferent to human value and, more often than not, she was cruel and diabolic in her ways. "Nature's discipline," Huxley said, "is not even a word and a blow, and the blow first; but the blow without the word."  

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188 T. H. Huxley, *Lay Sermons, Addresses and Reviews* (New York, 1883), p. 34.
nature is in fact a criticism of the unscientific attitude towards nature. If Wordsworth were to see nature as a scientist does, Huxley argues, he would have seen that
“Nature, even in the temperate zone, is always alien, and inhuman, and occasionally diabolic.”

This scientific approach to nature led to the transformation of the concept of nature, which found expression in two major tendencies in the late Victorian attitude to nature. As nature ceased to provide a moral basis for human action, a tendency to redefine a moral order in society for the guidance of human conduct is seen in the writings of the scientific humanists. The early Victorians tried to find a moral order and a purpose for human life on earth in a divine order as distinguished from the natural one. To the late Victorians the doors of divinity were closed by science. However, they attempted to adjust their moral vision to the scientific world-view by discovering a moral order in the relationship of the individual and the society. The ideas of society and social goal replaced the idea of the spiritual goal of the older form of religion. But, on the other hand, the liberation of nature from religion and morality became a basis for a naturalistic interpretation.

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of man and man's spirit as opposed to the supernatural. It brought about a revolt against both society and religion and glorified man's natural life on earth with a romantic indulgence, which found expression in a form of naturalism that replaced the metaphysical idea of spirit by that of man's spirit on earth. The idea of 'creative nature' was used to supplant that of creative God. However, it is a dominant feature of both the kinds of scientific view that the relation of man to the planet from which he has his origin is their main concern. In both the humanistic and the naturalistic approaches the spiritual metaphysic of the Romantics and the religious philosophy of the early Victorians is discarded. It found expression in an extreme form of replacing the idea of God by that of 'Nature' as the First Cause.

The anti-Romantic temper of the period, guided by scientific ideas, is reflected in the treatment of nature in Victorian literature. There is a "marked falling off of the romantic enthusiasm for nature."\textsuperscript{190} For example, Arnold's treatment of nature is "shaped primarily by his rejection of romantic influences."\textsuperscript{191} There is an element of ambiguity in his idea of nature. In \textit{Quiet Work} he contrasts man and

\textsuperscript{190} See \textit{op. cit.}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{191} G. R. Stange, \textit{Matthew Arnold} (Princeton, 1967); p. 105.
nature and upholds nature's ministers,

...glorious tasks in silence perfecting,
Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil,
Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone. 192

But in The Youth of Nature he says that in the external
universe man may find beauty, grace, and magic, but not
moral good. 193 He lists vital differences between man and
nature in In Harmony with Nature. In Religious Isolation
he warns against the belief in the harmonious parallelism
between man and nature. In Arnold's view, although man is
part of nature, he is ethically self-reliant. The conception
of two natures - one the mutable and amoral, the other the
high cosmic order (and an ultimate source of value within
the individual) - is a result of Arnold's temperamental
idealism kept in check by modern rationalism. 194 The
scientific, rationalistic influence on Arnold is reflected
in his recognition of nature as morally indifferent, and
the perception of the larger cosmic order as the basis for
man's moral conduct reflects his search for idealism.

Tennyson's idea of nature, both in the sense of the

192 Quiet Work, 11.12-4.
world of material things and the natural instincts which man shares with the lower creatures, is closer to the scientists' idea of nature. He describes landscape with an artistic precision either for its own beauty or as a setting; but he never confuses it either with the benevolence of nature or with the metaphysical or moral idea. Man, for Tennyson, is linked with God not through nature but through faith. Nature is cruel, brutish and brainless and does not provide a moral system. He, in a way, anticipates Hardy's attitude towards nature. But they differ in one fundamental respect that while Tennyson finds a justification for existence in the divine love of God, Hardy does not perceive any such justification for things as they are. Tennyson rejects the idea of a moral order in nature; but he continues to believe in Divine Order.

