PART THREE - VISION
7. HUMAN SITUATION

For me, when my affections first were led 
From kindred, friends, and playmates, to partake 
Love for the human creature's absolute Self, 
That noticeable kindliness of heart 
Sprang out of fountains, there abounding most, 
Where sovereign Nature dictated the tasks.

Poets have tried to establish a relationship 
between man and the unknown mysterious universe. The 
romantics commonly saw men in the context of great cosmic 
and historical moments. They tried to link him with an 
"infinity", an entity greater than himself. He was not 
considered as merely a part of romantic landscape. Man's 
capabilities were given colour and acclaim. 'Reason', 
'Imagination', 'Intuition', 'Feeling', 'faith', were 
recognized as man's unique powers. An immensity was 
observed in romantic man as in 'Nature'. The human 
imagination was the vessel through which the infinite or 
Eternal expressed and became conscious of itself. Hence 
Blake, Shelley and others spoke of man as "The Divine 
Image". Goethe gave his Faust a titanic role but 
Schopenhauer, the modern could depict a blind human will 
achieving only unhappiness.
Human goodness was nothing more than a name, and the universe a vast expanse, dead indifferent huge body, black, empty and spiritless. The whole formulation of faith and hope on which life's course was set crumbled and fell flat. Faith was no longer nurtured by religious faith.

A grief without a pang, void, dark and drear, A drowsy stifled, unimpassioned grief, Which finds no natural outlet or relief In word or sigh or tear. 2

Man has been puzzled about his relation to nature throughout the history of thought. That man is a part of the vast design, was an accepted idea. But his relative position in the cosmic scheme has been a controversial matter.

Man is the main interest in all Hardy's works - poems, lyrics, ballads, epics and his novels included. His main themes are of human experience, in conflict or in harmonious relation with nature. Man is his main protagonist. Hardy rarely indulges in pure descriptive Nature poetry sketching rivers, woods, birds and clouds. He wrote in his journal on September 28, 1877.
An object or mark raised by Man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature. Hence clouds, mists and mountains are unimportant beside the wear of a threshold, or the print of a hand. 3

A typical instance is his poem "To My Father's Violin" where he describes a desolate scene. The natural features are in a splendid form. But without the man rendering the violin there is only a silent vacancy.

Similarly, Robert Frost is preoccupied with man's lot. The strained wail of human suffering appeals to him. Frost is haunted by nature's cruelty and sorrow barricaded in the human heart. He states that he, 'had only three or four pure nature poems. The rest were human portraits with nature setting'. 4 Frost generally uses nature as a milieu, or the setting for human action. The relationship between man and nature, interested him. Many of the poems describe the interaction, conflicting or communicative between man and nature. Frost does not
try to identify man with nature in any mystical way. The distinction between the two remained sharp and clear. The various images, of plants, woods and spring pools, are brought in as parables of the human situation. Man rarely finds responses from nature. In his individual self-styled interpretations of nature's moods and meanings, he faces chaos and disorder.

Hardy and Frost relentlessly try to estimate man's proper stature in the vast design of the cosmos. Hardy is incapacitated by his limited outlook, restrained responses, and hopeless pessimistic trends. Frost is undaunted in the face of perils. He faces obstacles bravely and relentlessly searches for a meaningful interaction with nature. It may be a "momentary" or a short-lived communion. Nonetheless, in its mere presence, the light of hope is kindled. Frost encounters nature from the other side of a barrier. Nature and man are generally found in confrontation with each other. Nature, is mightier and subtler and generally the winner. However a meaningful interaction between man and nature is not altogether absent.
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1

Man suffering among awful Powers and Forms
Of this I heard, and saw enough to make
Imagination restless; nor was free?

Hardy's more controversial, yet better known view
is that any individual man or woman is insignificant
because a given life, span is limited in relation to the
immeasurable geological time or universal eternity.

Before the birth of consciousness, all went well. Every
natural phenomenon like birth, death, sickness and decay
were accepted as normal events. Man was not unduly
stung by natural processes. But once, consciousness was
awakened in man, his rational powers began to analyse
nature and human relevance in the cosmic scheme. What
he found did not comfort him, nor was he assured of
nature's guidance.

