Like George Eliot and Meredith, Hardy was greatly influenced by the scientific ideas of his age and was aware of the new light in which nature was being presented. He was, like George Eliot, thoroughly impregnated by the deterministic spirit of modern science and recognised the organic unity of nature. To George Eliot this unity implied the responsibility of one organism to another. But to Hardy it meant problems of adjustment and competition between the organisms. Hardy, like Meredith, recognised the presence of harmful elements in nature. Meredith reconciled the humanistic and the naturalistic views in the idea of the evolutionary goal of nature and rejected the scientific notion of amoral nature. But unlike Meredith, Hardy did not accept the idea of the evolutionary goal and therefore he did not feel the presence of a moral and spiritual order in nature.

The anti-Romantic view of nature, which had its beginnings in the early Victorian period, came full circle in Hardy. In his fiction, as in his poems, we feel the disappearance of the Wordsworthian nature and its replacement by nature's harshness and cruelty. Like Mill and Huxley, Hardy recognised the cruel and amoral order of nature, but he did not accept
the idea of a moral order in society as a means of countering the amoral cosmic process. The position of Mill and Huxley that man has in society a moral order which combats the amoral cosmic process and creates a home for the human spirit was shared by George Eliot. But Hardy, on the contrary, felt that the cruel and amoral order of nature extended to the social order as well. He found that nature and society were almost equally indifferent to the destiny of the individual and more often than not hostile and inimical to his life.

Hardy rejected the Romantic idea of conscious and purposive nature, and his idea of nature's irrationality is in contrast with Meredith's 'rationality'. Meredith adapted the idea of biological evolution to that of the intellectual evolution and traced the rationality of nature to the evolutionary process. Hardy, like Meredith, accepted the idea that mind is an evolution of nature but rejected the view that nature has a rational principle.

Hardy's 'nature' is matter moved by an unconscious and blind force. He traces the irrationality in nature to the fact that she gives the instinct for happiness without creating the necessary conditions for its fulfilment. Although there is a trace of the possibility of human happiness in the world of his early novels, it is noticeable
that this happiness is ascribed to human ingenuity, and the impression of the harshness of the natural world is unmistakable.

Hardy's faith in the 'chink of possibility' of happiness in life grew weaker and weaker as the century grew older, and he finally adopted the view that man's struggle for happiness was a lost cause. He held the laws of nature and society responsible for human suffering. It led him to the belief that there was no providential design in the universal order. Although there is a superficial similarity between the attitudes of Hardy and Tennyson as both of them saw cruelty and harshness in nature, their views of life are essentially different. Tennyson believed in the purposefulness of creation and perceived a moral order, in a religious and mystical sense, outside the frame of nature. But Hardy did not find any proof either of such an order independent of nature or of the existence of God


Himself. He, like Swinburne, used the Darwinian concept of evolution to supplant the notion of a creative God and went a step further in using the concept of evolution for rejecting the notion of creative nature.

Hardy was emotional by nature and it is a well known fact to the students of Hardy that he was a pessimist by temperament. At the age of five he is said to have felt that he did not wish to grow up. His mind was acutely receptive to the impressions of suffering in life. He was quick to see the pathos involved in events and scenes resulting from the countryman's uprooting which followed the heavier industrialisation in the nineteenth century. His sensitiveness to the various aspects and conditions of life and to the changes going on around him is sufficiently evinced in his notes and letters, and of course in his poems and novels.

Hardy's interest in human condition and destiny and

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3F.E.Hardy, op.cit., p.224. 4Ibid., p.452.
6Ibid., p.11; F.E.Hardy, op.cit., p.15.
8F.E.Hardy, op.cit., pp.107,114.
his view of nature are intimately related. Much has been written about his pessimism and his idea of cruel and indifferent nature. But it may be observed that his pessimism was in fact not so much a philosophy of life as a response to it. And much of the confusion about his treatment of nature in the novels has been caused by the impression from the reading of his poems. A poet has greater freedom of incorporating a philosophy than a novelist has, for the demands of objectivity are greater on the novelist than on the poet. Many years of conscious thinking had gone into the making of The Dynasts, but most of Hardy's fiction was an expression of his reaction to some particular circumstance in the Wessex world. In his fiction Hardy was primarily concerned with the impressions of life and the philosophical attitude emerged out of them. But in the poems, specially in The Dynasts, his experience and response of life


10 Hardy's Works are "not a scientific system of philosophy; "views in them are seemings, provisional impressions only." F.E.Hardy, op.cit., p.375.

have been worked into a philosophy, and the world of his poetry is limited in terms of this philosophy.

However, it does not imply that there is no philosophical outlook in the novels. In fact the philosophical outlook, instead of restricting the fictional world, gives it a new dimension. While the reader responds to the drama in the lives of the individual characters, he is also conscious that it is a drama which concerns not only human destiny but the entire creation. But when the philosophical outlook is imposed on this drama and becomes more pronounced, as in the later novels of Hardy, the fictional world is to that extent limited by the philosophy. In this perspective the study of nature in his fiction as a changing reaction to a fast-changing world would be more rewarding and appropriate than its study in terms of a fixed attitude and philosophy.

Nature in Hardy's early fiction is of a different kind from that which becomes the basis of his pessimism in the later works. Though, in the early fiction, there are prophetic glimpses of his later treatment of nature, yet it does not have the same gloomy aspect as in the later novels.


Therefore, in order to see Hardy's treatment of nature in its perspective, it is necessary to trace the changes and developments at different stages of his career as a novelist. From this point of view his fiction can be divided into three groups. The first group includes the fiction written during 1871-76 when man is presented as the master of nature. In the second group fall the works of 1878-85 when man gradually loses control of the initiative and nature's role in his life becomes more dominant. And finally, in the third group, consisting of his last novels, the balance of the forces between man and nature weighs decidedly on the latter's side and the tragedy in human life becomes inevitable.

In the first group of the novels Hardy either presents a sunnier view of nature or shows the possibility of happiness through human ingenuity in tackling nature. A different kind of Darwin's impact on Hardy during this early period is unduly neglected because of the gloomier conclusions from Darwin in Hardy's later period. There is much

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14 A similar approach is made by John Holloway when he relates Hardy's 'deepening and harshening gloom' to the passing away of the old rhythmic order of rural England (The Charted Mirror, London, 1960, pp. 94-107).

similarity between the reactions of Meredith and early Hardy to Darwin. Hardy's awareness of the tyranny of chance and accident as part of a hostile or at least an indifferent order of nature, so pronounced in his later works, did not necessarily derive from his reading of *Origin of Species*. Apart from the fact that the element of chance is given a negligible place in the early novels, it does not necessarily have a tragic sequence. Moreover, Darwin did not describe chance as an element in nature as used by Hardy. Darwin in fact rejected the idea of chance as such, i.e., something that is not logically connected in terms of cause and effect, and maintained that phenomena appeared as chance because of our ignorance of the laws of nature. Hardy rather seems to have adopted, like Meredith, the Darwinian notion of nature which equips the individual organism with sufficient means of adaptability to the environment and to other organisms. For instance, Hardy's definition of wisdom in *Desperate Remedies* (1871) sounds very much like Darwin's notion of adaptability. Wisdom is the evolutionary instrument for the individual's happiness. It is "a steady handling of any means to bring about any end necessary to happiness." 