In Tennyson's view the idea of an intelligent First Cause is not deducible from the phenomena of the universe. He finds the order of "Nature, red in tooth and claw," at odds with the vision of "the likest God within the soul." Evil dreams of 'Nature at strife with God' shake the faith

195 Faith and The Promise of May.
196 vide below p.263.
197 In Memoriam, CXXIV, 2, 11.2621-4.
of man in the purposefulness of creation. Tennyson finds nature as purposeless, for she is "so careful of the type.../
So careless of the single life."¹⁹⁸ He makes no attempt to reconcile the natural and the spiritual orders. He rather believes that "somehow good/Will be the final goal of ill."¹⁹⁹ The perfection of man is to be accomplished by eliminating the brutish elements of his primitive nature.²⁰⁰

Some similarity between the attitudes of Tennyson and Meredith to the animal instincts in man is apparent.²⁰¹ Both of them recognise the presence of evil in human nature and believe that the goal of human life is higher than that of the animal world. But Tennyson believes that this goal can be achieved through the elimination of the primitive elements, whereas Meredith believes that the higher goal can be reached not through the suppression of primitive nature but through the evolutionary process of transforming it into the rational nature. It is so because Tennyson was mainly concerned with the life of the soul beyond the earthly

¹⁹⁸ ibid., LIV-LV. ¹⁹⁹ ibid., LIV, 1, 11.1033-4.
²⁰⁰ ibid., CXVIII, 7, 11.2537-40. Similar ideas are found in Tennyson's call to "leave the hot swamp of voluptuousness" in The Ancient Sage, in his reference to "every serpent passion killed" in Locksley Hall Sixty Years After, and also in Dawn and The Meaning of Man.
²⁰¹ vide below pp.256-9.
existence. But Meredith was concerned with the spiritual goal of man in terms of a higher civilisation.

To Browning, as to Tennyson, nature means mostly the world of science. He too believes in the necessity of finding man's destiny and the meaning of life outside the frame of nature. Man is distinguished from nature and allied to God by virtue of a "spark that disturbs our clod," whereas "Low kinds exist without [the doubt] /Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark." That is to say, man belongs to a spiritual order and nature does not. The non-spiritual nature provides a testing ground for the higher destiny of man. "Each rebuff/That turns earth's smoothness rough" is but an opportunity for man to "project thy soul on its lone way." In Saul, Part II, Browning refers to the insufficiency of natural life and the need for supplementing it with religious sentiments. He thought that it would be a betrayal of human nature if man rested content with

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202 Beach, op.cit., p.435.


204 Rabbi ben Ezra, st.III,11.17-3.

205 ibid., st.VI,11.31-2; st.VIII, 1.40.
If Romantic naturalism was being rejected by the Victorians, there were other forces in action that necessitated a return to nature either as an escape and emotional fulfilment or as a means of criticism of the prevailing scientific and mechanical basis of the social order. "With growing material prosperity the old values of religion and spirituality in human life were disappearing." The old beautiful rural England was being transformed into an ugly urban England. As D.H. Lawrence wrote in 1929, "Tragedy of ugliness...betrayed the spirit of man in the nineteenth century." Man was losing his humanity under the power of machine. The impact of the mechanical age on human life is very well summed up by Dorothy Van Ghent:

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206 Dowden, op.cit., p.220.

207 Virtue was connected with material prosperity and the ethics of the prosperous industrialists and businessmen dominated English manners (D. Thomson, op.cit., p.101). In mid-Victorian period religious fervour was directed towards material improvement (ibid., p.109). Rising incomes and improving security of the middleclass led to "vulgar pride in mere quantity" (Young, op.cit., p.6). "The household Gods of Respectability, Prudery, and Humbug...presided over the age" (L.R. Decker, The Victorian Conscience, New York, 1952, p.10).

208 D.H. Lawrence, Selected Essays (Penguin Books, n.d.), p.119; cf., "The worst aspect of town development after the Napoleonic wars and in early Victorian times was the overcrowding, especially in back-to-back terraces, which yielded a higher return in rents to the landlord." Klingopulos, op.cit., p.22.
Dickens lived in a time and environment in which full scale demolition of traditional values was going on, correletively with the uprooting and dehumanisation of men, women and children by the millions - a process brought about by industrialisation, colonial imperialism, and the exploitation of human being as a 'thing' or an engine or a part of an engine capable of being used for profit. 209