*But*

*Before the disease of feeling germed,*
*And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong;*
*Ere neuroscience shall be affirmed*
*How long? how long?*

("Before Life and After" ll 13-16, CPH, p.277).
Hardy cannot agree with Maeterlinck's view that nature may practice a scheme of morality, justified by nature's own standard. Hardy analyses Maeterlinck's apology and finds it to be a fantasy. Such a morality seen (according to Maeterlinck) in a certain perspective or by Nature's own standard is felt to be justified. In Hardy's range of vision, Nature is unlimited in power, vast, arbitrary and dispassionate in the dispensation of natural laws causing human suffering and anguish. Man's evolution is integrated with the total evolutionary process of Nature. His rational power or his consciousness alone isolates and distinguishes him. Hardy's main concern is to find a meaningful relation between man and nature. There is a perpetual struggle of human will against an unconscious will of nature.

WHENCE comes Solace? Not from seeing what is doing, suffering, being, Not from noting Life's condition, Not from heeding Time's monitions; But in cleaving to the Dream,

("On a Fine Morning" 11 1-5, CPH, pp. 129-30). Man in Hardy's view, is reduced to an insignificant portion of the whole. Cruelty, disease, poverty, suffering are the consequences of his continuous struggle against
nature. In "The Wind's Prophecy" (CPH, pp. 494-95) there is a sinister note in the replies of the wind which symbolizes nature, in a threatening aspect. In the violent disorderly cosmos through which man moves, the human will seems to be ineffective. The pervasive power speaks of 'wrecks', and belies down with black alarms. The loud shrieks of the wind drown the meek protesting human voice. The background is dark and ominous.

Yonder the headland, vulturine,
Snoreis like old Skrymer in his sleep,
And every chasm and every steep
Blackens as wakes each pharos-shine.


In "A Man Was Drawing Near to Me" fear mounts with every description of the night and the dark moorland. 'There was a rumble at the door, / A draught disturbed the drapery' (11 25-26, CPH, pp. 579-80).

Hardy's "Convergence of the Twain" illustrates man's vain bid to conquer nature. Nature emerges out of the conflict victorious. Nature is shown to be mightier than man. The theme of the poem, in part is "The vanity of human wishes". The great ship represents the peak of man's ambition, skill and final attainment. It is his indirect bid to win the battle against nature.
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But the ship planned by 'The Pride of Life' finds its final rest in the solitude of the sea. The rapid progression of the first two short lines in each stanza is suggestive of a sense of frail instability of the human world. ('In a Solitude of the sea/Deep from human vanity'). In sharp contrast, is the slow and heavy march of the long, last line - an ironical commentary from Hardy, 'And the Pride of Life that planned here, stilly couches she'.

The irony is in the contrast between the majesty and the pomp of the ship planned, and its destiny among the crawling slimy, grotesque and dumb sea-worms. It is the irony of fate and man's importance against an extraneous nature. There is also a contrast in the foreknowledge of man and that of fate. Man's vanity coupled with his ignorance of what is to come does not foresee the disaster. Whereas nature or the Immanent Will,

Prepared a minister mate
For her - so gaily great -
A shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

("The Convergence of the Twain" ll 19-21, CPH, pp. 306-7).

Human life as governed by nature is full of ineffable sadness. A pitiless destiny surges through...
human masses ruining mirth and good feelings. Man's irremediable woes destroy his faith in nature. 'Life's pending plan' is muted by 'skies spouting fire and blood' and nations engaged in bitter quarrels. An unborn pauper child is warned by the compassionate poet.

"Sleep the long sleep:
The Doomsters heap
Travails and tears around us here,
And Time-wraiths turn our song singing to fear."

( "To an Unborn Pauper Child" ll 3-6, CP, pp. 127-8).

Thus consciousness, which elevates man in the evolutionary scale, itself becomes the source of man's sorrow. His awareness of the futility of struggle against nature, makes the suffering keener. Nature remains impenetrable, unknowable, and human beings are caught in the intricate web of her schemes. A unity thus abides Hardy's perception of the 'the Prime Force or Forces'. The poem "The Impercipient" epitomises Hardy's assessment of man's humble situation.

"for the charge that blessed things
I'd liefer not have been,
O, doth a bird deprived of wings
Go earth-bound wilfully?"

Man in the new world, a virgin country, was far more exposed to the rigours of nature than his English counterpart. Almost every diurnal and nocturnal effect in that wild new world associated man and nature. Man is acutely aware of his physical surroundings. The forests, rivers and hills determined the condition of his survival chances. The Americans at the time of transition were still engaged in taming the wilderness. They had to work hard to wrest a living. Nature under such circumstances was looked upon from a utility point. It appealed to them as something to be exploited for human use and gain, rather than a source to inspire poets of a means of communion with the cosmos. In their long struggle with the untilled land, the Americans were left with an inward gloom, an utter darkness, cynicism, bitterness and disillusion.

