5. IMAGES AND THE PATTERN OF IMAGERY

An image could be termed as the reproduction in the mind, of a sensation produced by a physical perception, an intellectual and emotional translation of the visual in an instant. It functions as I.A. Richards has pointed out, by representing a sensation through the process of being a 'relict' of an already known sensation.¹ C.D. Lewis calls it 'a picture made out of words', while Pope refers to it as 'the sensuous element in Poetry.'² Hardy and Frost worked on nature as Wordsworth worked as an artist working on a portrait. A few images occur frequently, like the woods and trees, the birds, the cycle of seasons, and stars, which bring out the deeper meaning of their nature poetry.

¹

The image of 'dark trees' and 'limitless groves' is obsessive. It is a major theme against which all other images are mere variations. Dark woods inspiring fear and curiosity are suggestive of man's concern for knowledge and his eternal quest for the unknown. Woods also act as effective retreats from the fever and fret
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of the world and its laden-eyed despair. The dark trees fascinate and terrorize man in turn. They represent his insatiable curiosity and an irresistable pull towards doom.

Cities were polluted by smoke, dust and soot. Hooting horns, rattling chains and noisy machines disturbed the peace and serenity of the erstwhile country side. Sensitive poets turned to the woods in a bid to quieten their frayed nerves.

Hört,- halt end Spirit-lame,
City-opprest,
Unto this wood I came
As to a nest;
Dreaming that sylvan peace.

(Hardy "I'm a Wood" II 9-13, CPH, pp. 64-65).

The tree and wood image in Frost signifies nature's capriciousness in tempting man to come to her. Man is torn between a desire to surrender to the enchanting charm and an instinct to withhold. The very first verse of Frost's A Boy's Will expresses a desire to enter the woods. 'Into their vastness I should steal away'("Into My Own" PRF, p. 5). The dark woods presented an escape from the stifling human world with its trailing problems. The impulse to enter the woods is repeatedly
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expressed by Frost. In "A Dream Pang" (PRF, p.16) a
Wanderer in a dream comes to the edge of the wood,
ponders and stops. The fascination of the woods is strong.
In "Stopping by Woods On a Snowy Evening" (PRF, p.224)
and "Come In", a mesmerized traveller stands transfixed
at the point of entering. The breath taking beauty
of the 'lovely, deep and dark woods' enchant him.

Far in the pillared dark
Thrush music went—
Almost like a call to come in
("Come In" ll 12-14, PRF, p. 334)

The poet withdraws at the last moment. This is
because he finds in the enigmatic woods, something
sinister, some antihuman force, with destructive
impulses, a snare set by nature.3

In "Ghost House", the human efforts are
thwarted by the woods. Man clears the woods and tends
a hospitable land. But,

The woods, come back back to the mowing field;
The orchard tree has grown one copse
Of new wood and old where the woodpecker chops;
The footpath down to the well is healed.
("Ghost House" ll 7-10, PRF, pp.5-6)
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Man and nature are keenly poised. The vastness of the woods, their power and determination, are measured against human will. The woods seem in such a light are antihuman and anticreative.

The evolutionary theme of fierce competition, struggle for survival, and victory of the strong over the weak are explicitly brought out in "In a Wood". In the world of majestic tall trees, basic qualities of rivalry and scorn are rampant. The weaklings harbour black despair, and the mute helplessness of the meek.

Great growths and small Show them to men akin - Combatants all! Sycamore shoulders Oak, Bines the slim sapling yoke, Ivy-spun halters choke Elms stout and tall.

("In a Wood" 11 18-24 CPB, pp. 64-65)

A similar relentless fight is depicted in Frost's "Something for Hope". The Woods with unedible steeple bush would claim the meadowland. They in turn will be crowded out by the maple, birch and spruce to push.

At the present rate it must come to pass, And that right soon, that the meadowsweet And steeple bush, not good to eat, Will have crowded out the edible grass.

("Something for Hope" 11 1-4, PRF, pp. 375-6)
5. Images and the Pattern of Imagery

The Wood image is suggestive of conflicting meanings. The enigmatic woods that invited the poets to sylvan peace, are also projected as entertaining malevolent designs. As the fascination for the dark woods is insistent, so is the fear of the woods. The grim hostile aspect of nature is seen in the tragic death of John South in *The Woodlanders*.

"I could bear up, I know, I could, if it were not for the tree — yes, the tree 'tis that's killing me. There he stands threatening my life every minute that the wind do blow. He'll come down upon and squat us dead." 4

In Frost's "Hill Wife", the wife is gripped with an inexplicable fear of the surrounding woods. She imagines the woods as sinister agents. Like Hardy's John-South she is afflicted with an obsessive fear of the trees. The dark pine in her imagination creates an ominous atmosphere.

She had no saying dark enough
For the dark pine that kept
Forever trying the window latch
Of the room where they slept.

("The Hill Wife", "Oft-Repeated Dream" 11 1 – 4, *PRF*, p. 128)

The overwrought woman finally disappears among black alders. The black colour accentuates the portentous outlook. Her mortal ties snap. Her husband learns
'of finalities beside the grave'. The emotional turmoil she undergoes in her married life is reflected in her unreasonable fear of the tree. The 'Pine tree' could represent the 'phallic' in nature. The apprehension about her husband in her subconscious mind is revealed in her over reaction to the pine tree.

The woods are shown as the dividing line where man and nature stand separated. In "New Hampshire" Frost shows man and nature, as two disparate units of his dualistic stand. Woods are the point where man leaves, and nature starts. The character in the poem is frightened of a grove of trees which he cannot axe. He finds (in the words of Mathew Arnold) 'Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood'.

Remember Birnam Wood! The wood's in flux!
He had a special terror of flux
That showed itself in dendrophia.

("New Hampshire" ll 373-75, PRF, 159-172)

Violence is associated with woods in "Spring-Pools" and "Draft Horse". Spring, the light season of the year flits past. Summer crouches, the dark summer foliage fed on the 'flowery waters', and watery flowers
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of spring.' The playful tone changes into a strident one as the poet passes the spring season and comes to summer. The dark trees, sprung at the expense of the pools 'look sinister' to him. The poet is frightened by the menacing power in the dark foliage. This is yet another point of encounter. The poet stalls the disaster by his defiant challenge. 'Let them think twice.'

The trees that have it in their pent-up buds
To darken nature and be summer woods -
Let them think twice before they use their powers.

("Spring-Pools" ll 7 - 9, PRP, p. 245)

The vision of an insentient nature and the ensuing cosmic alienation are delineated in "The Draft Horse."

The deep grove swathed in the terror-inspiring darkness suggests menacing forces at work.

Through a pitch-dark limitless grove
And a man came out of the trees
And took our horse by the head
And reaching back to his ribs
Deliberately stabbed him dead.

("The Draft Horse" ll 4-8, PRP, pp. 443 - 4).

The persistent association of dark trees with doom and disaster are seen in "Into My Own" also. The adjective dark is invariably used to describe the gloomy woods symbolizing death. A variant is seen in "In Hardwood Groves". The trees or leaves are
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associated with life. The poet assures, that the dying of the leaves is only a preliminary process before the renewal of life. "Before the leave can mount again" on the trees, "they must go down into the dark decayed" (PRF, pp. 25 - 26).

Frost is 'a swinger of birches.' He is aware of the barriers and the possible evil lurking behind enchanting dark woods. But he is not deterred by pessimistic considerations. He swings back and forth into the woods and out of them at will. He accomplishes the 'going' and 'coming' from a vantage point, which brings out the two-tract travel effectively.

If tired of trees I seek again mankind,
Well I know where to hie me - in the dawn
To a slope where the cattle keep the lawn.

("The Vantage Point" ll 1-3, PRF, p. 17)

But for Hardy, the monist, there are no two-ways. After seeing the bitter battle in the forest he retraces his steps back to his "Life" - "loyalties" i.e. mankind,
There at least he is welcomed with "smiles abound"

Since then, no grace I find
Taught me of trees,
Turn I back to my kind,

("In a Wood", ll 33-35, CPH, p. 65)
There are poems in which the wood image is dealt in a romantic vein. Man and tree (tree representing nature) exist in peace and harmony. Such moments reveal the poets' deep-rooted romantic affinities.

In "Pine Planters" Marty South talks of Giles's harmonious association with the woodland. 'The Woodland holds him alone' (CPH, p. 271–73) Giles Winterborne in the novel The Woodlanders is like Pan, the wood-god, identified with the trees. When he sets out to meet Grace Kelbury he ties an apple tree across the gig, 'the twigs nodding with each step of the horse' He stands with a specimen of apple tree in the market place of Sherston Abbas, bringing 'a delightful suggestion of orchards into the heart of the town.' There was a sort of sympathy between Giles and the fir or oak or beech that he was operating on. Grace in the end realizes the affinity of Marty South and Giles with woods.