The triumph of the forces of materialism resulted in a deep seated spiritual anarchy in society. A tendency of revolt against the spirit of materialism agitated the mind of the thinkers and writers of the age. 210 Arnold advocated the need of culture as "particularly important in our modern world, of which the whole civilisation is ... mechanical and external." He observed that "an inward condition of the mind and spirit" was lacking in the mechanical and material civilisation of the age. He also accused the 'Philistines' of a "narrow and mechanical perception of our religious business." 211 The industrial novels of Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens, Disraeli, Kingsley and George Eliot exposed the evils of industrialism. 212


210 cf., "The great Victorians were strenuously anti-Victorian..." Decker, op. cit., p. 11.


A revolt against the repressive, narrow Victorian conventions is seen in the non-conformist ideas of wedded love. The arraignment of the marriage system in Thackeray, George Eliot, Trollope and Charlotte Brontë, and later in Meredith and Hardy, was an expression of their search for sincerity. Clough repudiated the contemporary ideas of repression, of stunting of sturdy limbs given by nature, and maintained that to make conformity a duty was a tacit repudiation of the real nature of things. An important channel through which this revolt against false conventions found expression was the upholding of natural morality and nature against social morality and society. The rejection of the restraints laid by Evangelicalism "on the senses and the intellect; on amusement and enjoyment, art: on curiosity, on criticism, on science" was part of this revolt.

This tendency of revolt continued in the later part of the Victorian age and found expression in the Pre-Raphaelite school of painting and poetry, and in the Aesthetic Movement. Art became not only an escape from tradition but it also offered a basis for criticism of conventional values. The founding of George's Guild in

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214 *ibid.*, p. 396. 215 Young, op. cit., p. 5.
1875 was a "blow against capitalism, demonstrating Ruskin's principle that there is no Wealth but Life."\textsuperscript{216} As tradition was found wanting, emphasis was laid by Morris, Burne-Jones, Swinburne, Pater and Meredith on personal values.\textsuperscript{217} The Aesthetic Movement was a culmination of the challenge to the false sense of respectability begun in the early part of the Victorian period.\textsuperscript{218}

In this environment the romantic love of nature passed into a new phase. It became, on the one hand, a nostalgia for a lost world of peace and companionship,\textsuperscript{219} of healthy bodies and quiet minds,\textsuperscript{220} and on the other it offered an immediate basis for an important criticism of science and industrialism.\textsuperscript{221} Carlyle glorified the Sabeans because they recognised a spiritual order in nature.\textsuperscript{222} He blamed the atheistic science for its mechanical world-view.\textsuperscript{223}

\textsuperscript{217}Young, op.cit. p.11. \textsuperscript{218}ibid., p.153.
\textsuperscript{219}vide Arnold's Scholar Gypsy and Thyrsis.
\textsuperscript{220}Houghton, op.cit., p.80. \textsuperscript{221}Williams, op.cit.,p.60.
\textsuperscript{222}Heroes and Hero-Worship (World's Classics,1965), p.13.
\textsuperscript{223}Beach, op.cit., p.308.
he found science responsible for "unbelief and universal spiritual paralysis." 224 In his view nature is preternatural, and "this world after all our science and sciences, is still a miracle; wonderful, inscrutable, magical and more, to whosoever will think of it." 225 The tumults of the eighteen-forties were to him the voice of nature which spoke loudly that money was not the sole nexus of man with man as the utilitarians thought. 226 In Carlyle's view the laws of nature are related to a transcendental order. As the physical phenomena of the scientists are determined by certain laws of physical nature, the spiritual power exerts itself through certain laws beyond the physical, of which the physical laws are a shadow and a reflection. These laws are the spirit behind the order in nature. It is therefore man's duty "to conform himself to Nature's laws, be verily in communion with Nature and the truth of things, or Nature will answer him." 227

224 Heroes and Hero-Worship, p.17.  
225 ibid., p.10.  
226 Jack Lindsay, George Meredith (London,1956), p.98.  
227 Heroes and Hero-Worship, p.7. But Carlyle's spiritual order is not an unmixed blessing. Though he was critical of Mill's materialism, yet he believed, almost like Mill, that the laws of nature could be destructive if not properly handled (vide Past and Present, Everyman's Library,1947, p.7).
This call for communion with nature was more than escapist, for it had a positive function to perform, that is, to reassert the spiritual values in life as against the material, and also to rescue man from the infection of the urban life. Ruskin used architecture and painting in his Stones of Venice (1851-53) to counterbalance "our loss of fellowship with Nature...to tell us about Nature; to possess us with memories of her quietness; to be solemn and full of tenderness."\(^{228}\)

