PART TWO - EXPRESSION
4. TREATMENT

"Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes"!

- John Keats

In the foregoing Chapters the poets' concept or view of nature has been given prime importance. The critical evolution of their poetic art with special attention to a few significant images, the pattern of imagery and pastoral lore would be analysed in the ensuing Chapters. The concept of a mute, insensate nature has brought in its wake - a new expression. The ruminative visions of immanence have vanished. Pan is no longer sought in the shrine of Flora or in the mirth of May. External nature, perceived by the eye does not inspire modern poets. The transitional years steeped in the turmoil, prompted a plain, unembellished style. Hardy and Frost introduced a new simplicity, a plainness and a sharpness into nature poetry. Their diction is devoid of grandeur and a melancholic sobriety is discerned in their mood. The flatness of their expression approximates to the spoken dialect of rural homes. They reckon austerity and sincerity of presentation as having a majesty of their own. Nature poetry was retrieved from a stale insipid
state of romantic mysticism. Nature as conceived by them is realistically brought out in crisp, terse tones. These poets are not didactic in their portrayal of nature. Frost stays ambiguous with an ironic detachment.

An outstanding feature of their nature poetry is their close, keen observations of nature. In their youth, they were intimately connected with Nature. Every subtle nuance in nature’s mood was familiar to them. They perceived beauty in ugliness. The picturesque and the grand are forsaken as also an illusive reverie. Nature was a psychic almanac, a static panorama. Hardy feels that true art lies in, ‘making (Nature’s) defects the basis of a hitherto unperceived beauty, by irradiating them with the light that never was on their surface, but is seen to be latent in them by the spiritual eye’.

Accuracy and brevity mark their work. Nature in the pure countryside terrains of Dorset-shire and New England surrounded them and endowed them with a sharp vision which missed nothing. Hardy valued observed-facts for their authenticity. Like his
"A Sign-seeker" (CPH, p. 49-50), he is delighted by hard facts. He never believed in anything beyond the visual. He confesses his inability to see across 'a hazed lacunae'.

Frost believes in factual statements. In "Hyla Brook" (PRF, p. 119) he declares that, 'we love the things we love for what they are'. Like Frederick Harrison and Thomas Hardy, Frost believed that all knowledge was based on observed facts. Reginald Cook reiterates Frost's powers of perception.

"What I had discovered this afternoon on the mountains was something I associated with Thomas Hardy. Whenever, I stopped at the cabin to talk with Frost, about local matters, flowers, trees, birds, streams, mountains, he had been informed. His replies were like annotations to the poems. When friends sat before the hearth at Max Gable, T. Hardy too talked about simple country things, the habits of owls and Wessex weather. Simple country-things. His comments could serve as foot-notes for chapters of the alfresco Frost, an outdoor man too. "He was a man who used to notice such things, "- Natural things for instance -" But Frost's realism is not an unimaginative mechanical reproduction of facts, a mere news reporter's colourless statement. He himself classifies the realists and identifies his own class.
4. Treatment

'There are two types of realists, there is the one who offers a good deal of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real potato. And there is the one who is satisfied with the potato brushed clean. I am inclined to be the second kind.'

Thus precision and realism are the prominent characteristics of poetic expression. The analysis that follows, examines basic attitudes which determined their lyrical mood, poetic diction and the pattern of imagery in their verses. To the conventional images they have given a new dimension. Trees, Birds, flowers, seasons, stars and moons have been poets' favourite symbols for a long time. But Hardy and Frost have given a new impetus to such ancient symbols in their evocations. In terms of imagery Hardy's grave positive, stark delineations tend towards the static and convey a sense of finality. There is a stillness and lifelessness about them. In "Beyond the Last Lamp" (CPH, pp. 314 - 15) a spiritless, desolation unfolds in the rain washed streets and in the lifeless preambulation of fervourless lovers. In "Logs On the Heath" (CPH, pp. 489-90) a tree is left by the shifting times tide, 'Sawn, sapless, darkening with seet.'

On the otherhand, Frost's images throb with life, He selects scenes and themes which symbolize action.
His best delineations are packed with experience, his best images are continuously creative ("The Tuft of Flowers" PRF, p. 22) "Mowing" (PRF, p. 17) "Going For Water" (PRF p. 18).