'You (Marty) and he (Giles) could speak in a tongue that nobody else know, not even my father... the tongue of the trees and fruits and flowers themselves.'

As Hardy points out Giles as an autumn God, so

Frost pictures Pan as the god of forests and Pastures who is also a musician. Here the creative impulse is deployed in a quiet and intriguing way. Pan appears
with grey skin, hair and eyes. He comes out of the forest and stands basking in the sunlight above an uninhabited wooded valley. Solitude fascinates him, but he realises that his pipes are too hard to teach a new world songs, he lets nature speak. Pan, the wood god enjoys the woodland serenity, standing 'in the Sun and looked his fill/ At Wooded valley and wooded hill'.

("Pan the us", PRF, pp. 23 - 24).

The tree image is used in certain uncommon contexts too. Hardy stages a pastoral mourning for his woodland hero Giles Winterborne. All the salient features of a pastoral elegy are ideally present. Giles was closely associated with the vegetation of little Hintock. He was an inmate of the woods and his presence was likened to a tree spirit. In Grace Fitzspier's remorse-smiten memory, Giles rises as 'fruit-god' and a 'wood-god'! His presence among the sappy bows of the plantation merges with the green leaves and green lichen. He appears as autumn personified. 'Cider-stained' and 'starred with apple-pipe'. When he dies the entire wood, symbolizing mother nature plunges into deep grief, mourning the untimely end of a glorious son of the wood.
The whole wood seemed to be house of death pervaded by loss to its uttermost length and breath. Winterhorns was gone, the copse seemed to show the want of him. 10

In "Felled Elm and She" the poet subtly describes through a tree the growth and decay of a woman. Unaware of each others' existence, a young sapling of an elm tree and a fine girl grow rapidly. In the spring of the girl's life, the bloom of her youth earns her an admirer and a steadfast lover in the speaker. The tree on its part has two and twenty annual rings bearing testimony to its uninterrupted growth. But an "end comes in the fortieth year." The woman wilts under the sway of disease and the elm tree too, as if in sympathy and becomes hollow and spectre-thin. The girl succumbs to her mortal disease and the tree is felled.

When you, at your fortieth line,
showed decay, she seemed to pine;
When you were quite hollow within
She was felled - mere bone and skin:
You too, lacking strength to grow
Further trunk-rings, were laid low,
Matching her; both unaware
That your lives formed such a pair.

("The Felled Elm and She" ll 11-18 CPP, pp.868-69).

The trees bear evidence to the predatory instinct in nature. The poem "Spring-Pools" presents a chain of action the pools like the flowers on their bank await desiccation.
The roots invade the spring pools, feed on the limited source of water, they think only of the dark foliage they have to bring on. The trees, tall and erect with their leafy banners forming a dark arabesque blighting light, thrive on the pools. In this way the eternal life process goes on forever. The instinct to destroy is seen in the darker recesses.

Will like the flowers beside them soon be gone, and yet not out by any brook or river, But up roots to bring dark foliage on.

("Spring-Pools" 11 4 - 6 PRF, p. 245)

Except for the occasional poems written in a romantic mood, ("Pine Planters" - CPH 271) ("Going For Water" PRF p. 18), the woods reflect an introspective mood, a panic moment and rayless despair. The destructive tendencies of nature, the insensitive and irrational urges of woods interpreted in the Freudian way of interpreting the symbol reveal the psychological obsession of the poets. It is the inner fear that is ruinous. So Frost confesses,

"Sometimes when I watch trees sway, From the window or the door; I shall set forth for somewhere, I shall make the reckless choice Someday when they are in voice And tossing so as to scare The white clouds over them on, I shall have less to say, But I shall be gone.

("The Sound of Trees" 11 17-25, PRF, p. 156)
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In the darkwoods the self is lost, not redeemed. The unknown stationed behind a barrier, as a brute force drives the self to dangerous innerplace - the disruptive forces within one's own self. The poems with the image of dark woods present the will as on the verge of being overwhelmed. The non-human otherness in nature asserts itself in these presentations.

In "Desert Places" another unusual evocation is seen. The traveller resists all instinctual promptings towards death by submersion.

"The woods around it, have it - it is theirs" (PRF, p. 296) The snow-covered woods do not beckon the poets to enter them. The line 'In a field I looked into going past' indicates his symbolic farewell to trees. "Stars" replace "the deep woods" in Frost's later poetry.

Dark woods are natural images. Evocatively the trees signify the theme of life and death, God, fate, Time, Universe and fresher images of youth and love. They raise a sense of wonder, a lure and also fear. They are images of elevated moods. They also import calm, deliberate ponderings on the deeper mysteries of life. They stimulate introspective contemplation.
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No single and unified pattern of feeling is suggested by the dark woods.

The bird is a traditional and conventional poetic image. Nightingales, the Cuckoo thrushes and skylarks have rent the air with their sweet exhilarating melodies. Other birds such as the crow, the owl, and the vulture have flown across ominously. With the romantic poets, Byron, Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth, the bird is associated with happy memories and visionary flights. Shelley’s skylark is a symbol of the spontaneous life. The blithe minstrel of the sky is hailed. But the cheerful bird transcends the limits of time and vision. Shelley tells the bird,

"Thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing.
A voice, a mystery;"

Through the viewless wings of poetry, John Keats approaches 'the light winged dryad of the trees' which is an immortal bird. No particular age or generation could lay claim to it.
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Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:"

As poets of the transitional years Hardy and
Frost use the bird images in a more realistic and
restrained way. Birds do not transport them to visionary
and mystical realms. Their birds are firmly rooted on
the earth. They appear at a particular season and at a
particular place. The mysterious aura of the romantic
bird is totally absent. Their very solidity of appearance
dispels the hazards of myth. Thrushes, bullfinches, and
nightingales are delineated in a sober, colourless,
matter-of-fact way. The winged wonders are seen in their
elements of air and rain.

These are brand-new birds of twelve-months' growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales,
Nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain.
And earth, and air, and rain.

("Proud Songsters" 11 7-12, CPH, pp. 835-36)

Frost's oven bird is of the 'mid wood' shunning
the oppressed city. He sings in the fall or autumn season
when the splendour of summer is past. The natural world
which the 'oven bird' inhabits is in decline.
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.
He says the early-petal-fall is past,
when pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
on sunny days a moment overcast;

(“The Oven Bird” ll 4-8, PRP, pp. 119-120)

There is a directness of approach, precision of observation
and a perfect evocation of the sense of place and time.

The poets are preoccupied with the themes of the
transitoriness of existence. The birds in their mere
rudiments, twelve months earlier, are lively in their
piping and singing. But the hour of their singing is
ill-chosen. It is the hour of darkness, when the sun
goes, and night creeps in. The merry spring season and
the month of April are at an end. The birds are
unconscious of the limitations of ‘Time’, the eternal
factor that steals every lively thing to an irrevocable
end and silence. They are blissfully ignorant of the
implications of an end of the season, end of life,

By subtle nuances of tone, the poet ends the joyous
carolling and brings in a requiem for the gay season
that is fast fading.
The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
And as it gets dark loud nightingales
In bushes
Pipe, as they can when April wears,
As if all time were theirs.

("Proud Songsters" ll 1-6. CPH, pp. 335-36).

In Frost, perhaps, it is the remnant of an old transcendental strain which restrains him from a simple, naive, unreflecting enjoyment of things suggesting, 'that a bird is not merely a song and splash of colour, but something mysteriously tinged with meaning, and which always sets up an inner experience to view with if not to outdo the outer.'

The mid-summer wood visitant of Frost talks 'of early petal fall'. The mention of 'fall' incites the poet to contemplate on 'the other fall', a fall of greater magnitude which implies total annihilation, the end of everything, Frost does not bestow immortality to his 'oven bird' as Keats does to his Nightingale. He knows the bird would one day die as all other birds do. But before disappearing from the scene he casually flings the question; 'what to make of a diminished thing'? From the simple fact, the poet traverses to
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mystical heights. The true significance of the poem is revealed, an indirect reference to the period. The 'diminished bird' meekly suggests the much diminished contention of the resplendent romantic era.