The spirit of revolt expressed itself also in the rejection of the conventional morality and dogmatic religious laws. Arthur Whistler's pictures, which he called 'Nocturnes', vindicated the theory of art for art's sake.\(^{229}\) The emphasis was on pure aesthetic satisfaction. Rossetti was irked by the mid-Victorian propriety.\(^{230}\) The sensuousness in his picture of the blessed Damozel is expressive of the desire for freedom from restrictive morality. The Blessed Damozel, although in heaven, desires "to live as once on earth/With Love."\(^{231}\) The spirit of defiance to break the bounds of morality appears again in Swinburne. His Poems and Ballads

\(^{228}\) Houghton, op.cit., p.30; vide The Stones of Venice (Everyman's Library, 1907), II,185.

\(^{229}\) Gaunt, op.cit., p.100. \(^{230}\) ibid., p.47.

\(^{231}\) The Blessed Damozel, ll.129-30.
was received warmly, especially by the young, as a herald of social revolution. Swinburne upheld the life of the senses against that of religion, and "the sensualism of his first volume of Poems and Ballads...is but one article in the creed of naturalism - of one who begins with earth as the foundation of his system - as well as being a manifesto in the struggle for freedom." His appeal to nature is similar to Wordsworth's but the voice is very different, for Swinburne does not find a spiritual meaning in nature as Wordsworth does, nor does he discover a religious meaning beyond nature as Browning and Tennyson do. Swinburne accepted the evolutionary concept to supplant the notion of a creative God and to replace it by that of a creative nature.

It is seen that there are two main tendencies in the treatment of nature in Victorian literature. One tendency is characterised by the rejection of Romantic naturalism and the other by a desire to return to nature and to re-establish a kinship between man and nature. But in both the cases the Victorian concept of nature lost much of the Romantic charm of the early years of the nineteenth century.

A similar change is perceptible in the idea and

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treatment of nature in Victorian fiction. The two major tendencies - the romantic and the anti-romantic - are expressed, in different forms, in fiction as in other forms of literature. The transformation in the concept of nature resulting from the scientific ideas made a significant impact on the novelist's vision of life as it influenced his view of man's relation to nature and society. Nature had an eminent place in the thought of the period, and it is reflected in the novelists' preoccupation with nature.

In the following section an assessment of nature in English fiction is given with a view to show that nature finds gradually a greater significance in Victorian fiction than in that of earlier periods.

III. NATURE IN ENGLISH FICTION

Nature has been treated as a minor theme in English fiction before the Victorian period. Before Mrs. Radcliffe English fiction is almost bare of scenery. In the period of Richardson and Fielding the old romances were regarded as hopelessly unnatural. Literature, whether


it was sentimental as with Richardson or representing common sense as with Fielding, corresponded to solid, substantial, matter-of-fact motives, intelligible to the ordinary Briton of the time. "Nature has become the nature of the middle-class John Bull." The landscape in Fielding's Tom Jones is 'solid and substantial' enough to delight a common, healthy middle-class Englishman of the pre-industrial eighteenth-century England. His landscape, limited to being a picturesque background to human action, is intended to impart delight to man as it reflects his healthy instincts cultivated into habit by long tradition of country life and physical exercise in the agricultural England.

Jane Austen, although writing in the nineteenth century, continues the eighteenth-century tradition of nature in her novels. She "copies from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life." Her universe is Newtonian, and the cultural pattern of her novels is partly based upon the Newtonian science, which assumes the material organisation of the universe as the machinery through which a beneficent providence exerts itself. Nature in Jane

237 Ibid. 238 Tom Jones, Bk. I, Ch. I.
242 Ibid., pp. 279-80.
Austan is the inanimate, objective world of matter. The rational harmony of nature is evinced in the order and peace of the objective world. Nature is an object of contemplation to man, for in it he finds the rule of reason and peace. In Mansfield Park, Fanny Price, with her "delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling," looks at the inanimate nature with the eyes of an objective observer. When she turns from the troubled household to look at the scene outside the window, she faces a scene of harmony and repose in nature. The orderly landscape on which she delights to look is reminiscent of Pope's 'Nature methodised'. Similarly, in Pride and Prejudice, when Elizabeth Bennet praises Pemberley, one has the unmistakable impression that she looks with the eyes of a landscape painter for the picturesque.