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18 *Desperate Remedies* (London, 1912), Ch.I, p.17.
In *Desperate Remedies* there is an emphasis on the fact that nature has provided the necessary means which can be used for the desired end. The hostile elements of nature can be controlled and the consequences avoided if man makes use of his knowledge of nature's laws. In a long but significant sentence Hardy observes on the smouldering heap in Edward Springrove's garden:

*Farmers and horticulturists well know that it is in the nature of a heap of couch-grass, when kindled in calm weather, to smoulder for many days, and even weeks, until the whole mass is reduced to a powdery charcoal ash, displaying the while scarcely a sign of combustion beyond the volcano-like smoke from its summit: but the continuance of this quiet process is throughout its length at the mercy of one particular whim of Nature: that is, a sudden breeze, by which the heap is liable to be fanned into a flame so brisk as to consume the whole in an hour or two.*

Old Mr. Springrove is a farmer, and if he had utilised the farmer's knowledge of nature and not neglected the fire, it would not have been converted into an irresistible enemy by the tameless, swift and proud autumn wind. His neglect leads to the burning of the houses, which is linked with the sufferings of Cytheria and his own son.

The sunnier view of nature in *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) is possibly due to the influence of Wordsworth, Mill, Carlyle and Comte on Hardy and also due to the fact

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19 ibid., Ch.X,p.193.  20 ibid., p.198.
21 F.E. Hardy, op.cit., pp.56,75,98,153.
that the impact of industrialisation was delayed in Hardy's Wessex. This novel opens on a note of Wordsworthian harmony of man and nature: "To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature."\(^{22}\)

Nature here is symbolised by the trees and has a distinct individuality. The sense of harmony between man and nature is intensified by the plantation whispering distinctly to the man who sings:

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\begin{align*}
\text{With the rose and the lily} \\
\text{And the daffodowndilly} \\
\text{The lads and the lasses a-sheep-shearing go.}^{23}
\end{align*}
\]

This treatment of nature reflects Hardy's faith in the indestructible order of the Wessex world.\(^{24}\) "Nature itself unchangeable and inscrutable, is the norm, the basis of Wessex life... Nearest to Nature, and most changeless are the rustics."\(^{25}\) These inhabitants are at peace with nature; they know that nature is the basis of life and that it has to be come to terms with. Besides being a

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\(^{22}\)Under the Greenwood Tree (London, 1912), Pt. I, p. 3.

\(^{23}\)Ibid.

\(^{24}\)It will be seen that with a growing threat to this order Hardy's treatment of nature underwent a marked change (vide below pp. 278-9).

\(^{25}\)Heisel, op. cit., p. 39.
background for the human drama, through their significance for those who live among them."

In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), and *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), Hardy's response to nature resembles Mill's. It reflects Hardy's awareness of nature's cruelty and his recognition of the value of human resourcefulness to gain mastery over nature and achieve happiness. Mill had observed that all the sequences in nature are not inevitable and uncontrollable. Like Mill, Hardy felt the importance of man's power to control his motives and urges and to escape the evil consequences. That man can realise happiness by using his ingenuity in controlling nature should not be confused with the idea of conventional nature as a beautiful and beneficent order of things. For instance, the observation that "it is true that, especially in his earliest work, Hardy sometimes refers to nature in a conventional way as the course of things which, if it could be left unopposed by artificial human arrangements, would naturally

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27 Williams, op.cit., p.128.
28 Norrel has a detailed discussion on Hardy's meliorism and Mill (op.cit., pp.92-4).
work for good ends” may be misleading if it is not kept in view that nature works for good ends in collaboration with human power. The harmony of Under the Greenwood Tree is there because man has learnt to come to terms with nature, and the Rousseauistic references to nature in the later novels are controlled by an all-pervasive irony, and the idea of a benign nature is placed side by side with that of the cruel nature.

In the three novels under discussion Hardy is not concerned with the conventional nature as such. He depicts the cruelty and harshness in the physical world, but the emphasis is on what is the best that can be made of the given conditions and not on the worst that may happen. The personality behind and in nature, although emphasised in these novels, is in fact dominated by man. For instance, in A Pair of Blue Eyes Henry Knight hangs precariously on the Unknown Cliff. Hardy refers to “the other than unpoetical moods of nature” in this scene, but he also stresses that the hostile nature is mastered by man.

30 Beach, op. cit., p. 503. 31 Vide below pp. 298, n. 109; 300-1.
32 Holloway, The Victorian Sage, p. 252.
33 Morrel, ”Hardy in the Tropics,” pp. 18-9.
34 A Pair of Blue Eyes (London, 1912), Ch. XXII, pp. 240-5.
In Knight's struggle the emphasis is unmistakably on his ingenuity and grasp of reality. The glorification of human effort in his and Elfride's struggle against nature corroborates Hardy's respect for human nature and his regard for human work.

The influence of the positivists is quite apparent in *Far from the Padding Crowd*, although there is a difference between the position of the positivists and that of Hardy. The former laid emphasis on the social happiness and Hardy on the individual. When this novel was published, its author was taken to be George Eliot. Hardy thought that this mistake was due to his reading of Comte's 'Positive Philosophy'. It may be noted that both George Eliot and Hardy rejected the romantic idea of natural impulses. Both emphasised the need of control over nature for human happiness. The similarity between the wild nature of George Eliot's Maggie and Hardy's Bathsheba is obvious. Bathsheba's romantic attitude towards nature and consequent loss of touch with reality is stressed over and over again. Her vanity is part of her romantic nature, and she pays a high

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35 *ibid.*, pp.246 ff.
38 *ibid.*, p.98.
price for it. In submitting to Troy she submits to the 'arch-dissembler' nature that prompts her to love him. As a result, she has to suffer and finally to realise that her romance was an illusion.