Hardy's 'Darkling Thrush' stands midway between Shelley's exalted skylark and Frost's diminished oven bird. The barren background of "The Darkling Thrush" is similar to the scant mid-summer scene of "The Oven Bird." The fervourless speaker and the deprived circumstances are in perfect harmony,

'The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I

(The Darkling Thrush ll 9-16, OPH, p. 150)

Hardy's thrush makes its appearance in winter. The end season images gives rise to thoughts of death and end of life, the comparison of tangled bine-stems to the broken strings of lyres is indicative of death theme. The image epitomises the end of an era, the drawing to a close of the nineteenth century. 'The Sepulchral
quality of the scene as indicated by the words 'spectre-gray', 'Winter's dregs', 'eye of day', again stress the end.

From the bleak scene arises a startling cheerful voice of a bird, an aged thrush singing in full-throated joy. The poet is puzzled as he himself could see but 'little cause for carollings' in the present fervourless state.

Unlike the sudden, unexpected appearance of Hardy's darkling thrush, Frost's oven bird is a common sight which everyone could normally come across in the mid-summer season in the mid-wood region. While Hardy indicates the end of a century in his scenic background, Frost implies a universal fall. In the line And comes that other fall we name the fall' (FRF, pp. 119-20). Other fall has religious connotation.

The setting is not cheerful. There is nothing remarkable for jubilation. But their birds find in the growingly cheerless surroundings cause to be cheerful, a joyous carolling and a declaration of some blessed hope.
So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

("The Darkling Thrush" ll 25-32, CPH, p. 150)

The oven bird sings unconcerned with the petal fall,
rather in a mood to celebrate the lapsed spring. Shelley
ends his poem "The Skylark" with a rapturous plea. In
the aged darkling thrush's singing is seen Hardy's own
farewell to terrestrial things. The 'Hope' which the
bird expresses in its joyous singing does not find a
resonance in the cheerless post. The poet leaves the
nature of 'Hope' unspecified and vague. The thrush's
song could have given only a momentary enjoyment, a self
deception for the poet.

In Frost's oven bird, there is no romantic
overture in the scene or in the singer. There are no
Edenic overtones and symbolic interpretations. There
is neither regret in looking backward nor hope in looking
forward. The bird celebrates Nature and its experience
in the autumn season. The Oven Bird's song is a protest against the drift of things. Frost counters the reality of diminished nature by insisting upon factual details. The only paradox in the poem concerning the bird's singing is 'It knows in singing not to sing'. But this again is consistent with the view of a 'diminished nature.'

The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

("The Oven bird" 11 11-14, PRF, pp. 119-20).

Frost's oven bird is humanized, it looks before and after. Shelley has lamented the unfortunate burden of mankind. But Hardy and Frost find relief for mankind in the happy carollings of their birds. Even diminished nature can be celebrated by a certain kind of singing; it is this knowledge that the oven bird and darkling thrush share with their poet's spokesmen. The bird, in an evocative way, resists the relentless march towards annihilation. Irving Howe also finds in the bird the poet's own momentary stay against confusion, when he
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says, 'The bird is assigned as a pleasing conceit, and not a sentimental indulgence, something of the poets stoical resistance.'

The theme of evolution is stressed in the bird image. Hardy's bullfinches, after listening to the tales of green-gowned faeries of Blackmoor, are informed about nature's total unconcern with 'bird or beast', she calls her child. She does not try to protect them from attacks of wild animals. Fiends can feast on the weak bullfinches, while mother nature drowses, dreams and gropes blindly. The bullfinches decide to sing till their end comes,

"BROTHER Bulleys, let us sing
From the dawn till evening! -
For we know not that we go not
When to-day's pale pinions fold
Where they be that sang of old."

("The Bullfinches" 11 1 - 5, CPH, pp. 122 - 23.)

In Frost, perils and dangers await a frail oven bird. The sleepy bird sings while it sleeps, inviting trouble. But the poet contemplatively observes that the bird 'ventured less in peril than it appears'. In the evolutionary ladder the bird appeared before the evolution of Homo sapiens. If the dangers had been really awesome, then the birds as a class would have
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been extinct, The bird desists from singing when hostile ears prick. Its instinct warns it of its predator’s presence. The bird makes use of its survival instinct and escapes the peril. Here the bird, unlike Hardy’s bullfinches, does not succumb easily. The poet describes it as a ‘ventriloquist’, one who would speak giving the illusion that the sound comes from some other source. This coupled with its instinctive restraint saves the bird, even though it foolishly indulges in singing in its dream. The image is again evocative of resistance, and a possible success in the struggle for existence. Instead of ending on a pessimistic note of helplessness the poem is optimistic.

It ventured less in peril than appears. It could not have come down to us so far, Through the interstices of things ajar On the long bead chain of repeated birth, To be a bird while we are men on earth,

("On a Bird Singing In Its Sleep" 11 8-12, PRF, pp.302-3)

The bird imagery also suggests the cruelty and the futility of existence in nature. Clym Yeobright, dejected and indignant at upstairs’s inhumanity to his mother and infidelity to him, returns home to confront her. As he approaches the doorstep he sees, ‘a solitary thrush cracking a small snail upon the doorstep for
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his breakfast. * The night-jar philosophically epitomizes the futility of love.

The night-jar seemed to imp, and say,
You should have taken warning;
Love is a terrible thing: sweet for a space,
And then all mourning, mourning!'

("A Hurried Meeting" 11 54 - 57, CPB, pp. 827-29).

In the images of helpless mild birds Hardy symbolizes the plight of humans in an indifferent universe.

A contrast is seen in "The Blinded Bird". The bird loses its eye sight in a fire accident. He is condemned to live in eternal darkness. Yet he maintains a cheerful demeanour singing zealously. The poet feels the bird in its grievous misery exhibits charity and generosity of the highest order. It symbolizes hope, pure benevolence and divinity.

Who hath c/arity? This bird,
Who suffereth long and is kind,
Is not provoked, though blind
And alive ensepulchred?
Who hopeth, endureth all things?
Who thinketh no evil, but singe?
Who is divine? This bird.

("The Blinded Bird" 11 15 - 21, CPB, p. 446)
The birds mock humanity when they find man's inability to fight the onslaught of nature. Man is impotent against the Omnipotent nature. Hence the thrush sings.

'They cannot change the Frost's decree,
They cannot keep the skies serene;
How happy days are made to be

'Sluces great Men's sagacity
No less than ours, O tribes an treen?
Men know but little more than we

("The Caged Thrush Freed and Home Again" ll 13-19, CPH, p. 147).

The birds suffer the agony of betrayed faith. Treacherously hidden behind a mask of benevolence the hunters pounce upon the unsuspecting victims. The birds symbolize the helpless state of the meek and misplaced credulity sadly leading to the altar. Unbelieving, they repeatedly marvel at man's cruelty.

"THey are not those who used to feed us
When we were young - they cannot be -
These shapes that now bereave and bleed us?

("The Puzzled Game - Birds" ll 1 - 3, CPH, p. 148).

Frost is also aware of man's cruelty to birds. But he does not specify an attitude. He talks about
general inconsideration. A brood of birds biding in an old nest in the blinding torrents of rain are disturbed by man's callous brushing of the straw. In complete confusion and disarray, they get into the cold rain and a dark night. They must brood in the mire till the day break. The bird stands for helplessness, man for instinctive mercilessness and wanton cruelty. Man and nature are equally cruel to the humble nestlings. Man renders them homeless, nature's wet, dark surroundings make the suffering more acute.

To think their ease was beyond relief —
They could not go flying about in search of their nest again, nor find a perch,
They must brood where they fell in mulch and mire,

("The Thatch" ll 22-25, in PP, pp. 252-53)

Man's cruelty is once again stressed in his habit of caging birds. It is condemned to solitary confinement over a grave. ("The Caged Goldfinch" CPH, p. 491).

Man's inborn cruelty to his fellow human beings, his thirst for blood and power is forcibly brought out in the pathetic picture of bonded larks.

We know that even as larks in cages sing
Unthoughtful of deliverance from the curse
That holds them lifelong in a latticed hearse,

("We Are Getting to the End" ll 5 - 7, CPH, p. 929)
The bird is a natural symbol consistently used both by Frost and Hardy. It has nothing in common with the romantic moonlight or a singing nightingale. The immortal skylark of Shelley appears to Hardy as a thing which has perished, insignificant and tragic. "Lived its meek life; then one day, fell — / A little ball of feather and bone;" ("Shelley's Skylark" CPH, p. 101). The only bird singing with any spirit unconditioned by 'things terrene' is the darkling thrush singing in a 'Frost-Covered', 'Spectregray night of gloom.' The birds are mostly shown as living in bondage, scared, crippled, blinded and mated. They endure the rigours of the frost-covered bleak winter, the fervourless earth, the whims and the cruelties of human beings. The thematic significance and symbolic interpretations vary. But the plight of the human beings and their suffering is seen in his keen portrayal of birds in agony. In his note of 1885 on the social life of London, Hardy compares men to caged birds. 'All are caged birds; the only difference lies in the size of the cage.' Hardy finds 'life's decree indelibly associated with the image of the starved, half-frozen bird which had haunted his imagination since childhood.'
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Frost’s birds are though colourless are real. There is no melody in their singing. But they are sturdy and resist nature’s adversaries or man’s wanton cruelties. They are sensible enough to protect themselves against predators. Like Hardy’s birds they are earth bound. Frost talks in a startling way of his attempts at chasing a singing bird. He finds its song unbearable. It is not that he finds anything wrong with the singer, but on the other hand he concedes that “something was wrong within himself in wanting to silence any song.”