The treatment of nature in the Gothic and sentimental novels of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries

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244 ibid., Ch.XI, p.128.
246 Pride and Prejudice, Ch.XLIII.
247 Mollins, op.cit., p.39.
reflects the Rousseauistic cult of return to nature. Nature in these novels is used as a machinery to the story and as a background to the action. Besides, the landscape is mostly used as a means of expressing the writer's love of the picturesque. The terrible and supernatural manifestations of natural forces are a background to the macabre and lurid scenes in the Gothic novels, and in the sentimental novels, the grandeur of the wild and calm aspects of nature reflects the mood of the characters.

Nature in Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* is completely different from his 'nature' which could be adorned and dressed by poetry, painting and gardening.\(^{248}\) In this novel we are in "regions of romance, of secluded cottages, of hills and barren moors."\(^{249}\) Nature is associated with dark and devilish deeds of man. It is used as a supernatural machinery to discover scenes of horror or to develop the action; it is also used to create an atmosphere of the supernatural.\(^{250}\) For example, when Manfred pursues Isabella, the gleam of the moon reveals to "his sight the plumes of the fatal helmet."\(^{251}\) Similarly, the wind is used

\(^{248}\) ibid., p.120.  \(^{249}\) Varma, op.cit., p.63.
\(^{250}\) ibid., p.59.
to create an opportunity for Isabella to escape Manfred.\textsuperscript{252}

Besides the use of the wind and the moon as part of the machinery of the story in the sentimental novels of Charlotte Smith, we also find an expression of her romantic love of the picturesque in nature.\textsuperscript{253} To her nature is mostly a Rousseauistic antithesis of human society.\textsuperscript{254} Free from the lust and corruption of man, the objects of nature, in their sublimity and grandeur, offer calm and peace to the mind. Her description of Celestina's state of mind through landscape anticipates Mrs. Radcliffe's symbolical use of nature in Romance of the Forest and Mysteries of Udolpho.\textsuperscript{255} Charlotte Smith's landscapes are

\textsuperscript{252}ibid., pp.25-6.

\textsuperscript{253}vide Emmeline, edited by A.H.Ehrenpreis (London, 1971), pp.4,33,37 etc.

\textsuperscript{254}Before Charlotte Smith there was a tradition of sentimental use of the landscape and glorification of the 'noble savage' in the novels of William Guthrie, Mary Robinson, Henry Brooke, and others, who were influenced by the French Abbe Prevost. In their novels nature is mainly presented as a contrast to civilisation with the professed purpose of showing the virtues of nature's children (E.A.Baker, The History of the English Novel, New York,1950, Vol.V,pp.92-146). Here it may be noted that Mrs. Aphra Behn's Oroonoko: or, The Royal Savage "represents the first appearance of the idea of the noble savage - some seventy years before Rousseau" (Allen, op. cit., p.34).

like those of a landscape painter and they are so vivid in
details that they can be reproduced faithfully on canvas.

Like Charlotte Smith, Mrs. Radcliffe shows much love
for the beauty and grandeur of the sky, sea, mountains,
trees, rivers and various other aspects of nature. But her
landscapes are not definite and particular. There is a
suggestion of vagueness and mysticism in her treatment of
nature. For her "nature is a manifestation of Divine
grandeur and her attitude contains all the germ of that
philosophy of nature which was later so well expounded by
the Romantic poets." 256 Her deep and passionate interest
in the 'otherness' of nature frequently led her to an
unproportionate magnification of landscapes in relation to
the events, characters and their emotions. Wagenknecht's
observation that "it is to Mrs. Radcliffe's credit as
an artist that passionately as she loved scenery she never
described it for its own sake; we get it always as it
inspires and it intensifies the moods of her characters," 257
is only partially correct. There are occasions when the
scenery is described for its own sake. 258 For example,