In contrast to Bathsheba, Gabriel Oak has a firm grasp of reality. He regards nature only as a useful instrument. His flute-playing is symbolical of human power to control and use nature, and of his sense of realism as distinguished from the romantic music of the wind. It foreshadows his ability to adapt to a changing world. This realistic approach enables him to overcome the vicissitudes of life. The weakness of the romantic attitude and the strength of the realistic are presented through his treatment of Bathsheba's sheep. Unlike her, Oak does not have fanciful expectations from life and hence he has nothing to complain against. The infuriated universe is a reality to him and he feels that no useful purpose will be served by brooding over the flaw in nature's design. This implicit Comtian attitude helps him in making the best of his knowledge

39 Ibid., p.175. 40 Torrel, Thomas Hardy, p.61.
41 Far from the Madding Crowd (London,1912), Ch.XLI, p.311.
42 Ibid., Ch.II, p.13. 43 Torrel, Thomas Hardy,pp.97-8.
44 Far from the Madding Crowd, Ch.XXVII, p.287.
of nature's laws. For example, his action in the storm scene when he saves the ricks of Bathsheba's grain is in conformity with Comte's scientific view of nature. Oak reads the signs of nature and foresees the approach of foul weather and prepares for action accordingly. His close observation of nature has equipped him with the knowledge to anticipate the course of events. Different phenomena of nature such as the appearance of the toad and garden-slug and the disappearance of the moon are nature's warning of the beginning of foul weather. And Oak knows that all these forecast storm, rain and lightning. His use of the extemporised lightning conductor shows as to how man can control the sequence of the natural events and nullify the fury of the elements. Virginia Woolf's observation that "Nature in Far from the Madding Crowd is prolific, splendid and lustful and still the Great Mother of labouring man" is apt in the sense that nature is amenable to the nurture of man. But at the same time the picture of the infuriated universe against which Oak has to contend should not be lost sight of. Like Henry Knight, Oak struggles

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46 Far from the Madding Crowd, Ch. XXXVI, pp. 277, 278, 283.

against nature and comes victorious out of it, which is an
instance of Hardy's faith in evolutionary meliorism. 48

The theme of adaptability is continued in The Hand of
Ethelberta. The Darwinian struggle for survival is presented
through Ethelberta's struggle against her own nature. The
place of the external elements of nature is largely taken
by the impulses of nature and by the social environment.
The struggle here is seen in terms of a conflict between
the individual's happiness and natural impulses. But this
struggle is presented on a smaller scale than in the later
novels of Hardy, 49 and the stress here is on Ethelberta's
triump over nature, on the supremacy of her will over
emotion.

Early in the novel it is suggested that adaptation to
a changing world is a problem of the individual. Like Oak
and Knight, Ethelberta has to make an adjustment with the
circumstances of her life, which is symbolised by the duck

48 Morrel, "Hardy in the Tropics," pp.18-9; cf., The
character of Egbert Mayne in An Indiscretion in the life of
an Heiress, first published in New Quarterly Magazine
(1879), and written during 1867-58.

49 cf., "Lacking here [in The Hand of Ethelberta] is the
sense of desperate struggle for survival that is symbolised
by trees and vines in The Woodlanders (1887)." Clarice
Short, "In Defence of Ethelberta," Nineteenth-Century Fiction,
XIII (June,1958), p.50.
dodging a marsh-harrier. 50

Later in the novel Hardy uses two kinds of weather pervading nature at the same time 51 to suggest that Ethelberta's position is as precarious as that of Knight on the Unknown Cliff and of Oak in the stormy weather. It also suggests that there is margin for choice and action and intelligent intervention - a chance to "bend a digit the poise of forces, / And a fair desire fulfil." 52 Ethelberta is able to avoid a life of want and misery in not being duped by nature. She resists her love for Christopher Julian because she knows that both of them are poor and their marriage cannot bring happiness to them. She accepts the reality of life and adjusts herself accordingly.

In the novels discussed above Hardy presented man dominating nature. In the novels of the late '70's and '80's nature gradually plays a dominant role in human life, and the retreat of romantic naturalism becomes more pronounced. It was possibly a result of the growing temperamental gloom

50 The Hand of Ethelberta (London, 1912), Ch.I, pp.7-8; cf., "The duck is the symbol of Ethelberta herself, eluding the men and circumstances that will beset her." Morrel, Thomas Hardy, pp.97-8.

51 The Hand of Ethelberta, Ch.XXXI, p.258.

52 "He wonders about himself" in The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy, p.471.
of Hardy and the changes in the Wessex world. By the mid-seventies Hardy's rural community was confronted with a series of internal crises.\(^{53}\) Great changes were being brought about in the rural life by the Railways and the Industrial Revolution.\(^{54}\) The old basis of rural Wessex community was disappearing and, as the old order was giving way to the rational invasion in the form of urban intrusion into Wessex, the abiding power of social and emotional ties was systematically weakened.\(^{55}\)

Hardy was emotionally attached to his early associations,\(^{56}\) and it was natural that the changes in the scenes of his childhood days and the threats to the rural order of Wessex life left him with a sense of gloom and despair. It is judiciously observed that his deepening and harshening gloom was "not a mere self-ingraining philosophical bias, but something in most intimate relation to his vision of the passing of the old rhythmic order of rural England."\(^{57}\)

The use of landscape in the novels of this period reflects Hardy's response to the changes in the surrounding

\(^{53}\) Williams, op.cit., p.135.
\(^{54}\) Holloway, *The Charted Mirror*, pp.94-5.
\(^{55}\) Heisel, op.cit., p.23.  
\(^{56}\) Barber, op.cit., p.128.
\(^{57}\) Holloway, loc.cit.
world. In the gradual erosion of the old order he saw a confirmation of the scientific view of the cruel and indifferent order of nature in which the stronger devours the weaker. Now he is not so much concerned with the cruelty of the physical elements as with the order governing them. As the universe of the early novels moves towards the vision of later Hardy, he shows an increasing awareness of the irony in human situation, i.e., happiness is still possible in the scheme of nature but it somehow or the other eludes human achievement. It is a growing awareness of a want of adjustment of desire and aspiration with circumstances leading to frustration. It is because of this awareness that nature, presented as a background or personification in the earlier novels, becomes a character in the drama of human life and plays a decisive role in it.

The changed perspective in which nature is now seen is reflected in the difference between the worlds of Far from the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native (1878). In the former man is the master of nature and in the latter the position is reversed. The changeless Egdon Heath, a symbol of man's place in nature, is an "untameable,

58 Beach, op. cit., p. 508.
Ishmaelitish-thing - enemy of civilisation. " It "measures each character's acceptance of his earthly fate." Hardy has taken care to point out the vastness, and the changeless character of the Heath to suggest the insignificance of man in nature. Geologically speaking, the Heath might not be changeless; but the geological process is so slow that the change is almost imperceptible. Compared to the timeless order of nature the life of man is like a tiny spot of time in eternity.

Egdon has never submitted to any change aimed to be effected by man. Marks of human art are so absorbed in its colossal body that they only stress its inamenability and unresponsiveness to the human hand. Human appearance on this scene is accompanied with a sense of man's littleness. For example, the reddleman appears as a moving spot to Eustacia's father who is gazing over the tract he has yet to traverse. Thomasin is seen by Mrs. Yeobright as "a little figure ... diminishing far up the valley - a pale-blue spot in a vast field of neutral brown, solitary and undefended."  

61 *Return of the Native* (London, 1912), Bk. I, Ch. I, p. 5.
64 ibid., Bk. II, Ch. VIII, p. 187.
Egdon, as a symbol of nature, represents the indifference of nature's process in relation to the individual life. Its impersonal character underscores the predicament of man. He is caught between the 'irrepressible New' and the changeless, pre-historic Heath. He can neither escape it nor can his attempts to come to terms with it succeed. Eustacia, with her hatred of the Heath, and Clym, a product of the Heath, suffer equally. Eustacia, in her hope to escape the Heath, marries Clym who has come to stay on there. Both of them suffer for their opposite aspirations, and their love for each other becomes part of the irony of nature. Love, like the Heath, is an impersonal force, which is suggested by the similarity between the growing passion of Clym for Eustacia on the one hand, and on the other by the passage of time from winter to spring and the accompanying signs of life on the Heath:

The month of March arrived, and the Heath showed its first signs of awakening from winter trance. The awakening was almost feline in its stealthiness.  