Most of the images are natural images, suggested by their keen and painstaking observation of nature. Their recording is precise. They do not heighten charm. They are meticulous about saying no more than they mean. In "Pedigree" (CPH, p. 460 - 61) clouds are called green rheumed" and the moon is compared to a "dolphin's eye". These are natural symbols. In Frost's "Design" (PRF, p. 302) the natural symbols, a normal blue-heel-all flower, dimpled albino spider and a moth are participants of a bizarre nocturnal ritual. The incident is described in a way to inspire terror. But the symbols in the strange drama, are all ordinary occurrences.

They adopt a chiaroscuro method to intensify the effect. In the spectrum of symbolic interpretation counter images are used. The images evoke opposing moods and altitudes. In the subtle rhythm of the poem and the alternate use of light and dark symbols heightens the poetic effect. In his "An Old Man's Winter Night"
(FRF, p. 119) Frost reveals the difference between the apparent end reel threat of nature. The scene moves from a dark setting to light. Against the menacing darkness are the combined confrontation of lights in the form of 'lamp', 'fire', 'moon' and 'stars'. More frightening than the surrounding darkness is the remote and chilling moon light. In "Dust of Snow" (FRF, p. 221) the scene shifts from despair to hope from a foreboding of death to a new avowal of life. The snow by its white colour means "death". In contrast is 'the crow' a dark coloured, warm creature of life. (The Crow belongs to raven family and is not a bird of ill omen.) Frost uses counter images to gain a balanced mood. Where one image raises terror, another is brought in to mitigate it. Sometimes an ambivalence is seen in the image itself ("Range-Finding" FRF, p. 126; and "On a Tree Fallen Across The Road" FRF, p. 236). The images are found inspiring contrary moods in "The Birth Place" (FRF, p. 264) and "Black Cottage" (FRF, p. 55) the tension prevalent in such instances reflect the poet's love of contrariety.
Counter-images are common in Hardy also. Past and present are alternated in "The Voice" (CPH, p. 346). The poignant memories of the past, his deep love for a dead woman and the sweetness of their early romance are recollected. The image from the part of a youthful girlish form clad in "air-blue" gown is brought along with an image of an ethereal ghost listlessly flitting in the present. The pathos of the speaker's loss are intensified in the juxtaposition of counter-images. The incidence of this practice is frequent in Hardy. In "Weathers" (CPH, p. 563) good and bad weathers are contrasted with each other. The rigours of a bad weather are made to look tougher by reference to a pleasanter weather. As poets of the post-Victorian era, and the beginning of the modern era, they are aware of the scientific theories which have dislodged earlier faith. Frost uses Newton's second law of motion in "The West-Running Brook" (FPH, pp. 257 - 60) "The black stream casting on a sunken rock/ Flung backward on itself in one white wave". When an equal and opposite force is applied against the normal easterly flow of the brook, it changes direction and runs west. In the same poem
Frost once again makes use of a scientific law, to explain a natural phenomenon. According to the thermodynamic law of degradation of energy, everything is on a downward drift.

The Stream of everything that runs away
Some say existence like a pirouette
And flâneute, forever in one place,
Stands still and dances, but it runs away;
It seriously, sadly runs away.

(Ibid II 44 - 48).

There is a striking similarity in their choice of natural image; use of counter-images, views based on scientific principles and fidelity to observed facts. But in the use of pathetic fallacy as a poetic mode the disparity is seen between the Victorian poet and the modern poet. Hardy feels that in this human universe (universe according to the philosophy of David Hume) people are prisoners of a constant series of pathetic fallacies. According to R. L. Purdy even a poem was originally entitled "The Pathetic Fallacy." Hardy's poems are known for their emotive quality. Perceptions of landscape vary with the change in the emotion. Hardy perceived the landscape to be harmonious with the lonely nature of men in an alien, and barren material world. The darkling wasteland is at once inert and
4. Treatment

- 60 -

and animate, indifferent to human feelings yet in harmony with their moods.