Frost's view of human nature is that the individual man is small, lost and unimportant in the midst of a vast and changing universe. In the poem "Storm Fear" nature is invested with a sinister, misanthropic motive. The fear of being wiped by hostile nature is explicit. The storm rages in the dark against man. Trapped by wind, snow and sleet, the speaker with his small family doubts
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whether he has enough fortitude in him to survive nature's fury.

Those of us not asleep subdued to mark
How the cold creeps as the fire dies at length-
How drifts are piled,
Dooryard and road ungraded,
Till even the comforting barn grows far away,
And my heart owns a doubt.

("Storm Fear" 11 11-16, PR, pp. 9 - 10).

Where Nature is portrayed with a hostile motive, man is indicated by 'fear' as a motif. 'Fear' is shown with another emotional attitude 'doubt'.

While man's existence is conditioned by nature, nature exists independent of man's needs or hopes. Man's relationship with nature and universe is uncertain. If the universe is purposeful and ordered, man remains in ignorance of its direction or purpose. Man's position becomes a question of survival in an unpredictable universe. Thus, Frost like Hardy does not agree with the romantic notion of finding nature as a 'Nurse, Guide and Guardian'.

Frostian man is a solitary figure braving alien entanglements. In "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things", Frost shows the cleavage between the human and natural world.
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The barn opposed across the way,
That would have joined the house in flame
Had it been the will of the wind, was left
To bear forsworn the place’s name.

("The Need of Being Versed in Country Things" ll 5-8, PRF, pp. 241-42).

A landscape radiating loneliness and fear appears in
the poem "The Impulse" PRF, pp. 128-29). The wife is
alienated from nature. 'It was too lonely for her
there,/ And too wild',

Frost like Hardy holds the natural world at its
most impersonal and unfeeling, unable to express
kinship and unwilling to return love. One of the
salient features of Frost’s poetry is the recognition
of the limitations of man. In "A Leaf Treader", Frost
shows man as a fugitive, hurrying towards destruction
of the self and others.

All summer long I thought I heard them threatening
under their breath.
And when they came it seemed with a will to
carry me with them to death.
They spoke to the fugitive in my heart as if
it were leaf to leaf.
They tapped at my eyelids and touched
my lips with an invitation to grief.

("A Leaf Treader" ll 7-10, PRF, pp. 297-98).
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"An Old Man's Winter Night" (PRF, p. 108) delineates the terror of isolation and the terror of isolation and the woe of a universal alienation in the old man's loneliness. Frost does not expect any response or sympathy from nature. He acknowledges nature's remoteness in the poem, "The Most of It" (PRF, p. 538). Man craves for a meaningful and companionable response from nature. He cries for "counter love". But what he gets is "a mocking echo of his own". The unfulfilled intention is the essence of human life.  

Like Hardy, Frost is sadly conscious of the transience of human life, time's limitations and man's aspirations and the inevitable finality. Many of his best lyrics such as "Bereft" (PRF, p. 251) "Desert Places" (PRF, p. 296) "Once By the Pacific" (PRF, p. 250) and "Out, Out —" (PRF, p. 136) grow out of this knowledge of men's transitoriness, the realization of the rush of everything to nothingness - the end of a season, the end of a farm, or a family or a village culture.

There is a limit to our time's extension. We all are doomed to broken-off careers. And so's the nation, so's the total race. The earth itself is liable to the fate of meaninglessly being broken off. 

In Hardy's perception of nature there is an inevitability, a pre-destined state which man cannot avoid. The forces of nature are described as 'sinister, malign and evil'. In Frost, a singular 'violence' masks his descriptions of nature. In the poem "The Flood", the malevolence, and savage brutality are given effective expression,

'It breaks away in some new kind of slaughter. We choose to say it is let loose by the devil; But power of blood itself releases blood. It goes by might of being such a flood Held high at so unnatural a level.'

("The Flood" ll 4-8, PRF, pp. 254-55).

Unlike Hardy, who vainly tries to match man against nature, ('The Convergence of the Twin' CPH, pp. 306-7) already discussed in this chapter), Frost understands the definite existence of barriers. Man is alone against colossal forces of nature. Nature remains a permanent 'other' impersonally unified beyond man's ability to comprehend it. Frost adapts the Emersonian image of nature dwarfing man. The sky dominates by its 'starlight and the moon light'. The human light is 'flickering' and 'pathetic against' the huge night.
The earth had a single light afar,
A flickering, human pathetic light,
That was maintained against the night,
It seemed to me, by the people there,
With a God forsaken brute despair.
It would flutter and fall in half an hour
Like the last petal off a flower.