I have wished a bird would fly away, And not sing by my house all day; Have clapped my hands at him from the door When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

("A Minor Bird" ll 1-4 PRP, pp. 250 - 51)

The poet’s open-non-conformity with the accepted convention shows his breaking away from outmoded romanticism. In "Minor Bird" (PRP, p. 250) and “Come In” (PRP, p. 334), the bird song is an invitation from the mysterious depths of nature. But the poet is aware of the perils. "A Minor Bird" symbolizes mighty nature and an oven bird, a ‘diminished thing’. The birds stand for the poet’s desire to overcome hurdles.
The cycle of seasons is an image celebrating death and resurrection. It originated in Greek Mythology in relation to Adonis and Aphrodite. According to the myth, the handsome youth Adonis was amorous betrothed to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Unfortunately he was mortally wounded in a scuffle with a wild boar. The goddess was plunged into grief at the unexpected turn of events. Her grief won Adonis a periodical release from the underworld. Adonis's death and resurrection into mortal form was, by a natural symbolism, associated with the seasonal end of vegetation and its regeneration. It is connected especially with the growth-cycle of corn, which is buried in the earth in winter, making its appearance as if out of a long sleep in spring and summer. Out of annihilation a new life is born. The new-born seedling in its turn grows, matures, and finally withers. Life ends in death and death is followed by life, autumn and winter are followed by spring and summer. The rhythm of the seasons and the changes in vegetation symbolize Nature's eternal process of creation and destruction. The image of the cycle of the seasons
generally ends on a sanguine note of faith in Nature and joy in life.

In the poetry of Hardy and Frost life emerges from the winter and ends in winter. Autumn is a mere herald while spring is pestered by memories of winter. Summer and mid-summer are briefly touched upon. The poems are full of white, bleak, desolate, winter scenes or bare grey autumn settings. The main theme is decay, life-in-death in the autumn season and death occurring in the great winter sleep.

Adonis' death and banishment into the underworld is symbolized in the wasted, dreary, joyless, paltry spectacles of the winters. In the ancient days, Adonis' death was celebrated with his image being surrounded by beds of plants and flowers whose rapid withering symbolized death.

In Hardy and Frost, the winter seasons is generally characterised by bare, cold weather, sparsely covered vegetation, and totally inhospitable surroundings. A naked thorn seeing the plight of the temporary dwellers voices sympathy.
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"the mid-aged and old
Face the path there to town,
In these words dry and drear
It seems to them sighing:
'0 winter is trying
To sojourners here!"

("The Voice of the Thorn" 3 - 8, CPB, p. 233).

Winter is the terminal part of the year. The landscape is desolate. The withered leaves, barren boughs and cheerless sober birds of the fervourless darkling plain attunes with the poet's gloomy mood. And when I come to the garden ground,
The whir of sober birds
Up from the tangle of withered weeds
Is sadder than any words.

("A Late Walk" 5 - 8, FRP, pp. 8 - 9).

Snow is the white child of winter. Benighted in the dark and gloomy season, it stands for disparate things ranging through peace, mystery, a threat to life to a delight in nature's handiwork. As Robert P. Tristram says, "snow dust sparkles through his (Frost's) verses like his own mind." Water stands for fertility and new life. But snow freezes everything to lifelessness. Life, throbbing and active in spring and summer, comes to a
The woods around it have it—it is theirs
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent—spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

("Desert Places" 5-8, PRP, p. 296)

Winter has a chilling effect on all natural impulses. Even animals and plants are devoid of their natural breeding instincts. In the poem "A Winter Eden", the scene, in beauty and peace is like paradise. But something lurks to mar the peace. In the purity is seen an unproductive sterility and sexual dormancy.

So near to paradise all pairing ends;
Here loveless birds now flock as winter friends,
Content with bud-inspecting.


It is a bleak season of dejection and spiritlessness. An incongruous, frail cat appears on a blanched scene, as an epitome of hopelessness. The ascending crescendo of futility of winter ends in death. The cycle of the season ends, the year comes to a close and so also the life spark which flickered in the growing gloomy desolate surrounding.
The dreary bleakness merges under a blanket of benighted snow with an unerring destiny of death.

A sparrow enters the tree,
Whereon immediately
A snow-lump thrice his own slight size
Descends on him and showers his head and eyes,
And overturns him,
And near inurns him,

("Snow in the Suburbs" 9 - 14, CPH, pp. 732 - 33).

Frost uses snow as one of his starkest expressions of isolated self. "Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening" (P&F, p. 224) is an apparently simple poem expressing the poet's admiration of the breath-taking beauty of the hour. Snow fills the dark woods. The contrast of light against dark adds to scenic beauty. The twice repeated 'sleep' in the end is suggestive of the intention of forces that beckon him. It is the darkest evening of the year 'and the narrator stands alienated on a wasteland between the deep dark woods' and the frozen lake. Similar apprehension is seen in "The Onset". The white snow descends and the speaker blindly stumbles. He lets the overpowering sense of death descend on him. It is a passive submission. There is apparently no struggle and so the evil design of nature wins no great triumph. It looks as though life has never begun. Snow and death in these instances have become almost synonymious.
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Always the same, when on a fated night
At last the gathered snow lets down as white
As may be in dark woods, and with a song
It shall not make again all winter long
Of hissing on the yet uncovered ground.

("The Onset" ll 1-5, P&F, p. 226)

"Dust of Snow" reveals Frost’s fondness for the
chiaroscuro scenic effect. Black is etched against the
white. Another conflicting presence is the movement of
the scattered snow counterpoised against the immobility
of the evergreen trees. But for the crow it is a blank,
lifeless scene. If snow is taken to be symbolic of death,
the crow by its own contrasting dark shade means life.
But it is a bird belonging to the raven family traditionally
portending a ill omen or death. The snow is not a solid
mass, it is in the form of dust. This again is suggestive
of mortal annihilation ('dust unto dust'). The hemlock
tree on which the crow is perched contains the deadly
poison. The cumulative effect of all the three symbols
of death converges on the scene, on a gloomy day.

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

("Dust of Snow" ll 1-4, P&F, pp. 221 - 2).
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Hardy uses fog and frost, as reminders of the invariable end that awaits nature’s creatures. Fog is a light mass of condensed vapor mixed with dust. It is light and airy. This analogy aptly brings to the mind of the speaker in "The Head above the Fog" a similar fleeting apparition of the ghost of the dead lover whose body has dissolved.

Such it is I see
Above the fog that sheets the mead—
Yea, that which once could breathe and plead! —
Skimming along with spectre-speed
To a last tryst with me.

("The Head above the Fog" 11 16-20, CPH, p. 481).

Despite such scenes of death and annihilation, Frost does not want a humble surrender. Brother Heser in "Snow" sets out in the most adverse weather. But his instinct urges him to defy nature. "There’s the storm That says I must go on/ That wants me as a war might if it come". ("Snow" PRP, pp. 143 - 56) People like Heserse and Brown ("Brown’s Descent" PRP, pp. 137-140) challenge brute nature. Man’s undaunted courage is poised against nature’s chilly antagonism. Something in men compels them to put up a fight. Their very
defiance is the relief to the unrelieved gloom of winter.

The idea of mutability in nature is conveyed both by the late settings of winter and the details pointing to an inevitable and ceaseless movement towards death. The nightfall, leaffall, snow-fall and killing frost indicate an end. But winter in Hardy and Frost is not a final static season of death and destruction—a scene of final exit, dropping of the curtain. It is a continuous process seen all through the other seasons, signifying a uniform movement towards an unalterable end.

For the lower forms of life and in the vegetative world winter is succeeded by spring. Spring is the season of rebirth and rejoicing for the living world. Snow thaws, lizard run off, and the sun awakens the buds of blueberry. It is time for putting in the seed. The cycle of growth is on its way again. Adonis is resurrected and the corn seedling sprouts forth.