Thy dreary dawn he saw as gleaming gold,
And in thy glistening green and, radiant red
Funereal gloom and cold.

("The King's Experiment" ll 37-40, CPH, pp.162-3)

In "The Pedigree" the clouds *reek* represent and symbolise the pathetic fallacy. ('green-rheumed clouds were hurrying past where mute and cold it globed' - "Pedigree" CPH, pp. 460 - 61) In "In a Ryelease near Weatherbury" (CPH, pp. 70 - 71) the lease is etched in his memory because of the happy association it evoked in his mind. 'Love's fitful ecstasies!' gave an aura when the mind was happy. But the lease becomes in the poet's mind grey, cold and dispassionate reminding him of a broken affair. Hardy himself confessed that "the simply natural is interesting no longer"8 In Hardy's treatment of nature, the emotional impact on a scene is more important. The inherent qualities of the scene are not as important as sensations associated with it.

Hardy's romantic affinities are projected in his use of pathetic fallacy. Wordsworth, a true romantic, staunchly believed in the ennobling interchange between mind and nature. When Hardy lets the landscape reflect
human emotion, such an interchange is suggested. However, viewing it in a broader spectrum, the real purpose of Hardy's use of pathetic fallacy becomes clear. Generally the neutrality of Hardy's landscape reveals an indifferent and remote nature unconcerned with human suffering. The grey scenes of "Neutral Tones" (CPH, p. 12) and "Darkling Thrush" (CPH, p. 150) bear evidence to such a practice. However, Hardy deviates from this norm, lets nature express human emotions such as pangs of disappointment as in the last lines of "Neutral Tones", "Your face, and the God-cursed Sun, and a tree, / And a pond edged with greyish leaves." Hardy resorts to pathetic fallacy in a bid to bring sharply into focus the hopelessness of the human situation which illogically turns to nature. The tone is ironical, and the mood is bleak. The swift change from nature's neutrality of expression, to the projection of an emotional nature, apparently seems to be a contradiction. But the irony and the mocking tone resolve the ambiguity. It is as if, Hardy's dismay at Nature's neutrality weaving an unreal illusion or dream of a responsive nature. Hardy's use of anthropomorphic images again stresses his view of a non-anthropomorphic aspect of nature.
One basic tenet of the new nature poetry is its resistance to pathetic fallacy and in Frost it finds an able champion. Frost considers nature in a dualistic perspective, as friendly and as 'the other', a force which is responsive and different, also remote. Hence the question of nature participating in any human emotional upheaval or the use of pathetic fallacy to stress his point, rarely arises. Even in the poem "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things" (PRF, pp.241-42), there is only an apparent case of pathetic fallacy. The birds fly in and out of the abandoned barn, 'Their murmur more like the sigh we sigh/From too much dwelling on what has been'. (PRF, 241 - 42). But their sympathetic response is illusory. Frost abandons the suggestive pathetic fallacy gently. 'One had to be versed in Country things/Not to believe the phoebes wept.' (Italics added). Frost's resistance to the pathetic fallacy shows his inclination towards modernism.

In altering and compounding the images into complex varieties of vision, lies the creative power of the
poets. Simple or natural images appear as visual images. Other images appeal to the intellect meditatively. In their quest for an apt medium for their concept of nature the poets have embarked on the emotional appeal rather than on the aesthetic. The frequently recurring images like the tree or bird typify their pattern of imagery marked by realism and exactitude of execution.
NOTES


2. G.W. Sherman, correctly points out the impact of Hardy's early experiences on his works. He early developed a great interest in nature, both his parents being great outdoor lovers. His mother took him on walks along the Via Vicenza, which runs across the heath, "straight and bare, as a pale parting line in hair" - an image described in his poem - "The Roman Road", when she had knelt down beside him. Nature and history were inseparable companions on these walks in the woods and on the heath."


6. Counter Images are also seen in "The Last Chrysanthemum" (CPH, p. 149) where the blossoming in the proper summer season and the untimely winter bloom are discussed. Other poems which illustrate the use of counter-images are "Before and After Summer" (CPH, pp. 333-4) and "The Later Autumn" (CPH, p. 149).


8. Life, p. 185.