("On the Heart’s Beginning to Cloud the Mind" ll 6-12,
PRF, pp. 290-92) (italics added).

Frost understands the fact that man must accept
his diminished position in the scheme of things. The
routine repetition of cheerless, dreary acts form the
common pattern of human life. There is no exciting
moment of revelation in the human encounter with nature.
The mysteries remain as mysteries and man remains limited
in his vision. Yet Frost is not completely lost in
darkness. He asks man to show courage and defiance
in the face of an antagonistic nature. He feels that
though nature is mostly hostile, it is not totally
ever and malevolent. There are instances of nature
making gestures of friendliness.

A great wave from it going over them,
As if the earth in one unlooked-for favour
Had made them certain earth returned their love.

("Two Look at Two" ll 40-42, PRF, pp. 229-30).
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Man and nature exist to confront each other. Frost insists on man's separateness and nature's unsurmountable barriers. Nature is always a superior force and man must finally submit to nature's tremendous power, displayed eventually at his death. Man and nature embody in their separate entities, elements of antagonism and respect. Tension, dark conflicts and passionate involvements are common features of such a confrontation.  

The confrontation is of different kinds. Three poems, "Mowing" (PBF, p. 17), "Mending Wall" (PBF, pp. 33–34) and "Stopping By woods on a Snowy Evening" (PBF, p. 224) reveal the actual encounter with nature at the point of contact. Man uses a long scythe beside the wood. It cuts the hay. In this way the speaker is engaged in honest interaction with nature. The speaker comes in contact with nature represented here by hay. The scythe whispers to the ground, probably commenting on the 'Sun' or the lack of sound. But the poet finds a peaceful encounter in the sequestered wood between man and nature, conducted in the most cordial atmosphere. The most exciting movement in nature is expansion of its horizons. Man's sensory perceptions are gratified in his total involvement with
nature. The moment of touch or contact between the
human and non-human powers are important. Nature’s
stubborn solidity is juxtaposed with man’s permanent
fascination for nature. The poem "Wood-Pile" (PRP,
pp. 101-2) signifies man’s encounter with nature on a
hostile basis. It becomes the emblem of man’s confrontation
with nature. A neatly cut and piled wood-pile, a
monument of human skill, lays wasted on a sequestered
wood-land. But in such a state nature finds a
peculiar utility. The wood-pile warms the frozen
swamp around with an invisible and unlit fire of decay.
In another poem "To Earthward" the same principle and
essence of contact is illustrated.

When stiff and sore and scarred
I take away my hand
From leaning on it hard
In grass and sand,

The hurt is not enough;
I long for weight and strength
I feel the earth as rough
To all my length.

("To Earthward" ll 25-32, PRP, pp. 226-27).

Hardy accepts the endless process of flux in
which human life is swept away. He depicts the humble
human efforts against nature’s ‘thwarted purposing’. Such a tragic delineation is shown in "Tenebris" I,
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Black is night's cope;
But death will not appal
One who, past doubtings all,
Waits in unhope.


Frost, on the other hand, craves for a sense of stability and of crystallization from the flux of things. The confrontation between man and nature is in itself a kind of triumph and a token of man's defiance.

ii

Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours, I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands; but this I feel,
That from thyself it comes that thou must give,
Else never canst receive. 14

Having established man's limitations in terms of time, eternity and space, the poets turn to the harmonious relation that could exist between the separate entities. Man should acquaint himself with the existent barriers between him and nature. He should desist from tampering with nature ("A Star In A Stoneboat", PRF, p. 172). It would be perilous to trespass the barriers. Nature, as seen by Hardy and Frost, does not represent any moral
phenomenon, but a primordial force, an untillable and unmanageable "other" factor. An attempt at achieving stability and ease the tension between two kinds of forces is the eternally recurring natural cycle and the unalterable finiteness of men.

Hardy and Frost insist on affirming life. The Immanent Will, moves in its own orbit, inscrutable, but there are "moments" of vision. In Frost, conflicts and tension are solved in a momentary stay against flux between the opposing forces of the human and the non-human, personal and impersonal, concrete and abstract. The traditional significance of man and the modern scientific reductive view of man are matched. Sublime harmony at rarer moments rule over harsh dissonances.

The poets are sensitive naturalists, whose eyes, ears and senses are well-tuned. Hardy's unflinching integrity of response to the physical world is transformed into a sense of wonder. In "I Watched a Blackbird" (CH, p. 866) is seen the speaker's enjoyment of unadulterated joy. A simple common blackbird in its prosaic activity of building a nest is projected as one of nature's wonder. The exuberance of spring's stirrings, and the instinct for nesting can inspire men to rise out of lethargy. In such indirect ways
nature responds to man. Men, while working with nature find themselves in a strange unison, bound in a common bond. This is the essence of Hardy's 'The Pine Planters'!