Hardy finds spring as essentially a season of new birth. But plants and flowers symbolizing spring hesitate to blossom. Lingering memories of severe frost-filled December days restrain their exuberance. Pondering over the sufferings of the bitter winter would make them
realize the futility of coming back to life. Life can spring again. But for Hardy there is no unconditional joy. He is aware of the inevitable decay that awaits.

"The trees are afraid to put forth buds,
And there is timidity in the grass;
The plots lie gray where gouged by spuds,


Jean R. Brooke, finds Hardy's delineation of spring in the true romantic strain. Commenting on the poem "The Year's Awakening" he says,

"the repeated question "How do you know"?" to the vespering bird and the hidden crocus sufficiently points up the mystery of their instinctive knowledge of the vast movements of the zodiac and transformation of light which are part of an intricate process that adds up to the miracle of spring". 22

But I cannot agree with her. This is because what Hardy reveals in "The Years Awakening" (CPH, p. 335) and "A Backward Spring" (CPH, p. 498) is a sense of bewilderment in interpreting the circle of life and death in a downward spiral. The vital and positive activity of nature's humbler creatures is irrational when measured against the evidence of purpose that nature presents to the intellect of man. In "A Backward Spring" there is a general reluctance to burgeon forth evidencing a new
 lease of life. Memories of winter days pester them.

- the myrtle asks if it's worth the fight
  this year with frost and rime
  to venture one more time

("A Backward Spring" ll 9-11, CPH, p. 496)

In human life summer is followed by winter; only for
animals, birds and plants, winter is succeeded by spring.
Hardy presents spring in the mechanically motivated
bullfinches and thrushes rolling off a conveyor belt.
It is a routine affair, an inevitable instalment. A
passage from Tess of the D'Urbervilles, corroborates this.

The season developed and matured. Another year's
instalment of flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes,
finches, and such ephemeral creatures, took up their
position where only a year ago others had stood their place
when these were nothing more than germ and inorganic
particles. 23

Robert Frost indulges in the rejoicing over a
joyful spring in the 'white orchard', the 'swarming
bees' and 'the darting bird'. It is not a whole-hearted
celebration. Nature's processes are seen as a source of
life. Spring stresses the romantic perspective of nature's
dynamism as a creative, living principle. As Hardy is
troubled by 'ruminations of mid-December days' ("A Backward
Spring") Frost is troubled by an 'Uncertain harvest'.
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Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today;
And give us not to think so far away
As the uncertain harvest; keep us here

("A Prayer in Spring" ll 1-3, PRP, p. 12).

The reductive view of spring is again seen in Hardy's "An Unkindly May". Dirty clouds hover above, dishevelled pigeons look like predatory vultures. Even the flowers have failed in their blossoming and look pinched. The sun is unhappy with the disenchanted scene, he tells 'Nature, You're not commendable today!' ("An Unkindly May", CPH, pp. 841 - 42). The references to the ominous cloud, the storm like wind, the giant vulture like pigeons are indicative of the inevitable end.

The sour spring wind is blurring boisterous-wise,
And bears on it dirty clouds across the skies;
Plantation timbers creak like rusty cranes,
And pigeons and rooks, dishevelled by late rains,

("An Unkindly May" ll 3 - 6, CPH, pp. 841 - 2).

The poem "A Boundless Moment" describes what seems a glimpse of promise and delight while sauntering through the woods in March, the early spring. The speaker and his friend chance upon something white through the trees. It looks like a May flower with its connotations of spring.
He stood there bringing March against his thought
And yet too ready to believe the most

"Oh, that's the Paradise-in-Bloom", I said;
And truly it was fair enough for flowers

("A Boundless Moment" 11 3-6, PRF, 233-34).

But on a closer scrutiny, the speaker realizes it to be a beach clinging to its last year's leaves. The spring images of birth, new life and hope in paradise-in-bloom is effectively replaced by the death image of autumn in the dead leaves of a beech. For a moment fancy deceives them. But they recover in time to understand the truth. John T. Napier aptly points out Frost's true concern with the theme of waste and decay in nature. He says,

"The cyclic imagery which has so often provided poets with symbols of faith and life in here manipulated to suggest a movement which culminates in death. In so far as man is part of the natural order, he is a part of a system of perpetual waste and decay." 24

Generally images of spring are associated with ideas of resurrection, and rebirth. But in Hardy and Frost the inconstancy of nature, usually seen in autumn or winter is also witnessed in spring and summer. The persistent idea of the transitoriness of life occurs in "Nothing Gold Can Stay". Thoughts of nascent life
mature into preoccupations of withering and ultimate end.

Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,

("Nothing Gold Can Stay", ll 3-6, PRP, pp. 222-3).

The instincts of the vernal season are however acutely alive in the plants and animal kingdom. The conventional spring fever of love and conjugal bliss are celebrated in an allegory in "Putting In the Seed". The rebirth of Adonis and the theme of new life in the spring time is suggested in the impulse in sowing the seed and waiting for the birth of the seedling. The life force is thrusting itself up, forcing its way through the crumbled soil. Here the poet is reminded of a folk custom, where the couple mate in a freshly sown field in order to ensure success of the crop.

Slave to a spring time passion for the earth,
How love burns through the Putting in the Seed
On through the watching for that early birth.

("Putting in the Seed" ll 9-11, PRP, pp. 123-24).

The poets are aware of the happenings in spring, are sensitive to the impulses of love and rebirth. But
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thoughts of coming autumn and past winter keep drifting in, to remind them that spring is but a short interlude. In most of the spring poems, there is an undercurrent of the sadness of an endseason.

Old life has withered and lies deeply buried in the winter soil. The great pulse of life throbs in the season's revival. New life burgeons through the heap of ruin. In Frost's "Blueberries" he calls attention to the mystery of rebirth as berry bushes sprout from slag. In the previous fall season fire had ravaged the area. Throughout the autumn and winter season, they scarce showed any sign of life. But their instinct of resurrection is strong.

There may not have been the ghost of sign
Of them any where under the shade of the pine,
But get the pine out of the way, you may bum
The pasture all over until not a fern
Or grass-blade is left, not to mention a stick,
And presto, they're up all around you as thick
And hard to explain as a conjuror's trick.

("Blueberries" 11 15-21, PRF, pp. 59-62)

Even as they are surrounded by profusion, the poets are constantly reminded of nature's otherness. Frost stages an apparent tension and conflict between the light and dark seasons, spring and summer in "Spring-Pools". Spring with its comfortable warmth melted the snow of cold winter to form the spring pools. But summer, characterized
by its dark trees slowly dries up the source of water.
The analogue is an apparent conflict between the seasons.

The trees that have it in their pent-up buds
To darken nature and be summer woods—
Let them think twice before they use their powers
To blot out and drink up and sweep away
These flowery waters and these watery flowers.

("Spring Pools" ll 7-12, PRF, p. 245).

Hardy presents conflicting and contrasting human
emotions against the general seasonal feeling pervading
elsewhere in "The Seasons of Her Year". In the first
half of the poem, the setting is winter, but the woman
is in a joyous mood, hearing summer songsters. Her eyes
reflect the blooming petals. In the second half, the scene
changes. The woman is surrounded by the splendour of the
summer seasons. But she is plunged into sorrow as her
fickle-minded lover has deserted her. Human feelings have
no place in the cyclic rhythms of seasonal changes.
Nature is unaware of human suffering, indifferent to the
pathos of their lot.

O'tis fine May morne, they say.
And blooms have blown;
But wild and wintry is my day,
My song-birds moan;

("The Season's of Her Years" ll 7-12, CPF, p. 156)
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Hardy wistfully remembers the bygone season,
"Often I ponder how/ Springtime deceives" ("Autumn in King's Hintock Park", CPH, pp. 215 - 16). Dried leaves and an old shrivelled woman personify autumn. They are aware of the end of the best season and also know by instinct the end that awaits them. In the portrayal of an old woman, in the declining years raking up withered leaves Hardy emphasizes the autumn's barreness in contrast to the luxury of spring. Similar pangs of regret are seen in "After a Journey" (CPH p. 549) 'Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division?'

But Frost is not pestered by feelings of regret. He accepts autumn for what it is.

Not yesterday, I learned to know
The love of bare November days
Before the coming of the snow.

("My November Guest" 11 16-18, PRP, pp. 6-7).

Nature in her bare autumn attire reveals the brutal savageness of the non-human world. In "Bereft" the menacing forces of nature appear to be ominously surrounding the speaker. Clouds hang around. Withered leaves coil around
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Erroneous Pagination regretted.
and hiss like snakes. Loneliness creeps on him and he finds himself pitched against the darker, malevolent forces.