In Hardy's view fate or destiny means the course of events in human life as determined by the antecedents in the chain of causality. It means more than the deterministic order of the physical world as conceived by the scientists.

65ibid., Bk.III, Ch.III, p.225.
Hardy's conception of fate incorporates also the events which are determined by the circumstances that are not a 'rational' part of the chain of causality. He uses chance as an element in nature to highlight the irrational order of the events in human life. It determines the course of events in an unpredictable manner and creates an impression of determinism which crosses the boundary of science. It illustrates the unintelligibility and impersonality of the processes of nature, for it is an element over which man can have no control, and more often than not it upsets human calculations making the human will ineffective.

In The Return of the Native chance plays an important role in human destiny. It is "a key to the awareness of things" in which the well-intentioned actions of Diggory Venn lead to much suffering and misunderstanding. It is a matter of chance that Wildeve meets Christian when the latter is carrying the guineas for Thomasin and Clym from Mrs. Yeobright. Mrs. Yeobright had tried to do justice to Thomasin and Clym by giving them their shares of the money. Wildeve wins it from Christian at a game of dice. And Venn happens to be present there and wins the entire money from Wildeve, and "in his anxiety to rectify matters, had

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placed in Thoraasin's hand not only the fifty guineas which rightly belonged her, but also the fifty intended for her cousin Clym...it was an error which afterwards helped to cause more misfortune than treble the loss in money value could have done.\(^\text{67}\) When Mrs. Yeobright next meets Eustacia, she inquires if Wildeve had privately given her money which had been intended as a gift to Clym. Eustacia thinks that she is being accused of receiving dishonourable presents from Wildeve. As a consequence, the already strained relations of Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright become more bitter. After this when the latter goes to her son's place, he is sleeping. She is seen by Eustacia but, as Eustacia is conscious of her bitterness, she thinks it better that Clym open the door for his mother. Eustacia is under the impression that Clym is awake by then. Thus the door remains 'closed' and Mrs. Yeobright takes her 'journey back in despair'. It shows the role of chance in human life and the failure of human intention in the face of a careless nature. The cruelty of chance is intimately linked with the cruelty of the physical world. The elements of nature join hands with the emotional despair of Mrs. Yeobright:

Mrs. Yeobright's exertions, physical and emotional, had well-nigh prostrated her; but she continued to

\(^{67}\text{Return of the Native, bk.III, Ch.VIII, pp.273-9.}\)
keep along in short stages with long breaks between... 

The sun had now gone "far to the west of south and stood directly in her face, like some merciless incendiary, brand in hand, waiting to consume her.\textsuperscript{58}

The sight of the sunlit silvery form of the flying heron symbolises the indifference of nature to human suffering and also adds to the sense of man's bondage to the physical condition. Hardy's reflection on the human condition in relation to nature is in keeping with the spirit of the tragic drama of human life in the novel:

That old-fashionèd 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.\textsuperscript{59}

Though not much concerned with nature in Trumpet Major (1880), yet Hardy finds an opportunity to satirise the romantic view of nature as a figment of imagination:

As Nature was hardly invented at this early point of the century, Bob's Mathilda could not say much about the glamour of the hills, or the shimmering of the foliage, or the wealth of the glory in the distant sea, as she would doubtless have done had she lived later on.\textsuperscript{70}

Similarly, the reference to nature's vagary in A Laodician (1881) reflects the anti-romantic view of nature:

\textsuperscript{68}ibid., Bk.IV, Ch.VI, p.342. \textsuperscript{59}ibid., Bk.III, Ch.I, p.197. \textsuperscript{70}Trumpet Major (London, 1912), Ch.XVI, p.142.
Nature had done there [on the face of Paula] many things that she ought not to have done, and left undone much that she should have executed.  

Hardy, unlike Meredith, deduced gloomy conclusions from the teachings of modern science. With Hardy the evolution of thought and sensibility is the main cause of untold suffering in both man and the lower animals. Man knows because he has a mind, and the more he knows of the universe the more he becomes conscious of the insignificance of human life. In *Two on a Tower* (1882), nature's crushing machinery is presented as working through the human mind within and also through the wind without: "The cruelty of human desire is inextricably mixed with the cruelty of the natural laws." Man is swayed off his feet by his desires as he is carried by the blustering wind from the west. Stars are impersonal monsters continuing their journey in space regardless of the lamentable human situation on this planet. Similarly, human aspirations as part of human consciousness assume proportions of impersonal power, for the aspirations develop regardless of the possibility of their fulfilment.

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72 Beach, op. cit., p. 518; Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 337. This theme is later fully developed in *Jude* (vide below pp. 303 ff.).
73 *Two on a Tower* (London, 1912), Ch. IV, pp. 31-3.
74 *ibid.*, Ch. XLI, p. 312.
In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) the idea of the defective working of the evolutionary process is extended to the imperfection of the law governing the process itself. The defect in evolution is related to the want of intelligence in nature. That is to say, the working of the process is defective because it is not governed by an intelligent power. In Hardy's view it is a proof of the want of an intelligent order in nature that the biological evolution is not followed by a corresponding intellectual evolution. For instance, the hereditary continuity on the biological level is not necessarily accompanied by that on the intellectual level. Elizabeth has inherited her mother's physical features but is ignorant of certain facts known to her mother:

Susan's former spring-like specialities were transferred so dexterously by Time to the second figure [Elizabeth], her child, that the absence of certain facts within her mother's knowledge from the girl's mind would have seemed for the moment, to one reflecting on those facts, to be a curious imperfection in Nature's power of continuity.  

It is ironic that what Henchard feels as "some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him" is in fact an

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76 *ibid.*, Ch. XIX, p. 128; cf., "Henchard himself comes to feel that some intelligent power 'is bent on punishing him' and 'is working against him'." R. C. Schweik, "Character and Fate in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XXI (Dec., 1966), 253.
unconscious force governing the events of life. It is shown in his blunders when he reveals his affairs with Lucetta to Farfrae. Again, later Henchard reveals his past to Elizabeth to claim parenthood and discovers that he has no kinship with her. The events that he thinks are doings of some intelligent power have developed naturally. That is, there is no scope for deriving an intelligent order out of them.