We work here together
In blast and breeze;
He fills the earth in,
I hold the trees.

("The Pine Planters" ll 1-4, CPK, pp. 271-73).

The love of nature in the form of a tuft of flowers binds together two strangers in a common bond. The speaker and his predecessor sow the grass separately. They do not meet. Nature, represented as a leaping tongue of blem, 'a stalk of red-flower', draws the two farmers together. Their admiration of a rare beauty, a bright splash of colour in an otherwise gray mown field make them two companions. ('And feel a spirit kindred into my own;/ So that henceforth I worked no more alone;')

("The Tuft of Flower", PRF, pp. 22-23). Similarly, the irresistible, universal, spontaneous tendency to find pleasure and harmony with nature prompts Hardy to join a cuckoo in his greatful admiration of a bounteous summer day.
THIS is the weather the cuckoo likes
And so do I;
when showers betumble the chestnut spikes,
And nestlings fly;
And the little brown nightingale bills his best,

("weathers" ll 1-5, CPH, p. 563).

At such moments there is no conflict, man and
nature are in tune with each other, 'Man's joy reflects
nature's bounty. There is a perfect accord of mood,
tone and setting. The natural scenic background
synchronizes with the human emotional uplift. A
youthful Hardy sets out for Cornwall, where he meets
his wife is full of the joy of a budding love. The scene
described in the poem reflects the poet's mood, 'The
rime was on the spray/ And starlight lit my lonesomeness'
("When I Set Out for Lyonesse", CPH, p. 312).

Frost's "A Servant to Servants" (PR?, pp. 62 - 68)
illustrates nature's soothing role. Deep and sad is
the servant's lot of imminent lunacy. Yet she has a
moment in the midst of drudgery to admire nature. She
clings desperately to the only aspect of beauty in her
otherwise dreary existence. The glimpse of a lake
which meets her melancholic gaze through the kitchen
window separates her from the dreadful fate of inherited
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madness. Nature is a panacea to her turmoil and frayed nerves, inspiring her to face yet another day with fortitude.

It took my mind off doughnuts and soda biscuit To step outdoors and take the water dazzle A sunny morning, or take the rising wind About my face and body and through my wrapper,

("A Servant to Servants" ll 26-29, PRF, pp. 62-68).

That man and nature can have a meaningful coexistence is seen in 'A Young Birch'. A man spares a young sapling of birch which grows into a healthy tree, heavily covered with 'leafy arabesque.' It becomes an ornament in the life of a man who spared it. A destructive impulse is altered into an aesthetic act. The Georgic instinct becomes a pastoral motive and man and nature are bound by strings of comradeship,

The most efficient help you ever hired Would know that it was there to be admired, And zeal would not be thanked that cut it down When you were reading books or out of town. It was a thing of beauty and was sent To live its life but as an ornament.

("A Young Birch" ll 17-22, PRF, p. 375).

Nature is an inexorable well of beauty and terror. Man should acquaint himself with the verities of existences. Hardy believes in the eternity of life force. Winter
and autumn may deny life. But in humble creatures, the instinct to breed and regenerate is strong and surfaces with the spring tide. 'In this clime at pairing time, / As soon as eyes can see here' a black bird is merrily calling his mate. ("The Spring Call" CPH, pp. 244-45).

While in the realm of the humble creatures, hope is renewed every spring, man-kind is hobbled down in a stupor. Even nature is dismayed at man's coverings.

*by your madnesses
Capping cool badnesses
Acting like puppets
Under Time's buffets;

("Thoughts at Midnight" 11 12-15, CPH, p. 836)

The Immanent Will or nature is described as 'a rapt Determinator that neither good nor evil knows' (The Dynaste II, vi, 7, p.47). But cognition stirs in man, a sentient being. In the animal kingdom in the evolutionary process, the development of consciousness is an important factor. Hardy anticipates a gradual spread of consciousness through more and more living beings. He asks, 'Men gained cognition with the flux of time!/ And wherefore not the force informing them,'
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(Af. Sc. The Dynasts, p. 703) Consciousness once awakened, the Mind would see its creation as 'ill-contrived', a mild-eyed prescience pondering over life's loom, may set things fair. Mankind may witness a change for the better 'And Right shall disestablish wrong/ The Great adjustment is taking place' ("There Seemed a Strangeness" 11 15 - 16, CPH, p. 725). Man's intelligence induces the great mind (Nature) to awaken into perception. With an awakening of consciousness nature may become sensitive to the sufferings of the creations and may mend her ways, with such an optimistic note of a harmonious relationship between men and nature. Hardy ends his The Dynasts,

\[
\text{Of the ages}
\]
\[
\text{Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered}
\]
\[
\text{From the darts that were}
\]
\[
\text{Consciousness the Will informing, till}
\]
\[
\text{It fashion all things fair}
\]

(The Dynasts, Afterscene, p. 707).