Something sinister in the tone
told me my secret must be known:
word I was in the house alone,
somehow must have gotten abroad,

("Bereft" ll 11-14, PRF, p. 251)

Without invoking a sense of fear Hardy pictures nature's indifference through an autumnal rain which drenches everyone indiscriminately. The autumnal rain image descending on all is suggestive of the futility of existence which consists of all the varied activities described in the poem like Frost's 'night of dark intent' ("Once by the Pacific" PRF, p. 250) here the rain descends to obliterate all traces of human endeavour.

And another knows nought of its chilling fall
Upon him at all,
On whom the rain comes down.

("An Autumn Rain-Scene" ll 19-21, CPB, pp. 612-13)

Hardy and Frost are poets of the season of storm and stress. The sense of waste, ruin and sorrow are strong with them though they realise it to be a passing phase. Frost is aware of the fact that the autumn wind will ultimately denude the trees. But he is reluctant to hurry the withering procedure. He wants the decaying
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process to follow the natural rhythms, slow and imperceptible.

Begin the hours of this day slow,
Make the day seem to be less brief,
Hearts not averse to being beguiled,
Beguile us in the way you know,
Release one leaf at break of day;
At noon release another leaf;

("October" 11 8 - 13, PEP, pp. 27 - 38).

Hardy understands it to be fruitless to resist the leaf fall. Frost's lingering wistfulness and reluctance are totally absent from Hardy. There is an urgency in the tone which vividly expresses the quick and fast phase of withering.

THE trees are underswing, and fling in many places -
On the gray road, the roof, the window - sill -
Their radiant robes and ribbons and yellow laces;
A leaf each second so is flung at will,
Here, there, another and another, still and still.

("Last Week in October", 11 1-5, CPH, p. 709).

One of the withered leaves is caught in spider's web. It remains there dangling when others reach the dry ground without hindrance. This gives the appearance of a mummed criminal hung from the gallows. Another green leaf perched up above, awaiting its doom trembles in fright. The scene is symbolic of the irrepressible force of nature. The poet's impatience in describing
the process shows how useless and feeble could be any resistance against the eternally set rhythms of nature. The entire scene speaks of a hopelessness. The lone fugitive leaf still resisting fall is only indicative of the tormenting state of suspense—state of waiting for one's own end. The sinister aspect of the spectacle is suggested by the images of 'Cobweb' and 'a hanging criminal'. The reference to 'mumming' is again a reminder of the inevitable end, death that would overcome Adonis and as it would do all the rest of the world.

Bleak, bare scenes are common. Everything that stood for a gay life, lovers and bees have vanished. The bees in a prepossessed dive, blindly get tangled in the hair. The romantic bounty and promise of a new lease of life is, totally, absent. It is a stark picture of nature in its dreary mood of desolation and decay.

Toadsmeat is mangy, frosted, and sere;  
Apples in grass  
Crunch as we pass,  
And not ere the men who make cyder appear.  
Couch-fires abound  
On fellows around,  
And shades far extend  
Like lives soon to end.

("The Later Autumn" 11 9-16, CPH, p. 710)
The end image is persistent in Frost's autumn scenes of falling leaves, and inhospitable gray grounds. "The desolate, deserted trees/ The faded earth, the heavy sky" are typical autumn features. ("My November Guest", *PEP*, pp. 6 - 7). Frost's preoccupation with the theme of death as an inevitable end to all life is indicated in his observations of autumn. In "After Apple-Picking" through the image of a woodchuck's hibernation, the poet suggests a similar dormancy, the eternal sleep that awaits man-kind. The poem describes a harvest of beautiful red apples, luscious fruits in great number, cherished in hand, lifted down, and let fall and strike the earth. But the poet sends a strange plea that something may always be left unharvested. Perhaps the thoughts of coming winter persuades him to save a few apples. Something should be left behind which could perpetuate the race amidst winter's ruin. Similar feeling is expressed in "October". The introduction of woodchuck in the last lines is in the form of a counter-image, an image of lethargy as opposed to his earlier activities. The woodchuck's winter sleep climaxes with the speaker's reverie concerning his day's labour.
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is
While he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.


The missing link between the physical world and the human realm is again the subject. He describes the animal's sleep as a seasonal torpor. As a dual perspective, the human sleep is both an everyday routine and a perpetual state of inactivity that finds eternal dullness. Man occupies a higher position in the evolution of species. The animal's seasonal dormancy is inevitable, it is adaptation for survival. Man on the other hand, can brave the adverse weather. Man is active in all climatic conditions. This is indicative of his superiority. The woodchuck, a lower form of animal is guided by its instinct. Its hibernation is an instinctual response to the natural cycle. Once wrapped in its seasonal torpor, the woodchuck is unaware of the happenings around him. But man is conscious of the 'essence of winter sleep'. The speaker, wary of the differences wonders as to the true nature of the sleep coming to him. Man, in other words, though he is part of the cycle of seasons, can still stand apart.
He is part of it, yet remains without completely merging with it. The poet is aware of the irrevocability of 'the other sleep' which comes with the winter, an end to all man's quest, labour, dream and desires. He becomes dissolved in his elemental state and perfectly mingles with other natural elements.

In Frost autumn invokes a basic survival instinct to overcome seasonal lethargy. It is a vehicle in the analogy drawn between the transience of season and the transitoriness of life in general. As Hardy notes in his "The Upper Birch-Leaves", in the tone of the withered leaves a note of warning.

'O we remember
At each wind's hollo -
Though life holds yet -
We go hence soon,
For 'tis November;
- But that you follow
You may forget !'

("The Upper Birch-Leaves" 11 18-24, CPH, p. 507)

"The cycle of Seasons" image used in the conventional way traditionally ends on a note of hope and faith in an orderly cosmic scheme. Shelley asked in his "Ode to a West Wind", 'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?'. But for the poets of transitional years, there is no
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promise of resurrection out of winter desolation. It is one steady 'melancholy march' towards the despair of winter. Their use of seasonal imagery never implies a rebirth theme. Waste and decay are reckoned as the essence of seasonal change. Life may surge forth, but it ebbs quickly. Winter is the beginning of the cycle and is also the end.

The cycle of seasons in Frost and Hardy is often reflective of parallel emotional upheavals. External nature reflects the poet's inner conflict. The complimentary moods in "A Boy's Will" runs parallel to the seasonal cycle of nature, beginning with subdued enjoyment of the autumnal mood, moving through deeds and images of winter, spring, summer and finally returning to the autumnal setting. The poems "Stars", "Storm Fear", "A Prayer In Spring" signify a circular and spiral pattern of moods. The poet moves from despair to fear and to hope alongwith season's transitions. In Hardy's "Daring Wind and Rain" (CPH, p. 495-6) each seasonal shift corresponds to a different human activity. Winter is seen with the human intimacy of the closed home, and spring with its domestic preparations for outdoor days and summer, with a glimpse of sea, away from home.
There is also a suggestion of growth, (children grow up). The theme of transience is further stressed by the image of moving house. The idea of transitoriness of existence is emphasized by the quick seasonal shifts. Except for an occasional rapture as seen in Frost's "Roses Pogonias" and Hardy's "Summer Schemes" the tone is uniformly autumnal wistfulness. It is thus another central image which is true to their concept of a reductive nature.

The blue vault of the sky has always fascinated nature poets. They have regarded it in an appreciative spirit as a work of God, superlatively beautiful. They have been impressed with the pervading tranquillity from above. The celestial scene has stood as a complete abstraction from other earthly sights and sounds. John Keats found it as 'Nature's patient sleepless Brent," Mark Akenside perceived it as the

[... celestial truth
Her awful light discloses, to bestow
A more majestic pomp on beauty's frame." ]
The poets have seen in the stars an appropriate image for constancy, the unchangeable against the ever-moving currents of flux. Caesar, the valiant Roman warrior describes himself as

"... 'Constant as the northern star,
Of whose true - fix'd and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.'" 28

Stars, sparkling above have symbolised man's aspiration, eternal truth, and benevolence of nature. They have also revealed portents and omens directing the destinies of dynasties and kingdoms. As guiding lights in the dark gloomy nights, stars, above all, are incomparable.

Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost evinced keen interest in astronomy. Their preoccupation with celestial matters was aided by advanced telescopes. Their turning to stars as images is not merely as a literary device, but it is a tribute to their lifelong passion for astronomy. Hardy's one entire novel ("Two on a Tower") is based on the hero, Stephen St. Cleave's interest in the distant planets and stars. That Hardy himself was a good reader of the sky is evident from his thorough knowledge of the various constellations and their natural positions. The sky was a
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an useful instrument to him.