256Varma, op.cit., p.117.
257Wagenknecht, op.cit., p.119.
258Allen, op.cit., p.98.
in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, St. Aubert goes on travel with his daughter, Emily, for the recovery of his health and passes through much of the sublime scenery of nature.\(^{259}\) The novelist uses it as an opportunity of giving us a surfeit of landscape pictures in words. And the story comes to a standstill except for the fact that Emily and her father move from one place to another. Similarly, as noted by Baker,\(^{260}\) in *The Romance of the Forest*, Verneuil is sent on an extended tour to give the author an opportunity to exploit the romantic beauty of forests, lakes, seas, mountains etc.

This is not to suggest that Mrs. Radcliffe's use of landscape is limited to the decorative. There are occasions in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* when the scenic background exists to feed Emily's sensibility. The description of the Castle of Udolpho has a sort of mystic vagueness which leaves an impression of the castle as a pile of enormous proportions. As observed by Verma, Mrs. Radcliffe "uses the terrible forces of nature to reflect the dark passions of man."\(^{261}\) She presents nature as the mysterious world of romance and 'unreality' in which the soul's desire for

In Miss Edgeworth's Irish novels we find an attempt to use landscape realistically for thematic purposes. In Mrs. Radcliffe and her successors there is an incongruous resolution of the apparently mystic and marvellous incidents by very simple and natural causes. In Miss Edgeworth's novels we move in a real world in which both the events and the landscape exist in reality. Her landscapes have a local habitation which has a relation to the people who dwell there. Although her view of nature is coloured by Rousseauistic idealisation, her world is not the wild, romantic world of Arcadian simplicity. Her Ireland is the country of hard-working peasants whose life is intimately connected with their surroundings. The 'return to nature' in her novels is not a return from the town to the country, from civilisation to forests and mountains. It is a return

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263 Decker, op. cit., p. 39 (reproducing Scott's reaction to "the host of sensational, unreal Gothic romances"). cf., Varma's observation on The Mysteries of Udolpho: "Appearances of most impressive kind continually present the idea of supernatural agency, but they are at length accounted for by natural means" (op. cit., p. 97).

to a country where life demands labour and hard work. In this respect her attitude contrasts with Mrs. Radcliffe's. The latter's Italy is a dreamland; Miss Edgeworth's Ireland is a reality. Mrs. Radcliffe's Castle of Udolpho is associated with the supernatural drama of dark passions and wild forces, while Miss Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent is associated with everyday drama of human life, in which money and business, greed and loyalty play an important role. Miss Edgeworth had in fact a tradition of Irish novelists behind her, "who had drawn an intricate network of symbolic references from the landscape and the movements of their haunted and fatal island."^265

Sir Walter Scott combines the romantic interests of Mrs. Radcliffe with Miss Edgeworth's "sympathetic study of industrial life and manners."^266 He owes much to the latter for his "successful treatment of landscape in The Pirate."^257 He shares the Romantics' revolt against the Industrial Revolution and "the mechanical and undialectical materialism of the eighteenth-century philosophers and its later development, the utilitarianism of the theorists of

^266 Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 138.
^257 ibid., p. 15d.
industry capitalism. The Romantic Movement in English literature coincides with the transformation of Britain from the agricultural country into 'the workshop of the world'. The hierarchical society of the eighteenth century was disintegrating. "The Industrial Revolution created a thousand new problems," and Scott saw it bringing strains in the life of the Scottish peasantry and destroying the old order.

Scott's attitude towards nature is part of his reaction against the Industrial Revolution. Like other Romantics, he uses nature as a contrast to 'industrial materialism'. But he differs from the Romantics like Byron, Shelley and early Wordsworth in his treatment of nature in that he does not use nature as a contrast to civilisation as such. The reaction of Byron, Shelley and early Wordsworth is against the Industrial Revolution as well as the eighteenth-century feudalistic social order. Scott's reaction is against the Industrial Revolution as he finds it destroying the old social ties which made for a certain kindliness in human society. His 'nature' means this society which 'industrialism' was destroying.