The indifference and cruelty of physical nature is an expression of the unconsciousness of nature. It is a disturbing and perplexing factor in nature's world that it can at once adopt a kindly as well as indifferent attitude to man, and its kindly elements can be hostile and the hostile ones kindly. Hardy's comment on the peacefulness of nature in contrast to the wilful hostility of mankind and the possible reversal of this position, in the scene after the sale of Susan, points to the serious doubt about an intelligent power governing the universe:

In presence of this scene after the other there was a natural instinct to abjure man as a blot on an otherwise kindly universe; till it was remembered that all terrestrial conditions were intermittent, and that mankind might some night be innocently sleeping when these quiet objects were raging loud. 77

Nature controls human life at every level but she is

77 Mayor of Casterbridge, Ch. I, p. 18.
herself too strong to be amenable to human efforts. Even Farfrae realises the limits of human art in controlling nature. As he tells Henchard about the spoiled wheat: "To fetch it back entirely is impossible; Nature won't stand as much as that."  

Weather plays a large role in human life; it affects life as well as the means of living. Ironically, Henchard is ruined by the prospect of good harvest, which brings down the price of grain and reduces him to the animal level to struggle for survival. In this struggle he somehow always takes the wrong step thinking all the time that he is taking the right one. It leads to his desire for death, which also grows out of the realisation that there is something wrong in the laws of the universe:

Part of his wish to wash his hands off life arose from his perception of [Nature's] contrarious inconsistencies...

In the last period of Hardy's career as a novelist his vision of life grew into a definite philosophy. It

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78 ibid., Ch.XXII, p.158. 79 ibid., Ch.VII, p.51.


81 Mayor of Casterbridge, Ch.XLIV, p.318.
was a period when England was passing through a series of unprecedented 'movements'. Great changes were taking place in the ideas and the life of the people:

Things were not what they seemed... The Eighteen-Nineties were the decade of a thousand 'movements'. People said it was a period of 'transition', and they were convinced that they were passing not only from one social system to another, but from one morality to another, and from one religion to a dozen or none.\(^{82}\)

The moral basis of civilisation was being questioned. The spirit behind this mood was that of dissatisfaction with the conditions of life and, in some cases, with the life itself. The questions that were directed against religious and social systems were now being directed against the existence itself. And the doubt about the order of the universe was giving way to the doubt of the universe itself. That is to say, a philosophical attitude was growing that was concerned not so much with whether the conditions of life were satisfactory as with the idea whether life itself was desirable.

In this atmosphere of philosophical fatalism and also that of growing material pressure\(^ {83}\) it was natural to Hardy's temperament that his tragic impressions of life became a


\(^{83}\) Ibid., p. 64.
distinct conviction, and what was a series of impressions assumed gradually the proportions of a philosophical system. As it is clear from his last novels, and from his notes and letters, he had been giving serious thought to his ideas and views of life. His readings of Schopenhauer intensified his pessimistic vision of existence. "Fundamental to Hardy's view of the world is his pervading deterministic conception of chance and fate." That is to say, the frustration of human will is determined by the events beyond human control, and this frustration leads to the suffering in life.

This pessimistic vision of life is reflected in Hardy's views of nature. The fact that the human race is too developed for its corporeal conditions points to the related fact that life is a kind of mistake "disturbing the blessed calm of non-existence." In Hardy's view nature exceeded

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85 Schopenhauer had observed that pain was the positive feature of existence and pleasure a mere absence of pain (T. Baile's translation of Complete Essays of Schopenhauer, New York, 1942, Bk. V.).

86 Brogan, op. cit., p. 280.

87 vide F. E. Hardy, op. cit., pp. 149, 163.

88 Complete Essays of Schopenhauer, Bk. V, p. 4.
her mission in creating the sensitive beings.\textsuperscript{89} He felt that the more highly developed a creature is the less he is fitted to the conditions of life, and his chance of happiness is minimised to the degree he has evolved from the lower to the higher order. Thus Hardy related the tragedy of human life to man's sensitivity and consciousness.\textsuperscript{90}

This attitude adds a new dimension to Hardy's view and treatment of man and nature in \textit{The Woodlanders} (1887). In the earlier novels he had shown man suffering at the hands of nature. In this novel he shows that both man and nature, i.e., the entire sensitive creation, suffer at the hands of a third power. This third power is referred to as the Prime Cause, God, or Nature. Hardy's view here becomes dialectical, for he portrays man and nature as creation, suffering at the hands of nature as creator. Weber's observation that "Nature is not the malign cause of human troubles" and his conclusion that "the view expressed in \textit{The Woodlanders} is that nature suffers with and like man"\textsuperscript{91} calls for this

\textsuperscript{89}F.E. Hardy, op.cit., p.218.

\textsuperscript{90}cf., Hardy's observation about Dorsetshire labourer: "It is among such communities that happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be longest postponed." Harold Orel (ed.), \textit{Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings} (London, 1957), p.169.

\textsuperscript{91}C.J. Weber, \textit{Hardy of Wessex} (New York, 1940), p.113.
distinction between nature as creation and nature as the cause of creation.

In the earlier novels man was shown as nature's victim and his suffering was mostly related to his physical environment. He did not share his suffering with the other creatures; he was rather singled out for his suffering. In *The Woodlanders* the suffering of life extends to other creatures as well and it is shown as emanating from the fact of existence itself. Man and nature suffer because they exist, no matter what the conditions of life be. Tragedy is inherent in the very nature of the woodlanders and the woodlands. The human as well as the animal (and also the vegetative) world is involved in the Darwinian struggle for survival.

People who suffer most in *The Woodlanders* are also the persons who have "an intelligent intercourse with Nature." It becomes one of the ironies of life that man suffers whether he cares for nature or not. And the suffering nature is as much a victim of this ironic situation as man is. Old South's dread of the tree is almost of a supernatural order. If the tree were left to itself, its presence

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92 *The Woodlanders* (London, 1912), Ch.I, pp.4-5.
93 *ibid.*, Ch.IV, p.24; vide Williams, op.cit., p.157.
94 *The Woodlanders*, Ch.XLIV, p.399.
would have killed the old man and the consequent suffering of Marty South and Giles Winterbourne would have followed, and when the tree is felled, the same consequences ensue. The tree thus symbolises the dialectics of nature. It is nature suffering at the hands of man and also nature at whose hands man and nature suffer.

Man's suffering is greater because he is also the victim of his emotions. As Fitzpiers tells Mrs. Charmond, if they had continued to meet in the past, it would have ultimately ended in "sorrow and sickness of heart... . That's the end of all love, according to Nature's law. I can give no other reason."95 The truth of his reading of nature's law is borne out by the lives of Grace, Marty and Giles. The inherent suffering in life is also evinced in the "sudden lapse from the ornate to the primitive on Nature's canvas."96 Imperfections in nature's plan are visible everywhere.

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95 Ibid., Ch. XXVII, p. 232; cf., "The hungry hearts and wild desires come to man by nature and are themselves a part of 'the world like this.' Man must always suffer, for he must always desire beyond the possibility of fulfilment. It is Nature's law. Hardy, like Fitzpiers, can give no other reason." W.H. Hatchett, "The Woodlanders or Realism in Sheep's Clothing," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 1 (December, 1954), p. 261; cf., Swinburne's denunciation of the gods for creating human desires and emotions that cause much suffering to man. He refers to "the supreme Evil, God" as one "who makes desire and slays desire with shame" (Atlanta in Calydon in Swinburne's Collected Poems, World's Classics, 1939, pp. 256–7).