ORION swung southward aslant
Where the starved Egdon pine-trees has thinned,
    The Pleiades aloft seemed to pant.

("Before Marching and After" ll 1-3, CPF, pp. 544-45).

The deep wood imagery which reflected Frost's introspective nature is gradually replaced by the star imagery. The fluctuation in his orientation is visible in the West-Running Brook (1928) and A Further Range (1936). In the poem "Come In" (PFP, p. 334) he says that though 'the pillard dark' through the call of a trash invites him to "come in to the dark and lament", he "was out for stars." The stellar bodies of the outer space signify the impersonal and intellectual bent of his speculations. Among the traditional symbols seen in Frost, stars stand out as the most appropriate image, reflecting his preoccupation with external questions of nature, man, cosmic alienation and the barriers separating man from other forces. Stars appear as backgrounds or as pivots of interest. His deep knowledge of the stars is seen in the poem 'A Loose Mountain',


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... see the star shower known as Leonid
That once a year by hand or apparatus
Is so mysteriously pelted at us?

("A Loose Mountain" ll 2-4, PRP, pp. 360-61).

The remote star symbolises a nature remote and
unconcerned. They are silent witnesses of man's
suffering. Man in his despair turns to them for guidance.
The war had ravaged the peaceful countries. Liveried men
in their prime had laid down their lives. Out of the ruin
a petulant phantom arises.

And on the breeze his puzzled phantom moans
Nightly to clear Canopus; I would know
By whom and when the All-Earth-gladening Law
Of Peace, brought in by that Man Crucified,
Was ruled to be inept and set aside?

("A Christmas Ghost-Story" ll 4-8, CPB, p. 90).

It was Frost's firm conviction that, they are not
made to alleviate human suffering. The stars congregate
above 'with neither love nor hate/ Those stars are like
some snow-white/Minerva's snow-white marble eyes/
Without the gift of sight.' ("Stars", PRP, p.9)

The poets are dismayed by their lack of response.
They vainly try to bring men and the furthest reaches
of nature together. In imagination Hardy travels
through the flashing firmament. The blazing stars
wane in the dark night. But he lets his spirit range onwards. But what he finds there makes him sick with grief and exclaims with pleasant thankfulness,

"In footless traverse through ghost heights of sky, To the last chambers of the monstrous Dome, Where stars the brightest here are lost to the eye: Then, any spot on our own Earth seemed Home!"

("In Vision I Roamed" ll 5-8, CPH, pp. 9-10).

As images of cosmic alienation, Stars occur, frequently in Frost. Thought with a pair of dauntless wings pierces the interstellar gloom. It comes back with its curiosity strangely quenched, smoke and burnt by the 'Dog Star'.

"Thought cleaves the interstellar gloom And sits in Sirius' disc all night, Till day makes him retrace his flight, With smell of burning on every plume,"

("Bond and Free" ll 11-14, PRP, pp. 120-21)

The stars cannot be brought into man's intimate range. A deep craving for knowledge of the star troubles a hugger-mugger farmer. He burns his house to claim the insurance money and gets a telescope. He indulges in the 'star gazing luxury' neglecting all other farm chores. But with all his absorption he could not achieve, anything -
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We've looked and looked, but after all where are we?
Do we know any better where we are,
And how it stands between the night tonight.
And a man with a smoky lantern chimney?

("The Star-Splitter" ll 95-97, PRF, pp. 176-79)

Earthly concerns do not reach or influence the
detached celestial bodies. They are not man's allies.
A shelterless wanderer roams around. The stars in the
sky are indifferent to the roofless plight of the
itinerant. They twinkle, and wag as if they are panting
for joy.

.. they shine, above all care,
   And memory,
   And demons of despair -
   Life's alloy.


Frost's stars generate a feeling of isolation and
cosmic indifference. Even when fire-flies 'emulate the
stars and achieve at times a very star-like start', they
cannot still sustain the part. 'Here come real stars
to fill the upper skies / And here on earth come emulating
flies' ("Fire-flies in the Garden", PRF, p. 246).
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Stars are also subjected to the law of mutability. The comets blaze across the sky. Hardy finds human life as compared with a meteorite is very short.

It will return long years hence, when
As now its strange swift shine
Will fall on Yell 'ham; but not them
On that sweet form of thine.

("The Comet at Yell'ham" 11 5-8, CPH, p. 151).

Frost's labourer finds a meteorite. He tries to restore the fallen piece back to nature. The "Star-shot" labourer put it in the soil. It interfered with natural growth, producing only flower instead of grain. Man is discouraged when he interferes with the phenomena and processes of the cosmic world. If he crosses the barriers, anguish and alienation result. Like the brook condemned to a city drain ("A Brook in the City"), the meteorite could seek vengeance. Nature is too radically the Other to be trifled with. The stars cannot be brought nearer.

The harm was done; from having been star-shot
The very nature of the soil was hot
And burning to yield flowers instead of grain,

("A Star In a Stone_boat" 11 20-22, PEP, pp. 172-74).

Hardy projects stars as arbitrary makers of man's destiny. In "The Dynasts", Napoleon finds himself as a helpless victim of a remote star. The queen feels that
the reference to the 'star' is an evasion characteristic of Napoleon's crafty and ruthless nature. But THE SPIRIT OF THE YEAR'S finds in it, the blind artistry of the Immanent Will.

Some force within me, baffling mine intent,
Harrises me onward, whether I will or no.
My star, my star is what's to blame - not I
It is unanswerable.

(The Dynasty, II, i, 8, p. 249)

It is interesting to note that, the fixedness of the stars was considered by the romantic nature poets to have a staying power against change. But Hardy finds in that very quality, a rigidity which is alien and unsympathetic. In "Lying Awake" (CPH, p. 863), 'the steady-eyed Morning tide star' is a mute witness of a diminishing community whose members are dwindling. Their names are found creeping out everywhere in the churchyard.

Frost's conviction of the existence of barriers between man and nature is again affirmed through his star images. It is perhaps due to the distance between man and the celestial bodies. But there is an invisible fence restraining man's inadvertent advance into the outer cosmic sphere. The two entities, man and nature, stand
disunited and alien to each other. If man tries to cross the line separating him and to reach the remote star, he is reduced to emptiness. In "Take Something Like A Star" (PR, p. 403) the speaker pleads with the lofty star. But the star remains detached, aloof and mysterious. It is 'wholly taciturn in its reserve'. The speaker is finally reconciled to remain behind the line. The 'Steadfastness' which Keats celebrates in "The Bright Star" is accepted by Frost as an inevitable inflexibility in a sullen mood.

And steadfast as Keat's Eremita,
Not even stooping from its sphere,
It asks a little of us here,
It asks of us a certain height,

("Take Something Like a Star" 11 18-21, PR, p. 403).

In "Skeptic" in (PR, pp. 389-90) in the last section a startling transfusion - an osmosis takes place. The stars and human sensibilities, are intermingled. At times the speaker feels the universe 'close in tight against my sense/ Like a cauld in which I was born and still am wrapped' (PR, pp. 389-90).

Another kind of mingling is seen in "An old Man's Winter Night" (PR, p. 108). In the chilling winter, Frost 'is forming fast and along with it a spiritual crystallization was taking place in the old man's lonely
suffering. Despair and old man's lonely existence become synonymous with each other. The desolate bleakness of the man in the decline is as ravaging as the external nature. The old man gases at the outer space even as the outer space is looking at him intently. Their respective positions change. The old man by his fixed glance becomes impersonal and the outer nature becomes for once an observer of man. The old man's vacant peering becomes weird. The poem signifies a basic unity in all things.

In Hardy's "The Nigh of the Dance", (CPH, p. 231-2) there is a great bustle on a moon lit night. Gaiety marks the hour, as preparations are in full swing for a night of dance, singing and merriment. The resonant hum of instruments tuned fill the air. Young love's youthful dreams blossom in the warmth of expectation. Even stars apparently evince an interest in the festivities,

the stars, like eyes in reverie,
Their westering as for a while forborne,
Quix downward curiously.

("The Nigh of the Dance" ll 3-5, CPH, pp. 231-32)
A momentary oneness with the universe and the stellar configuration is the main idea in Frost's "I Will Sing You One O" (PRF, pp. 217 - 220). A city clock's note of unruffled earthly weather is strange and muffled. It strikes one. The sleepless speaker's imagination takes him beyond the 'moon and stars,/
Saturn and Mars/ And Jupiter.' The Notes of the city clock travel 'through sigmas and tanes of constellation 'to' which man sends his speculation, beyond which God is'. From the sound of an earthly clock, his thoughts move on ot a cosmic clock 'with whose cast wheels theirs interlock'. The speaker finds,

The utmost star
Trembled and stirred,
Though set so far
Its whirling fringes
Appear like standing.
In one self station.