Frost, like Hardy recognizes the limitations of men. Nature gives man a chance to defy. Man understands the boundaries separating him from nature, but
learns to treat them as essential guidelines. A violent blizzard may rage, but for a man determined to get home, it is not an insurmountable barrier.

The snow blows on him and off him, exerting force downward to make him sit astride a drift, imprint a saddle, and calmly consider a course. He peers out shrewdly into the thick and swift.

Since he means to come to a door he will come a door, ("Willful Homing" ll 5-9, PRF, pp. 341-42).

Man lives by a sense of responsibility, a sense which enhances humanity's survival of chances. In "Brown's Descent", Brown acquiesces to the adverse conditions when he is lost in his tract. He yields to natural forces which are stronger and formidable. His tenacity takes him on a long route. "He bowed with grace to natural law" ("Brown's Descent", PRF, pp. 137-42). It is not a surrender, but a matter of accepting the human condition. Man's true potential lies in his acceptance of his limitations.  

Frost does not generally try to bring an interaction of nature and man. Nature remains separated from man, on the other side of an invisible barrier. Frostian man remains content with an occasional glimpse of the mystery as in "Two Look At Two" (PRF, pp. 229-30) and
"For Once, Then Something" (PRF, p. 225). The theme of the poem "All Revelation", is the subject and object relation in human perception. The first two stanzas portray the defeat of the mind in its inability to find answer. Following this is the central image of the Geode, and the confrontation of mind (humanity) with it (nature).

But the impervious geode
was entered, and its inner crust
Of crystals with a ray cathode
At every point and facet glowed
In answer to the mental thrust.

("All Revelation" 11 11-15, PRF, pp. 332-33).

In the active confrontation of mental thrust, matter emerges as superior. The literal meaning of the context is the continuity of mind and matter, humanity and nature as a part of the design which relates both man and nature to the source, the divine or archetypal. Spirit and matter are interchangeable and made a unity of the whole. A singular experience of design unites them. The "All" of "All Revelation" stands in sharp contrast to the all omnipotent and awesome 'all' of The "Most of it" (PRF, p. 338).
Man can resist the pull of nature. Acceptance and resistance are two important facets of man's favourable interaction with nature. Nature tries to overwhelm man in countless ways. It at times hurts those who love it. ("The Most Of It" PBF, p. 338).

The immediate natural world is set towards chaos, tossing man in its path, if unresisted. "The Universal cataract of death/ That spends to nothingness and unresisted" ("West-Running Brook," PBF, pp. 257-60). The natural world is impersonal, unfeeling as against the emotionally controlled human world. Invisible barriers separate them. The natural barrier is colossal and insurmountable, like the distance between stars and other celestial bodies and man, or the vast, fathomless ocean and man. The distance becomes a void which man continuously tries to cross and occupy. The very stars by their sheer remoteness remain beyond human reach. Nature's unconcern and indifference is another barrier. Nature, through inclement weather, poor harvest and other natural calamities, surrounds itself with a barrier in the immediate surroundings.

The barriers can also exist between man and man. "Human nature in peace and war" is the underlying idea in most of his poems. The most outstanding example,
of such a trait is "The Mending Wall" (PRF, pp. 33-34)
Each man is, secluded in his own individual sphere,
persistently resisting all attempts to trespass upon
his privacy. In "Two Tramps In Mud Time", the speaker
lives quite alone in his realm uniting his 'avocation
and vocation'. To him splitting the oak "splinterless
as a cloven rock" is an art, born out of 'a life of
self control'. He has successfully combined an
aesthetic craving with an ethical need. He firmly
believes,

Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes.

("Two Tramp In Mud Time" ll 69-72, PRF, pp. 275-77).

The two tramps on the other hand feel differently.
'Th' thought all chopping was theirs of right'. Being
professional lumberjacks is combined with their need for
making money. Silently they look on, quietly impressing
on the speaker's mind that he has no right to play,
'With what was another man's world for gain'. The
speaker himself confesses, 'My right might be love but
theirs was need.' Still he does not yield. Natural
laws in the form of barriers are inexorable. In his acceptance of limitations he is superior to other creations.