96 The Woodlanders, Ch. VII, p. 58.
The weaker suffer at the hands of the stronger, and the stronger in turn suffer at the hands of the weaker. And the process of evolution is retarded by the working of nature's own laws. As Hardy observes on the growth of the fungi on the trees:

> Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen at the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled the promising sapling.  

Thus it is seen that there is a marked shift in Hardy's attitude towards life and nature in *The Woodlanders*. A comparison between his next novel, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid* (1883) will show the degree of this change. All the potentialities of the tragic fate of Tess are present in the life of Margery Tucker, but she is saved by the "self-withdrawal of an external intervention" which is always threatening her happiness. Hardy underscores its unreal nature in the title of the story - it is romantic adventures of a milkmaid.

The implication of the withdrawal of Count Xanten from

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97 *Ibid.*, p.59; cf., E. Hardy’s perceptive comment on this passage: "A new and ominous note has crept into the attitude to nature in English literature" (*Thomas Hardy*, p.216).

Margery's life is that the Margery Tuckers are saved only in the dreamworld of magic. In *Tess* there is no possibility of the withdrawal of the destructive force because it is inherent in the system of life.

In *The Woodlanders* Hardy had related man's suffering to the destructive principle in nature. In *Tess* he traces the process of the working of this principle more minutely, and presents nature as a self-destroying principle within the individual. In *The Woodlanders* nature was presented mainly as a presence; in *Tess* it intermingles with the action of the character and works through it.

In *Tess* Hardy traces the suffering of the individual to the desire of happiness. This desire is of a deterministic order, for one must desire whether he wishes or not. It is an impersonal force and a self-destroying principle because it works from within. *Tess* is a victim of 'sexual selection' and suffers more because of the process at work within her than because of the forces working from outside. She is doomed by the fact that she is physically beautiful and emotionally sensitive. As her mother remarks, Alec is

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100 cf., "Hardy indicates that in *Tess* there is something self-destroying." Holloway, *The Charted Mirror*, p. 90.
"all afire wi' love for her" because of Tess' beauty.\textsuperscript{101} Besides, the destructive principle works at much deeper level in Tess. With the lapse of time, she is able to forget her moral sorrow, but nature, which had continued its process during her earlier sorrow, gives rise to a fresh one "which knew no social law."\textsuperscript{102} The recuperative power of nature has been imperceptibly vitalising Tess, and the desire for happiness is renewed. As Clare observes, she becomes a "fresh and virginal daughter of Nature."\textsuperscript{103} They are drawn together by their passion. Tess is not conscious of the possible suffering to which her children would be subject, for she is overpowered by her vitality: the conscious is defeated by the unconscious. Though she had been taught by her experience that non-existence was better than any kind of existence, "yet such is the vulpine slyness of Dame Nature, that...Tess had been hoodwinked by her love for Clare into forgetting it might result in vitalisation that would inflict upon others what she had bewailed as misfortune to herself."\textsuperscript{104}

That the government of the universe is carried on without any regard to the fate of the individual is evident

\textsuperscript{101}Tess of the d'Urbervilles (London, 1960), Ch. X\textsuperscript{VII}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{102}ibid., Ch. XIV, p. 111. \textsuperscript{103}ibid., Ch. XVIII, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{104}ibid., Ch. XXXVI, p. 277.
from the element of chance in life. The fact of birth itself is governed by it. As Abraham notices, Tess' horse is killed because "we be on a blighted star, and not on a sound one." Nature runs a blind course in the process of creating and destroying. In the search for happiness, it more often than not misleads its creatures. Tess' meeting Alec is an instance of nature's "ill-execution of the well-judged plan of things."

Besides the dialectical view of nature in which the process of creation is also the process of destruction, Hardy relates the questions of suffering and happiness to social and natural morality. What is observed as contradiction and ambiguity in his attitude to nature is in fact a complex and ironic vision of life. Commenting on nature in the last paragraph of Chapter XIII of Tess, Gregor has observed an ambiguity in Hardy's presentation of nature and written: "This somewhat Rousseauistic view of nature contrasts strangely with the determinist one."

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105 ibid., Ch.IV, p.42. 106 ibid., Ch.V, p.53.


Hardy's purpose in the passage in question is to use nature as a criticism of society in the sense that the natural order is more conducive to the happiness of the individual than the social one. He made no secret of his preference of nature to society. But it does not follow that he pleaded for

109 This has been noticed by Gregor, but when he refers to the two aspects as contradictory, he isolates the passage from the larger narrative trajectory. David Lodge agrees with Gregor's approach: "Ian Gregor has commented acutely on the contradiction that exists in Tess between a 'Rousseauistic view of Nature' as essentially life-giving, healthy, opposed to the inhibiting, destructive forces of society and convention which alone generate human misery, and the 'deterministic' view which Hardy runs alongside it" (The Language of Fiction, London, 1970, p.172). But seen from the perspective of the narrative contrasts in which nature is presented, it will be clear that the Rousseauistic view is applied in a relatively limited context and the deterministic view extends to the total vision of the novel. For instance, nature in the seduction scene of Tess is neutral, which is similar to the indifferent process of Tess' vitalisation (vide above p.296). But seen in the limited perspective of Tess' life at a particular time, her seduction and the ensuing pregnancy are referred to in Rousseauistic terms because her moral suffering arises from her conscience and the social conventions and not from nature. Similarly, in the later situation, her sexual impulse is presented as destructive because it gives rise to fresh desires whose fulfilment had caused her so much suffering; cf., "...The contrasting significances of Nature, the creator and the destroyer, are shown in Tess herself, in what is perhaps the most striking of Hardy's narrative contrasts" (Morrel, Thomas Hardy, p.89).

110 cf., "That which, socially, is a great tragedy, may be in nature no alarming circumstance." F.E. Hardy, op.cit., p.218; "...Marriage should not thwart nature...when it does thwart nature it is no real marriage, and the legal contract should therefore be as speedily cancelled as possible." Hardy and F.W. Pinion (eds.), One Rare Fair Woman (London, 1972), p.149; "Where there is opposition between natural impulse and restrictions of law and convention, natural impulse is assumed to be right [in Hardy's novels]." Beach, op.cit., p.505.
the human conduct to be modelled on nature or that he took
nature as a moral norm as such.  \footnote{It is crucial to an
understanding of Hardy's approach to morality that it is
judged by the standard of the happiness of the individual.
All that Hardy says in the passage is that, as Tess has
violated no law of nature, she is in harmony with it and
the social laws that condemn her are out of harmony. But
it does not imply that this harmony suggests 'nature's holy
plan'. The Rousseauistic view is based on the presumption
that man would achieve happiness by modelling his conduct
on nature. Hardy does not make any such presumption, and
does not create an impression that Tess' harmony with nature
is necessarily a condition of happiness. He in fact draws
no conclusion and merely states that Tess' action in fulfilling
her sexual impulse is in conformity with a law of nature.  \footnote{Here it may seem that "Hardy uses nature as a moral norm

\footnote{cf., "It is true...that to model our conduct on
nature's apparent conduct... can only bring disaster to
humanity." F.E. Hardy, op.cit., p.314.}

\footnote{cf., "Tess' seduction follows a law of nature, as
does her ensuing pregnancy, and one theme of the story is
the tragic incompatibility between social convention and
doing what comes naturally. By way of their bodies and
in particular their sexual desires men and women are part
of nature, driven by the same energies which lead to the
growth of plants and animals." Miller, op.cit., p.80.}
and at the same time regards nature as amoral. All notions of value are relative. Inasmuch as the natural order is conducive to the happiness of the individual, nature is presented as a moral norm. But as the natural order is inimical to the individual's happiness, it is presented as lacking a moral order.