("I Will Sing You One - 0" ll 62-67, PRF, pp. 217-220)

Hardy finds 'the stellar gauge' as measuring the 'earthly show; / Nation at war with nation' and eulogises the 'Heroes and women'. The Sun-cast symmetry reveals an illusion 'of imperturbable serenity'. But the speaker is uneasy about the delusion.
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How shall I link such Sun-cast symmetry
With the torn troubled form I know as thine,
That profile, placid as a brow divine,
With continents of soil and misery?

("At a Lunar Eclipse" 11 5-8, CPE, p. 116)

The poets find a bizarre human identity with the stars under strange circumstances. A tramp astrologer sees two stars burning after collision. Such a highly improbable astronomical accident is paralleled by an inner experience. The purpose of the parallel is a vain craving for unity. By gathering together the most unique and intimate experience with the most unique and remote, the speaker attempts to produce an illusory parallel.

In Heaven's firm-set firmament,
Himself had the equivalent,
Only within, Inside the brain
Two memories that long had lain
Now quivered toward each other, lipped
Together ........

("An Unstamped Letter in our Rural Letter Box" 11 30-35
PRF, pp. 330 - 81).

But the stars remain separate and distinct. The barriers are firm. There cannot be any intermingling between the human world and the stellar realm. Each is well-confined and man has to acknowledge this fact. The disunion leads to isolation and alienation. In the despair-filled
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circumstances acceptance is the only way out of desolation.

In the firmament there is perfect order and 'the Northern Lights' run like tingling nerves, the sun and noon cross each other without touching. By contrast, the human world is filled with shocks and changes. The two entities are totally different. In a wistful mood the poet observes,

The planets seem to interfere in their curves,
But nothing ever happens, no harm is done,
We may as well go patiently on with our life,
And look elsewhere than to stars and moon and sun.
For the shocks and changes we need to keep us sane.

("On looking up By Chance At the Constellation" ll 6-10, PRF, p. 268).

Hardy portrays a unique instance, where the compassionat stars openly declare man as part of their configuration.

A wretch, not wanted by any one wanders in the street. Even the ring doves slight him saying 'Oh; it's only he'. The hares voice the general disregard. 'He is one for whom nobody cares'. Wet eyed mourners have no special tears for him. But up above, the stars are moved by the pathetic destitute.

....'We stare must lead
No fierce regard
To his gaze, so hard
Bent on us thus, -
Must scathe him not. He is one with us
Beginning and end'.

("I Am the One", ll 19-24, CPR, p. 837).
Hardy occasionally sees omens in the stars, sun, moon and other heavenly bodies. The stars by their answering habits, represent landmarks. The poet could read the sky like a clock and from the position of the stars accurately find the time. Thus stars are guiding characters. In the poem "The Second Night" a wavering lover fails to meet his girl at the appointed time. The distraught woman ends her life. When he goes to the wonted place of their meeting, he is met by her apparition. He is unaware of what 'had come to pass'. But the stars cross the sky in a bid to warn the man.

A mad star crossed the sky to the sea,  
Wasting in sparks as it streamed,  
And when I looked back at her wistfully  
She had changed, much changed, it seemed:


Thus, a conventional image of the 'Star' is given a new symbolic significance. The stars by their very distance enhance the sense of alienation. Frost's preoccupation with the cosmic world is evidenced by the frequency with which the star image occurs in his later poetry. The poets perceived a rigidity in the unchangeability of stars. Yet the stars alleviated their craving for a sense of stability and the
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crystallization from the flux of things. 'We may take something like a star/To stay our minds on and be staid.' ("Take Something Like A Star", PEP, p. 405). Hardy reads the hour of the day from the position of stars in the sky. On the other hand the striking of a city clock at one O'clock takes on cosmic dimension in Frost ("I Will Sing You One-O", PEP, pp. 217-20). 'O' may be taken as a symbol of pictograph of the universe. Where Hardy accepts, the otherness of the stars as inevitable, Frost persistently tries to cross the barrier and reach the remote stars. This is reflective of Hardy's pessimistic stand and Frost's perception of dualism in the scheme of things. Stars feature as background, metaphor and facts. Like the other images they effectively reflect the poet's concepts and philosophies. Their delineations may lack-luster, but their interest in astronomy was deep.

The above analysis of four specific images shows, the pattern of imagery based on solid facts of observation. The images have become epithets. The commonest type of image found in Hardy and Frost is the visual image, though auditory and sensuous are not uncommon. The images and themselves do not convey any characteristic
mode. But when the conventional symbols are modified by a predominant passion and associated thoughts, they bear the distinctive marks of these transitional poets. Frost and Hardy cannot be classed as Imagists, but the presence of a strong strain of imagism is an integral part of their poetry. Hardy is sparing and restrained. Nonetheless imagery is inherent in his words and in his poetic style. He never uses it as a mere extraneous ornament, but as a necessary function of the language. In Frost, the images move in and out, down and around the themes, giving the impression of a basic pattern in the design of a tapestry. His whole poetry is one extended metaphor. Frost probes the various conventional images as "to what to make of a diminished thing." His "Hyla Brook" (PRF, p. 119) and "Oven Bird" (PRF, pp. 119-20) are fitting illustrations of his well-found convictions. Their motto is what Frost describes in "Hyla Brook" (PRF, p. 119) "We love the things we love for what they are." And their true love is found in the unhampered countryside of simple peasants and innocent shepherds. Their dismay at the radical changes of urbanization or mechanization, made them turn to their rural homes with nostalgic recollection. In their pastoral, they tried to revive their bardic inspiration.
NOTES

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3. Frank Lentricchia goes a step further and connects
of man's own impulses with the dark wood image in
Frost. He says

'To enter the darkwood in Frost is to plunge to
the underside of consciousness, to retreat from
all human contact, and to wander in the
limitless immensities of our own dangerous
impulses.'

Frank Lentricchia, R. Frost: Modern Poetic And
the Landscapes of self (Durham NC: Duke Univ. Press,
1975) p. 87.


5. In "The Last Mowing" Frost Stresses.
The trees are all I'm afraid of,
That flowers can't bloom in the shade of;
It's no more men I'm afraid of;
("The Last Mowing" 11 11-13, FRF, p. 264).

6. Lloyd Dendinger commenting on the poem "Stopping
By Woods" stresses the point,

"The equation of the woods with death, of the
lure of the woods with the death wish is surely
reading of the poem".

Lloyd Dendinger, "The Irrational Appeal of
Frost's Dark Deep Woods"

8. Ibid., p. 358.


10. Ibid., p. 353.


16. Life, p. 121.

17. Life, p. 444

18. John T. Napier aptly phrases this tendency when he says, "Frost hastens all his seasons towards an inevitable and almost perpetual winter".

Critics unanimously agree as to the desolation of winter scenes. Robert Langbaum finds Frost’s ‘darkest nature poem is ‘Desert Places’ where the snow and darkwood are unambiguously desolate’.


Trevor Johnson commenting on the scenic effect of Hardy’s “Darkling Thrush” says, “Here first of all is the typical Hardy landscape opening, notable for its precision, with its spectre-gray forest, and also its awareness shown in ‘Winter’s drags’ and ‘tangled bine-stems’ that the rubbish of last summer lends an added desolation to the scene”.


Cf. Peter W. Dowell says, ‘Man is separate from nature in two ways. One is his superiority by virtue of his thought, feeling and imagination which makes him cognizant of his isolation and ambivalent towards his relationship with nature. Man is at once aware of his separation and yearns to be one with it. His toil in the orchard draws him closer to his physical environment, and his sleep in a way similar to the natural creature woodchuck’.

Peter W. Dowell, “Counter-Images and Their Function in the Poetry” of R. Frost”.

26. John Keats, "Keat's Last Sonnet"

27. Mark Akenside, "The Pleasures of Imagination"
   II 92 - 99.
   Quoted in Ed. Philip P. Weiner,
   *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* Vol. IV


29. Cf. J.O. Bailey says
   Hardy often used the stars, sun and moon as omens,
   the stars representing natural law and guiding characters.
   J.O. Bailey "Astrology, Stars, Sun and Moon as symbol’s in Hardy’s Works”.
   *English Literature In Transition, 14* (1971), pp. 219 - 22.

30. Cf. Reginald L. Cook says, 'that approximately ten present in Complete Poems are star poems.'

31. T. Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (New Wessex Edition
   ....