Courage is another device with which man combats nature. Boldness is needed to retain man's position in the cosmic scheme. Frostian man lives by encountering nature in the form of obstacles in the immediate surroundings. He exhibits finer qualities of wisdom and valour in formulating a proper strategy for a successful encounter with nature. Human sight is limited, as can be seen in the poem 'Neither out Far Nor In Deep' (PPF, p. 301). The image of a ship revealed by degrees, raising its hull in the distance and the reflection of a 'standing gull on the wetter ground' emphasises the final conclusion, 'They cannot look out far./ They cannot look in deep'. The image of people looking blankly at the sea symbolises human predicament, and the uncertainty of man's position in the cosmic scheme:

So Frost concludes,

To overcome the fear within the soul
And go ahead to any accomplishment.
Courage is what it takes and takes the more of
Because the deeper fear is so eternal.

The preacher Meserve in "Snow" (PRF, pp. 143-156) insists on completing his mission while a blizzard is raging. He defies the weather, and in that very act courageously faces, resists and conquers nature.

The romantics celebrated oneness with nature, mingling with the great spirit of things. The existence of barriers between man and nature were decried. In establishing and reiterating the chasm separating the two, human and non-human, man and nature, Hardy and Frost decisively deviate from the romantic tradition. Hardy within the monistic concept finds humans differing from nature by their consciousness, as against an unconscious nature. Frost insists on barriers and holds that the acceptance of the boundaries minimise the friction between the two realms.

Man is the main theme, the main substance and the meaning of their nature poetry. External nature is only a milieu, a setting and a backdrop against which man is seen in his eternal struggle for survival. Nature in the romantic poets' sense was of 'essences unchanged by man'. Nature was personified in the objective visions of space, river, brook and the mountain. But in Hardy and Frost nature poetry has come
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to be understood essentially as efforts to define "man's proper relationship to nature". As Reuben A. Brower recalls a Frostian remark made in 1921, "we have had nature poetry for a hundred years. Now we must have the human foreground with it." All their observations of the impersonal things as storms, stars, are related to their observations to some insight into humanity.

Nature, or the vast cosmos is seemingly unfeeling and unresponsive. In man's confrontation with nature, moments of anguish, spiritual doubt and alienation are common. Cruelty, disease and suffering are consequences of the general struggle. "The fact of life with dependence placed/ On the human heart's resources alone," ("A Plaint to Men" CPR, pp. 325-26).

Man thrusts into the phenomenal world his mind and creates his own sense of value. Hardy and Frost project man persistently coping with the condition of his existence, imposed by nature.

And life is too much like a pathless wood Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs Broken across it, and one eye is weeping From a twig's having lashed across it open.

("Birches" 11 44-47, PRF, pp. 121-2).
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The poets try to bring man and the farthest reaches of nature together. Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" (CPH, pp. 306-7) illustrates such a sad and futile attempt. The ship, symbolizing human effort and skill, is destroyed by a tremendous collision with an iceberg, symbolizing nature's handiwork. The result is disastrous. Similarly in Frost's "A Star in a Stoneboat" (PR, p. 172) a meteorite brings havoc and destruction.

In "Moon Compasses" (PR, pp. 300-1). Frost suggests though moon can be adopted into the human family, stars only bring disastrous repercussions within an intimate human range. The mountain in "Moon Compasses" stands exalted measured in the moonlit compass rays.

In the various confrontations between man and nature, sometimes they meet as equal forces leading to a harmonious mood and action. In Hardy's 'Beany Cliff' (CPH, pp. 350-51) there is a perfect accord between the scene described, and the happy mood of the man and woman projected in the foreground.
The pale mews plained below us, and the waves seemed far away.
In a nether sky, engrossed in saying their ceaseless babbling say,
As we laughed light-heartedly aloft on that clear-sunned March day.

("Seeny Cliff" 11 4-6, CHH. pp. 350-51).

In Frost's "In Winter In the Wood's" (PRF, p. 470), man's identification with nature is complete and the two work in perfect harmony as two integrated halves of a whole. A lonely man, chops one single maple tree. The poet is certain that there is no defeat for nature in one tree's overthrow. Nor is the man defeated. Here, one tree and one man are locked in a vital struggle which ends in the man's becoming a partner to nature, and not a foe. In the ecological balance the changes brought by human agents are comfortably absorbed into the larger process. Neither man nor nature emerges as diminished or defeated.

In the process of his diversified encounters with nature, man also emerges heroically, by his patience and his endurance. Thus in the "The Subalterns" (CHH. pp. 120-21) Hardy points the various agents of nature like the leaden sky, the North Wind, sickness and death as compassionate and helpless. Man calmly...
surrenders to the inevitable with rectitude.