269 ibid.
270 ibid.
In the description of the background to the stories in *Chronicles of Canongate* Scott brings out the contrast between the 'industrial city' on the one hand, and nature "identified with 'the majestic and the terrible genius of feudal times'" on the other. The Gothic revolt against industrialism, suggested by 'terrible genius', is modified by Scott's conservatism which is suggested by 'feudal times'. His historical and poetic interest in nature is to be seen against this conservative background. The "lofty and craggy hill" is seen through the fascinating light of the romantic past as it speaks in every fold of old traditional lore. Nature is coloured into the world of medieval romance and is part of the 'idealised past'. It stands for the old social order — the idealised past — in which human interests were more valuable than the material ones. It also includes the natural processes by which society has been developed under the stress of circumstances. In his stories Scott "illuminates the present by his vivid presentation of the present order as the outgrowth

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274 Kettle, op.cit., p.121.
from the old." 275 His Scottish peasants and lawyers are a product and a type of social conditions. His 'nature' is that of a realist to whom human beings come first and nature comes second. He has no faith in the cult of wild nature and "no eye for the picturesque in scenery." 276 To him 'return to nature' is return to the past, to the old social order in which human relations were based upon sympathy and kindness.

With the growing hold of the utilitarian, mechanical and industrial spirit on the human life grew an ever increasing criticism of the contemporary tendencies in the Victorian age. The novelists were its products as well as its critics. To a large extent their attitude to nature and its treatment in their works reflect the contemporary ideas of nature and at the same time it becomes a criticism of the application of these ideas to human values. Besides, their use of nature reflects the emotional gloom that pervaded the society. 277

275 Leslie Stephen, English Literature and Society, p. 131.
Dickens' ironic use of the mechanical ideas of nature and their mechanical application to human conduct and values exposes the inadequacy of these ideas so far as human relationship and values are concerned. He accepted the concept of nature as a vast mechanism of cause and effect. But he rejected the utilitarian view that human behaviour is limited to this mechanical relation and also that the human conduct is solely governed by atomistic concerns, that is, pleasure and pain. Similarly, he accepted the scientific idea of an indifferent and non-moral order of nature but rejected the idea that this order extended to the human life as well.

Nature in Dickens is the inanimate world of objects governed by mechanical laws, and man is distinguished from the inanimate world by virtue of the fact that the values of sympathy and kindness have a significance in human life. Dickens in fact implies the presence of a dual order - the moral order of human world and the mechanical order of the inanimate world. In the loss of the human values, as a result of industrial utilitarianism, he saw that humanity was being reduced to the non-human order of the inanimate world. This he perceived as an inversion of the 'natural order' in which "the qualities of people and things were
reversed." His use of animism ironically suggests that human values are more than the good and the bad of the utilitarians. Significantly, his use of animism differs from the Romantics'. The latter used animism to suggest spiritual unity between man and nature. Dickens uses it to suggest the difference between man and inanimate world. For example, the river in *The Great Expectations* has a malignant potentiality that impregnates everything upon it. It is to suggest that with the loss of humanity man has become part of the 'animated' non-human world. In contrast to the 'animated' inanimate world, the de-humanised men are presented as diseased, for they "reverse the appointed order of their Maker." And this order is obviously based on sympathy and love in human life on the one hand, and its absence in the inanimate world on the other. The refusal to recognise the significance of human values obliterates the distinction between the human and the non-human. This is forcefully suggested in *The Great Expectations* in a passage after the sentence of death.

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278 Van Ghent, op.cit., p.129.

279 ibid., p.131.

is passed by the judge:

The sun was striking at the great windows of the court, through the glittering drops of rain upon the glass, and it made a broad shaft of light between the two-and-twenty [convicts] and the judge, linking both together...