Another significant thing to be noticed in this dual perspective in which nature is presented is that, as in The Woodlanders, here also Hardy associates nature with creation as well as with the law of creation. Tess's 'rally' and her beauty in the Froom Valley are described with an almost romantic indulgence, and her desire for happiness is presented as part of nature's creativity. But the sexual impulsion motivating the body to seek its fulfilment is presented as a blind and destructive force. Hardy's picture of Froom Valley is symbolical of the

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114 Morrel, "Hardy in the Tropics," p.10 and Thomas Hardy, p.90.

115 This blind force is not a transcendent power literally existing outside the created universe, that is, nature. It is in fact, like the 'It' of The Dynasts, immanent in nature. cf., "The supreme power is immanent rather than transcendent...it is ...a blind force sweeping through the universe...shaping things in patterns determined by its irresistible energy." Miller, op.cit., pp.14-5; vide F.C. Hardy, op.cit., p.320.
dialectics of nature. It is apparently a Wordsworthian picture, but the character of the valley is limited by its relation to the hills behind. Its precarious existence is underlined by Hardy: "Here in the valley, the world seems to be constructed upon a smaller and more delicate scale." The larger landscape by which it is surrounded and the historic perspective in which it is viewed show the limitation of "this fertile and sheltered tract of country" in relation to the cosmic process. Hardy is also aware of the process of devitalisation inherent in the existence of the valley. It is a composite picture that at once relates it to the past and the present placing it in the broader and the complex perspective of the existence and the process underlying it:

In those days, and till comparatively recent times, the country was densely wooded... . The forests have departed but some old customs of their shades remain.

In his last novel, Jude the Obscure (1895), Hardy's gloomy vision of life and nature comes full circle. The evolutionary meliorism of the early novels, which had been giving way to the sense of tragedy in life, is finally supplanted and replaced by an unequivocal pessimism.

References to an indifferent order of nature of the earlier novels are missing here. The order of nature which Hardy presents in this novel is positively a cruel one and extends to society as well.

Hardy had been for quite some time occupied with the idea that there was no justification for creation. In Jude the questions whether man is in harmony with nature or not and whether the laws of nature are preferable to those of society are now of a peripheral significance. He is now concerned with a much more fundamental question, that is, whether existence is justified and desirable. Like Hamlet, the question is 'to be or not to be'.

As Hardy looked at life from the point of view of the individual's destiny, he sought a justification for creation in terms of the individual's happiness. In Jude the picture of man in relation to nature and society lays emphasis on pain as the inevitable experience of life, which casts serious doubts on the 'meaning' of life.

The positiveness of pain is related to the helplessness of

119 There is a reference to this aspect of Hardy's thought in Tess. He remarked about the life of the Durbyfield children that if they had been given a choice between being and non-being, they would have most probably chosen the latter: "...Six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such harsh conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbyfield" (Tess, Ch.III, p.32).
human will in the deterministic order of the universe.
Since the early '80's Hardy had been occupied with a philosophical scheme later adopted as the framework for *The Dynasts*. Frequent references to automaton, somnambulist state, inevitable antecedent and non-rationality in relation to man and universe lead to the conclusion that Hardy believed, in a philosophical sense, that the Prime Cause was unconscious. In *Jude* this Prime Cause is 'nature' as a blind, motivating force of the universe. As human will is a conscious power, there is an 'incommunication' between man and nature. Consequently, nature acts without reference to the human will. That is to say, the individual will is helpless in causing nature to be concerned with it.

The universe of *Jude* is a deterministic one in which both man and animal are involved in the Darwinian struggle for survival. Like Darwin, Hardy's emphasis is on the competition and not on co-operation between the individuals in this struggle. Early in the novel Jude observes "the flaw in

120 F.E. Hardy, op.cit., pp.152,184,186,225,309.

121 This idea became the philosophical basis of *The Dynasts*. Hardy's hope of the 'Unconscious Will of the Universe' growing aware of itself and becoming ultimately sympathetic (ibid., p.335) was a cry in wilderness and "is not to be regarded as an element in Hardy's philosophy" (Beach, op.cit., p.517).

the terrestrial scheme by which what was good for God's birds was bad for God's gardener." Mutual butchery, he perceives, is nature's 'horrid logic'. It makes him doubt life's purposefulness. The older theory of evolution had asserted "the connection of all life and left room for the conception of co-operation." The humanists like George Eliot and Comte had made use of this concept in reconciling man and his environment by relating it to the social goal of the individual. Jude does not feel that there is any scope for co-operation in the order of nature:

That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony.

In *Jude* nature has a multi-dimensional presence. Man's fate is determined by the laws of external nature at the level of natural selection, i.e., survival, and by the law operating inside at the level of sexual selection, i.e., reproduction. He is as helpless before his sexual impulse as before the stronger in the struggle for survival. For instance, after Sue's marriage to Philotson, Jude thinks that by staying near her he may be able to overcome his passion. But he "did not pause to remember that ..."
insulted Nature sometimes vindicated her right in such circumstances." 127 Jude and Sue try to stay apart, but "other forces and laws than theirs were in operation." 128 Suffering from a hereditary curse of temperament, they are victims of "their supreme desire...to be together - to share each other's emotion and fancies and dreams." 129

In a corresponding picture of man's relation to society it is shown that cruelty in society is part of the universal order; natural determinism becomes social determinism. Human suffering in society is related to the conflict between the laws of survival and reproduction. It stresses the fact that in Hardy's vision of life "an inevitable conflict between will and the brute, irrational nature of things is envisaged as the very essence of the human condition." 130 Jude and Sue are led by their sexual instinct to violate the conventions of society, which is a violation of the survival instinct, because it incapacitates them to adapt to their environment. In violating the social laws they have, in a sense, exercised their will. But this violation itself has been prompted by their impulse for happiness. Thus the exercise of their will becomes an expression of a natural impulsion. Sue's earlier

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resistance to the sexual instinct was a prompting of the survival instinct. Her frigidity is a form of passivity in conforming to the survival instinct. It shows that there is little scope for the freedom of action and the human will is ineffective in determining man's destiny.\textsuperscript{131} As Sue realises after the death of her children, it was a mistake that she thought it to be "Nature's intention, Nature's law and \textit{raison d'etre} that we should be joyful in what instincts she afforded us."\textsuperscript{132} She and Jude thought of making a 'virtue of joy' believing that natural instincts were given for this purpose. But finally they discover that there is no foundation for their belief in nature.