And life to me had less
Of that fell look it were ere when
They owned their passiveness.

("The Subalterns" ll 18-20, CPH, pp. 120-21)

Frost insists on a resistance in man’s heroic struggle with nature. The tension between man and nature becomes exciting, harmonious or tension-wrought, where nature assumes a hostile attitude, man becomes heroic by his power to resist, and realizes the contrarieties and ultimates incumbent in nature.

Some spirit and stand simply forth,
Heroic in its nakedness,
Against the uttermost of earth.

("The Trial By Existence" ll 42-44, PAF, pp. 19-21).

In the poem "West-Running Brook" (PAF, pp. 257-60) the brook flows in an unusual westerly course. Like the brook, the speaker goes by contraries. The black stream striking an obstacle flings back one white wave. As it throws backward on itself, while it falls, so most of it is always raising a little. In this backward motion toward the source against the stream man shows
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his power of resistance. Life itself counts deeply, originating in an instinct of resistance against destruction. The universal cataract of death would inundate everything if 'unresisted' by 'some strange resistance in itself'. In the very drift of nothingness is found a counterdrift of renewal and resurrection. Against the black stream, a white wave appears; and against the current of decay, an impulse of life arises as a barrier.

The most common occurrence in these confrontations is the victimisation of man. Hardy's fatalism finds full expression in such instances as in 'I Said to Love' (CHH, p. 114). "Man's race shall perish, threatenest thou, / Without thy kindling coupling-vow?" Frost's "The Census-Taker" pictures a devastated wasteland where even the trace of humanity has been wiped out.

I came as census-taker to the waste
To count the people in it and found none,
None in the hundred, miles none in the house,

('The Census-Taker' ll 9-11, PRF, pp. 174-76).

The intellectual ferment and religious uncertainties of the transitional years provoked an
ambivalent reaction in their concept of humanity and its place in the universe. Expanding horizons of science, vast improvements of astronomical devices, and the decline of Christianity were sources of distress and hope. The poets were by turns haunted by fear and inspired by courage, exultation. Then general mood of the era was a mixture of frustration and anticipation, loneliness and a sense of universal brotherhood. Such contradictory and conflicting tendencies form the basis of their monistic and dualistic philosophies of nature.
NOTES


7. Many other poems are formed on the senseless futility of human situation. "At a Lunar Eclipse" (CPH, p. 116) speaks of the existence of the "continents of moil and misery", "Bartholomew at Vauxhall" (CPH, pp. 567-68) and "A Wet Night" (CPH, p. 276) divulge, the human plight struggling under unfulfilled ambition and inclement weather. "And night and storm were foes indeed to fear".

8. I have prized Clark Griffith's Statement which while analyzing the American view of nature observes that, "At a time when the European had sensed a wider and wider cleavages between Nature and himself; the American was scrutinizing events in Nature, and finding them to be unquestionably there and unfailingly meaningful."


11. Philip Gerber, brings out Frostian theme of human alienation lucidly in his book R. Frost where he says, 'Loneliness and the fear of loneliness are entrenched in the human heart. They are lodged thereby man's knowledge of his isolation on a whirling planet poised precariously in space. They are anchored by man's awareness that he is no more than grass for the mower.' Philip L. Gerber, R. Frost (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1966), p. 147.

12. Of (i) Robert M. Rechnitz, writing on "The Tragic Vision of R. Frost" (Robert M. Rechnitz, "The Tragic Vision of R. Frost" (Mississippi, 1974), pp. 139-145, says, "With"The Wood-Pile" Frost amplifies the idea of nature's unremitting warfare upon mankind. The poem achieves its end by contrasting the puniness and specificity of man with the featureless ambience of nature."


16. A Geode is a piece of stone whose inside is hollow and lined with.


18. See, "The Star-Splitter" (PRF, p. 176) "The Freedom of the Noon" (PRF, p. 245) and "Canis Major" (PRF, p. 261) also indicate a calamity when man and nature are brought together.

19. Cf T.S. Eliot says in the same vein

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
Old fires to ashes and ashes to the earth
Which is already flesh, fur, and faeces,
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.


20. See R.G. White's comments on History and Hardy's work in his book, T. Hardy and History, where he says, 'A reading of Hardy's work leaves the impression that men are indeed nobler than the unconscious cosmos which crushes them and that loving kindness is his favourite world, will prevail. And at the same time as man is made more tragic he is made more noble by Hardy's vision of him against the backcloth of history.'