In the works of Charlotte and Emily Bronte the romantic view of nature continues with a different emphasis. In them we find a culmination of an aspect of the romantic treatment of nature in fiction, in that the forces of nature that

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282 The tradition of nature as a Rousseauistic contrast to city life continued in Victorian fiction. Mrs. Gaskell's most elaborate descriptions are concerned with hackneyed subjects, summer gardens, picturesque village streets etc. Confined as she was to her Victorian drawingroom, she did not make any significant contribution to the nature theme in fiction. Her landscapes are most conventional and her response to them is unoriginal, for her view of nature is superficial (David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists, London, 1964, p.176). In her industrial novels the countryside is the dreamworld of Arcadia (R. Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England, London, 1972, p.63). For example, the rural world in Mary Barton and North and South is presented as a place of lost peace and innocence. Similarly, in the opening of Anthony Trollope's Doctor Thorne we find a conventional picture of the countryside. In George Borrow's Lavenbro and Romany Rye there is "a minor manifestation of the cult of the sublime in landscape that so many of the Victorians took over from Wordsworth and Ruskin" (Allen, op.cit., p.98). Anne Bronte, although she had the Brontes' interest in nature, was more concerned with conscience, and her novels are much in the tradition of instructional prose. She exercised a deliberate restraint on the expression of feeling and made little use of setting
become part of the life of the characters are 'realistically' presented. Nature becomes a dominating force in human life and also an integral part of the authors' own vision of life. Before them nature in English novel is mostly presented as a background to human action, as an ornament to the style, as a metaphor of human feelings and sentiments, as a contrast to the urban social reality, as a means of offering an opportunity to the author for expressing his love of the sublime and the picturesque, as an aid to the supernatural, as a machinery of the story and as a means of criticism of the contemporary social tendencies. No serious and sustained attempt is made to interpenetrate the landscape and the theme, or to present nature in a 'realistic' relation with the theme and the story of the novel and to define character and nature in intimate relation to each other.

In the novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë nature becomes a sustained and major theme. Nature, character and action are presented in intimate, realistic relation to

and nature. In The Tenant of Wildfell Hall we are aware of nature as a backcloth to the action to a large extent. Passion in her novels is more moral than natural. But there are occasions in Agnes Grey and The Tenant of Wildfell Hall when agony is reflected in external setting and nature becomes an integral part of an emotion and a spiritual state (Inga-Stina Ewbank, Their Proper Sphere, London, 1966, p.81).
one another on the one hand, and to the theme of the novel on the other.

The transformation that took place in the Victorian attitude towards nature as a result of the scientific philosophy and the evolutionary theory is vividly reflected in George Eliot, Meredith and Hardy. Its impact can be seen in the treatment of nature in their fiction, in their vision of life as well as their attitude towards man's relation to nature and society.

In George Eliot the idea of nature is a part of the complex world-view in which various themes of her novels are organically related. The life of her characters unfolds from the interaction of the inner and the outer worlds. The course of action is determined by the tension between the individual and the conditions of life in which he is placed. Her tragic vision is a consequence of her acceptance of the idea of nature as 'the tragic dramatist', and the theme of fatalism in her novels is related to the idea of the deterministic order of the universe.

George Meredith's optimism derives from his acceptance of the theory of biological evolution. His ideas of Comic Spirit and egoism are interlinked with the evolutionary concept of nature. His characters are conceived in terms of these ideas and the action issues
from the struggle between them.

In Thomas Hardy's novels nature becomes an individualised character which exercises a direct influence on the destiny of man. In a sense, nature becomes the presiding deity of his novels both in terms of character and action. His pessimism and nature are so intricately related that it is difficult to say which exercised greater influence on his vision of life.

Charlotte and Emily Brontë's attitude was influenced by their personal experience and by an awareness of the tension in their soul; the attitude of George Eliot, Meredith and Hardy was affected, in different ways, by the scientific and philosophical ideas on the one hand, and by the social changes on the other. The Brontës have, no doubt, greater affinity with the Romantics, but their romanticism is seen against the background of Victorian realism. George Eliot has the romantic sensibility for nature, but her concept of nature is that of scientific determinism and social positivism. Meredith's 'nature' is a compromise of pagan naturalism and scientific humanism. Both George Eliot and Meredith, in their different ways, attempt a reconciliation of the scientific view of nature with the social goal and civilisation. Hardy, on the contrary, finds little possibility of getting a 'point of junction' between man and nature and equates the social order
with the non-moral order of nature. His concept of 'unconscious nature' leads to the rejection of the idea of creative nature and expresses an aspect of the scientific-rationalistic thought of the period in an extreme form.

In the following chapters a detailed study of nature in five major Victorian novelists will be pursued in terms of the ideas presented in this background survey.