Sue finds that neither society nor nature cares for the individual.\textsuperscript{133} Philotson's observation on human condition points out the ineffectuality of human will: "Cruelty is

\textsuperscript{131} It was often emphasised by Hardy that passivity was an essential feature of life. Criticising the quasi-scientific system of human history, in which "events and tendencies are traced as if they were rivers of voluntary activity," he observed that they were "in the main the outcome of \textit{passivity} - acted upon by unconscious propensity" (F.E. Hardy, \textit{op.cit.}, p.152). In another place he wrote, "We are continually associating our ideas of modern humanity with bustling movement, struggle and progress. But the more imposing feature of the human mass is its passivity" (E. Hardy, \textit{Thomas Hardy's Notebooks}, p.30).

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Jude}, Pt.VI, pp.408-9.

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{ibid.}, Pt.IV, p.256; Pt.V, p.371.
the law pervading all nature and society and we can't get out of it if we would.\textsuperscript{134}

The conflicting laws of nature reflect Hardy's lack of faith in the evolutionary purpose of nature.\textsuperscript{135} It also shows the anti-evolutionary element in nature, for the non-cooperation between the laws of nature retards the process of evolution. It is further revealed in Hardy's attitude to the evolution of consciousness and sensibility, which leads to the lack of adaptability. The evolution of intellect, in Hardy's view, has reduced the human power of adaptability because man, as a conscious being, is not satisfied with the givenness of the circumstances and must aspire for something more.\textsuperscript{136} He is tormented by his unassuaged feelings and feels alienated from a better life by the conditions of his existence, which in turn weakens his capacity to adjust to these circumstances. For instance, Jude has ideals too high to be realised in his small

\textsuperscript{134}ibid., p.384.

\textsuperscript{135}cf., "Hardy is for the most part doubtful of the possibility of any man's contribution to the progress of the race... Heredity, he finds, works according to mechanical principle, beyond the control of human will... Nature shows no intention of improving the race by the process of reproduction." Beach, op.cit., p.518.

\textsuperscript{136}"Romanticism will exist in human nature as long as human nature itself exists." F.E. Hardy, op.cit., p.147.
surroundings. His ideals bring him in conflict with the society and thus lead him to suffering. His sufferings in turn demolish his visions. 137

Similarly, Sue's sufferings are related to her highly developed sensibility. A comparison between her refined nature and the animal nature of Arabella on the one hand, and their life on the other will make it clear that higher sensitivity means greater suffering. 138 Jude's consolatory words to Sue after the death of their children are surcharged


138 cf., Mary C. Richards' observation on Hardy's ironic vision: "...Perhaps most crucial in the assignment of ironies is this inconsistency, namely, 'that men feel, and puppetry remain!'" ("Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, IV, June, 1949, p. 34); cf.,

O God, that creatures framed to feel
A yearning nature's strong appeal
Should writhe on this eternal wheel
In rayless grime;

(Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy, p. 577).

Although Hardy was critical of Nietzsche (vide F.E. Hardy, op.cit., p. 320), he seems to agree with the latter's idea that nature is more cruel to her nobler creatures. Hardy's view that "this planet did not supply the material for happiness to higher existences" (ibid., p. 218) compares with Nietzsche's Aphorism: "I do indeed find the cruelty of Nature which is so often referred to; but in a different place: Nature is cruel, but against her lucky and well-constituted children" ("The Will to Power" in The Complete Works of Frederick Nietzsche, Edinburgh, 1910, Vol. I, p. 160).
with nature's irony:

It is bereavement that has brought you to this! Such remorse is not for you, my sensitive plant, but for the wicked ones of the earth - who never feel it.  

The course of events in the novel runs contrary to what Jude believes; the sensitive plant suffers more than the coarse one.

In the world of Jude the absence of happiness is an inevitable reality which implies the absence of meaning in life. It is symbolised by Father Time's suicide which is an expression of "the coming universal wish not to live." Thus Hardy's vision of cruelty in nature and his scepticism about existence are interrelated. The vision of a blind force sweeping through the universe is presupposed in various pictures of human suffering and the cruelty in the world of nature. This blind force is the ruling Power and Fate of Jude.

Thus it is seen that Hardy's vision of life developed along the ironic pattern of nature in the sense that the human will and resistance of the early novels take the form of an irresistible force in the later novels. In the first group of the novels he is mainly concerned with

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139 *Jude*, Pt.VI, p.417.  
140 ibid., p.406.  
141 ibid., Pt.III, p.156; Pt.VI, pp.408-9.
nature outside man, in which there is scope enough for the exercise of human will and for the freedom of action. In the second group the emphasis shifts gradually from the physical phenomena to the order of the universe. It is a deterministic order in which the scope for free action is minimal. The impressions of the cruel and inimical features of nature are translated in terms of a cruel order, which leads to the rejection of the moral and spiritual order in nature. In the third group of the novels the cruelty in the order of nature extends significantly to the social order as well. It makes the human will inoperative, and what appears to be the freedom of action becomes in effect an impulsion of the irresistible force of an inevitable precedent. 142

In all the novels of Hardy nature is presented from the point of view of the individual's happiness. The natural order is seen in terms of the provision for the fulfilment or otherwise of man's natural desire. Hardy's rejection of a providential design in nature is based on his perception that the scheme of things is not designed with a view to create conditions of happiness. He uses

142 cf., "Each man for Hardy remains free until his death, but when the moment of retrospective illumination comes, he sees that he has all long been the victim of an unconscious power which has used his free acts as part of the irresistible forward movement... ." Miller, op.cit., p.203.
the evolutionary theory and the idea of deterministic order to reveal the want of an intelligent power governing the universe. To him the purposiveness and the justification of creation are to be tested by the standard of the individual's happiness. As he does not find the order of nature conducive to this happiness, the idea of a purposive and creative nature is rejected. The scientific concept of nature is taken to its extreme rationalistic conclusion. His approach to nature is opposite of the Christian religious approach. The early theologians and successive Christian philosophers used nature to support the idea of an infinite and good God. Hardy, on the contrary, uses nature to deny the existence of God. To him the idea of a good, intelligent 'First Cause' cannot be derived from nature. His idea of the First Cause as a blind force is the reverse of the Christian concept of God. His view of nature is a culmination of the reaction against Romantic naturalism as well as religious spiritualism.

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143 In a letter written in February, 1808 and addressed to Hardy, Rev. Dr. A.B. Gosart enumerated some of the horrors of human and animal life, particularly parasitic, and added, "the problem is how to reconcile these with the absolute goodness and non-limitation of God." Hardy replied that he was "unable to suggest any hypothesis which would reconcile the existence of such evil... with the idea of omnipotent goodness" (F.E. Hardy, op. cit., p.205).